World
Watch
Research

Sudan: Full Country Dossier

January 2023

OpenDoors
Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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research@od.org

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Introduction

World Watch List 2023

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

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

Copyright note

Sources and definitions

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

WWL 2023 Situation in brief / Sudan

Brief country details

Sudan: Population (UN estimate for 2022)	Christians	Chr%
45,992,000	2,000,000	4.3

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

Map of country

Sudan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	83	10
WWL 2022	79	13
WWL 2021	79	13
WWL 2020	85	7
WWL 2019	87	6

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

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Sudan: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Non-Christian religious leaders, Violent religious groups, Organized crime cartels or networks, Government officials
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials, Political parties
Organized corruption and crime	Organized crime cartels or networks, Government officials, Ethnic group leaders
Clan oppression	Ethnic group leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs
Ethno-religious hostility	Ethnic group leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

It was believed that the downfall of the al-Bashir regime in April 2019 would lead to an improvement of the situation of Christians. Initially, that seemed very likely; the intended reforms by the civilian Transitional Council could have opened up political and civil space in the country, leading to more freedom for Christians. But these hopes were dashed by the October 2021 coup. As before, all Christian communities in Sudan have to remain wary of talking about their faith with Sudanese Muslims as this might be construed as being an 'act that encourages apostasy against Islam'.

The ethnic-cultural landscape of the country is also complicated: Arab versus non-Arab, Muslim versus Christian. The secession of South Sudan in 2011 did not solve these problems. This is particularly true for non-Arabs, as a significant number are Christian and still living in the country. The level of persecution that converts and ethnic Africans face is severe. So as not to be discovered, converts from Islam to the Christian faith will often refrain from raising their children as Christians because this might attract the attention of the government and community leaders (since children might inadvertently reveal the faith of their parents). This fear even extends to funerals where deceased Christians with a Muslim background are often buried according to Islamic rites in Muslim cemeteries, even though Christian and Muslim cemeteries are separate.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

1. [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR)
2. [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR)
3. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

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

- Church buildings are attacked and burnt down (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christian women and girls are harassed for not covering their head or wearing trousers (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christians ca be accused and charged of blasphemy (ICCPR Art. 19)
- Christian children are often harassed due to their parents' faith (CRC Art. 14 and ICCPR Art. 18)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- ***Christian broadcasting:*** The Sudan National Broadcasting Corporation's Sunday TV program is being used as a rallying cry for radical Muslims to accuse Christians of corrupting the nation.
- ***10 April 2022:*** A pastor and two others were [assaulted](#) by a group of radical Muslims during a church service at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Al Hag Abdalla, about 85 miles southeast of Khartoum in Madani, Al Jazirah state. When the pastor filed a complaint with the police, he was charged with disturbing the peace and later [sentenced](#) to a month in prison (Morning Star News, 20 and 25 April 2022).
- ***Detention:*** At least four Christians were detained and and treated inhumanely by the police in Darfur.

Specific examples of positive developments

None.

External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention 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: assaulted - https://morningstarnews.org/2022/04/pastor-in-sudan--assaulted-during-worship-then-charged/
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: sentenced - https://morningstarnews.org/2022/04/attacked-pastor-in-sudan-sentenced-to-month-in-jail/

WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Sudan

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2021/22 country report – covering 154 countries	AI country report 2021/22 (pp. 347-350)	https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf	6 June 2022
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14094995	6 June 2022
Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/SDN	6 June 2022
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/sudan/	6 June 2022
Crisis24 country report (Garda World) – covering 193 countries	Crisis24 country report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/sudan	6 June 2022
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2021 – covering 167 countries	EIU 2021 (p.16)	https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf	6 June 2022
FFP's Fragile States Index 2022 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2022	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	3 August 2022
Freedom House's 2022 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Sudan not included	Democracy Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2022 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/country/sudan/freedom-world/2022	6 June 2022
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2021 report – covering 70 countries	Freedom on the Net 2021	https://freedomhouse.org/country/sudan/freedom-net/2021	6 June 2022
Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 (country chapter) – covering 100+ countries	HRW 2022 country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/sudan	6 June 2022
Internet World Stats 2022	IWS 2022	https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#sd	6 June 2022
Middle East Concern country profile	MEC country profile	https://meconcern.org/countries/sudan/	3 August 2022
RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2022	https://rsf.org/en/sudan	6 June 2022
Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2021	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/sdn	6 June 2022
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators (country profile) – covering 187 countries	HDI profile	http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/SDN	6 June 2022
US State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom country profile	IRFR 2021	https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/sudan/	6 June 2022
USCIRF 2022 country reports – covering 15 CPC / 12 SWL, Sudan not included	USCIRF 2022	https://www.uscirf.gov/countries	
World Bank country overview – covering 178 countries	World Bank 2022	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/sudan/overview#1	6 June 2022
World Bank country profile data – covering 222 countries	World Bank profile (2020 data)	https://data.worldbank.org/country	6 June 2022
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 – covering 147 countries, Sudan not included	Macro Poverty Outlook 2022	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2fefc5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-ssa.pdf	6 June 2022

Recent history

Since becoming independent from Great Britain in 1956, Sudan has experienced persistent and recurring violent conflict, primarily driven by struggles between the central government in Khartoum and armed groups from the country's peripheries. Sudan's traditional power structures were dominated by an Islamist regime, headed by President Omar al-Bashir, who came to power in a coup in 1989. Sudan became infamous in the international community for funding radical Islamic groups, committing atrocities and fundamentally undermining freedom of religion. The popular movement that helped end the era of Omar Bashir in 2019 is now facing a new military dictatorship, since the army staged a coup in October 2021.

2018: The year began with demonstrations against the imposition of austerity measures that effectively tripled Sudan's US dollar exchange rate and the increased price of basic commodities (Human Rights Watch - HRW, 29 January 2020). But the government resorted to excessive force to disperse the peaceful demonstrations; that included the use of beatings and the unlawful detention of hundreds of protesters, activists and opposition party members. In December 2018, the USA categorized Sudan as one of 10 "Countries of Particular Concern" deemed guilty of severe violations of religious freedom (CNN, 11 December 2018). Meanwhile, Sudan's anti-government protests grew as 2018 drew to an end, with security forces killing the first 9 student protesters (Amnesty International - AI, 21 December 2018) and then a further 37 protesters in demonstrations that rocked the country (AI, 24 December 2018).

2019: In April 2019, the unthinkable happened - one of the longest-serving dictators in Africa, President al-Bashir, was overthrown. He had declared a state of emergency on 22 February 2019 and dissolved government at federal and provincial levels and appointed security chiefs to head all the country's 18 regional states. The ensuing brutal crackdown intensified the demonstrators' defiance (International Crisis Group - ICG, 26 February 2019). The standoff continued throughout March until finally on 11 April 2019, the army removed al-Bashir from office (BBC News, 11 April 2019) and assumed provisional power, with Sudan's Prosecutor General later announcing that the former president would be charged for the killing of protesters (AI, 14 May 2019). However, on 2 June 2019, the security forces killed scores of protesters who were holding a sit-in in Khartoum to protest against the military council's declaration that it would remain in power for three years (AI, 5 June 2019). Sudan's Transitional Military Council later admitted to deciding on the action that killed more than 100 protesters (AI, 14 June 2019).

The ex-president and some top members of his cabinet were allegedly moved to a prison and were charged with corruption (Al-Jazeera, 13 June 2019). However, the protesters demanded civilian rule and the first transitional leader (former defense minister) was forced to resign after one day (New York Times, 12 April 2019). The protest leaders and the Transitional Council failed to agree on the course the army was taking, particularly after so many protesters had been killed in the process. Finally, in August 2019 the following agreements were made (BBC News, 16 August 2019):

• Power-sharing would last for 39 months
• A sovereign council, cabinet, and legislative body would be formed
• A general would head the council for the first 21 months, a civilian for the remaining 18 months
• A prime minister, nominated by the pro-democracy movement, would head the cabinet
• The ministers of defense and interior would be chosen by the army.

2020: Sudan's first year of a three-year transition to democratic rule following the dramatic removal of President Omar al-Bashir in 2019, was marked by a failing economy, political tensions and continuing popular protests for justice and reforms. Nevertheless, on 31 August 2020, the government and a coalition of rebel groups made the positive step of signing a peace deal in Juba that would end the country's internal armed conflicts and provide for cooperation with the ICC in its Darfur investigation (Reuters, 31 August 2020). Meanwhile, the political and economic difficulties were compounded by the crisis surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic.

2021: The crisis deepened when the army made the decision to oust the civilian transitional council in a coup in October 2021 (CBS News, 25 October 2021), with head of the military General Abdel-Fattah al-Burhan emerging as Sudan's strongman (AP News, 27 October 2021). Civilian leaders were arrested and protesters took to the streets. Pressure from the international community forced the coup leaders to announce the reinstatement of the prime minister; however, there were no meaningful steps taken by the coup leaders to solve the post-coup crisis. Popular protests continued into December 2021. The newly reinstated Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok then ordered a halt to the firing of civil servants and a review of all appointments made after his detention in the preceding month's military coup (Al-Jazeera, 24

November 2021). A few days later, he [dismissed](#) the country's police chiefs and replaced them after the brutal killing of pro-democracy demonstrators (Al-Jazeera, 27 November 2021).

2022: In January 2022, the UN offered to broker an end to the political deadlock and a prominent Sudanese pro-democracy group [conditionally accepted the offer](#) (Al-Jazeera, 16 January 2022). The heavy-handed response by security forces against peaceful protesters led the USA to impose [sanctions](#) on Sudan's Central Reserve Police in March 2022 (Al-Jazeera, 21 March 2022). In April, crowds of Sudanese protesters gathered in Khartoum, and other cities to mark the [third anniversary](#) of former leader Omar al-Bashir's removal from power and to protest against the current military rule (Al-Jazeera, 11 April 2022).

After pressure to free prisoners mounted, high-profile individuals including all 19 members of the "Dismantling Committee' established under the Transitional Government to track corruption and embezzlement by the former regime were [released](#) after a judge refused to sanction their continued detention; nevertheless, many ordinary protesters were still left in prison facing mistreatment (HRW, 28 April 2022). With growing international pressure to commit to dialogue, Sudan's military council [lifted the state of emergency](#) it had imposed in October 2021 when the civilian government was removed (Al-Jazeera, 29 May 2022). In the period January - July 2022, protesters continued to take to the streets, demanding the resignation of the military rulers and the handing-over of power to civilians. On 30 June 2022, more than [seven protesters were shot dead](#) by the security forces. In July 2022, the military leadership indicated that it would step down, but protesters viewed this as a [ruse](#) (Al-Jazeera, 6 July 2022).

In a nutshell, the following are the major events since 2018:

- December 2018: Mass protests against al-Bashir
- April 2019: Al-Bashir overthrown.
- June 2019: Bloody crackdown by the army/security forces
- August 2019: Power sharing between the civilian and the army
- December 2019: Al-Bashir convicted of corruption and sentenced to two years.
- March 2020, Prime Minister Hamdok survived assassination attempt.
- March-June 2020: Unrest spreads to demand justice for people who were killed by the army.
- October 2020: Peace deal with rebel groups
- February 2021: New cabinets that included seven ministers from the former rebel groups were announced.
- October 202: The army conducted what can be characterized as a coup.
- January 2022: Prime Minister Hamdok resigned.
- August 2022: Introduction of the 'Community Squad'. Many believe this is similar to the Morality police-force which was disbanded in 2019. The Morality police were known for seriously persecuting Christians.

Political and legal landscape

As explained above in *Recent History*, in April 2019, one of the longest-serving dictators in Africa, Omar al-Bashir, was overthrown by the pressure of a popular movement demanding more democracy. There had been signs of discontent for some time among the general population due to the rise in prices of oil, bread and other goods. Even though the ousting of the president can be seen as a triumph for the pro-democracy movement, it was also a cause for concern since former ruling Islamists were still very influential in the country and another civil war could easily have been ignited.

The army's Transitional Council and the leaders of the pro-democracy movement signed an agreement to pave the way for democracy in the following 3-4 years, but the armed forces staged a coup against the civilian leaders in October 2021. This coup did not happen out of nowhere. The October coup took place exactly before the army was supposed to transfer the role of heading the Transitional Council to civilian partners in November 2021, as agreed in the power-sharing deal. The generals knew that they would face scrutiny for what they had done in the previous decades under al-Bashir's leadership if the transition was to be carried out successfully and elections were to be held on time. Hence, they acted to stop the process which would have placed them under civilian and elected government control. Many of the generals had allegedly participated in atrocities that were committed during the fighting in Darfur and South Kordofan. In early April 2022, the ICC held its [first trial](#) on Darfur crimes. The trial is against Ali Mohammed Ali, former leader of the notorious Janjaweed militia, currently in ICC custody (HRW News Release, 29 March 2022).

According to Freedom House, Sudan's score is just 10 out of 100 in [the Freedom in the World 2022](#) report, with the country's status 'Not Free'. Sudan saw a decrease of 7 points from the preceding year's score, but maintained 'Not Free' status.

Sudanese politics has always been controversial and the country has never been at ease with the international community nor with its own people. This was particularly the case for the indigenous Africans in the country which led to the independence of South Sudan. The secession of South Sudan on 9 July 2011 (after a referendum in January 2011) was the culmination of a painful and decades-long history of internal conflict between the powerful Muslim Arabs in the north and the Christian and Ethno-religious indigenous African population of the south.

The intended reforms by the civilian Transitional Council could have opened up political and civil space in the country, also leading to more freedom for Christians. But these hopes were dashed by the October 2021 coup. Protests against the coup continued throughout the whole of the WWL 2023 reporting period.

Gender perspective

The legal landscape facing women and girls is additionally restrictive, in particular making marriage a place of enacting violent repression of female converts. Sudan is one of just six UN states not to have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Sudan recognizes multiple forms of family law, connected to a person's religious community. To provide judgement on family matters, there are three types of religious court in operation: Sharia courts, Christian/civil courts and traditional courts. There is

no legislation that prohibits domestic violence, marital rape or child marriage and Article 40 of the 1991 Muslim Personal Law provides that once a child is 10 years old, they may be married with parental or guardian consent (OECD, 2019). Child marriage is widespread and according to Girls Not Brides (accessed 23 July 2021), 34% of girls are married before the age of 18. Whilst a man has the right to divorce his wife by *talaq*, a woman must file for divorce through the courts. A 2016 UNHRC report cites a culture of impunity for perpetrators of domestic violence and a silencing of victims (UNHRC, 18 April 2016). While there are no reliable statistics on the prevalence of rape, it is understood to be widespread. The authorities appear to be unwilling to address it even when government forces were implicated in rape, as underscored in a recent incident where a female social worker who briefed the UN Security Council on allegations of multiple instances of rape committed by government security forces following the coup was threatened with accusation of revealing government secrets (Al-Jazeera, 18 April 2022).

Before the October 2021 coup, women had been calling for greater participation in parliament under the transitional government, wanting more than just assuming 'soft' positions in which they would have nominal power (CMI Sudan brief 2020).

Military service is compulsory for men between the age of 18 and 33, who must serve 1-2 years (World Population Review 2021).

Religious landscape

Sudan: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	2,000,000	4.3
Muslim	42,334,000	92.0
Hindu	880	0.0
Buddhist	990	0.0
Ethno-religionist	1,167,000	2.5
Jewish	54	0.0
Bahai	2,800	0.0
Atheist	69,500	0.2
Agnostic	415,000	0.9
Other	2,100	0.0
OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.		

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

The religious composition of Sudan is a controversial issue. World Christian Database (WCD 2022) estimates the Christian population at 4.3% and the Muslim majority at 92.0%. According to government statistics, around 97% of the population is Muslim, which would make the Christian presence less than 3%. Various advocacy groups contest these low figures (and those of WCD), claiming that non-Muslims in the country make up 15-20%.

Almost all Muslims are Sunni but significant distinctions exist, particularly among the Sufi orders. In addition, there are small Muslim minorities, including Shia and the Republican Brothers, based predominantly in Khartoum. There is also a growing (yet still small) percentage of Salafists. The main traditional Salafist group, *Jama'at Ansar al-Sunna al-Mohammediya*, advocates peaceful means for achieving its objectives. However, the newer radical groups tend to be more militant and confrontational and have staged attacks on Sufi, Shia and Christian targets over the years.

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2021):

- "Government statistics indicate less than 1 percent of the population, primarily in Blue Nile and South Kordofan States, adhere to traditional African religious beliefs."
- "Some Christians and Muslims incorporate aspects of these traditional beliefs into their religious practice."
- "A 2019 decree mandates that academic institutions shall not give exams on Sunday, and it authorizes Christians to leave work at 10:00 a.m. on Sunday for religious activities. Individuals may also leave work to celebrate Orthodox Christmas, an official state holiday, along with several key Islamic holidays."

From 1999 to 2018, Sudan had been designated by the US Secretary of State as a "Country of Particular Concern" for its serious and systematic violations of religious freedom. Religious freedom, although guaranteed by the 2005 Interim Constitution, was not upheld in practice. Moreover, Sudan's criminal law based on Islamic law (allowing punishments such as amputations and floggings for crimes and acts of 'indecency' and 'immorality') had been applied indiscriminately especially against indigenous African Christians.

In 2020, the Transitional Council vowed to abolish all laws that violated fundamental human rights - including the apostasy law, which prohibited anyone converting from Islam to a different religion; also, it declared that women would no longer require a permit from a male relative to travel (HRW, 16 July 2020).

In September 2020, it was announced that Sudan's Transitional Council had agreed to separate religion from the state, ending 30 years of Islamic rule in the nation (Bloomberg, 4 September 2020). However, things fundamentally changed following the army's decision to conduct a coup in October 2021, effectively ending all hope of change. To summarize, most of the positive steps taken following the removal of President al-Bashir were undone by the coup.

Economic landscape

According to the Heritage Foundation's 2022 Index of Economic Freedom:

- Sudan's economic freedom score is 32.0, making its economy the 174th freest in the 2022 Index. Sudan is ranked 47th (last) among 47 countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa region, and its overall score is well below the regional and world averages. The score decreased by 7.1 points from the previous year.

According to World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook 2021: (No data is available for Sudan in the 2022 Outlook)

- *GDP:* GDP growth declined from -2.5 in 2019 to -3.6 percent in 2020 in the context of the COVID-19 crisis and severe flooding that disrupted economic activity. Despite some efforts to rein in excessive public expenditures, particularly on fuel subsidies, the economic downturn, COVID-19 crisis, and increasingly overvalued exchange rate had a very negative fiscal impact in 2020. "Sudan has conducted major reforms, including exchange rate adjustment and fuel subsidy reduction, that put the country on a potential path toward recovery and restoration of access to external financing in 2021. In this context, the decline in GDP of the past three years is projected to stabilize in 2021, leading into a period of positive economic growth. The 2021 budget envisions a reduction in the fiscal deficit to around 2 percent of GDP, thus allowing for a significant slowdown in the monetary expansion that has been fueling inflation. Sudan aims to accomplish arrears clearance with IFIs in 2021 and obtain access to over US$ 2 billion in external support from development partners."

- *Poverty:* Poverty projections based on GDP growth suggest that poverty rates may have increased consistently in recent years, to reach in 2020 an estimated 17.7 percent at $1.90/day PPP and 52.6 percent at $3.20/day PPP. "The Poverty outlook remains negative. Poverty rates are projected to increase to 19.5 percent by 2022 at $1.90/day PPP, and 54.8 percent at $3.20/day PPP. The continued rise in inflation, shortage of fuel and other basic commodities and COVID -19 are expected to continue adversely affecting living conditions. Results from the Bank's ongoing high frequency survey on COVID-19, suggest that about one -third of respondents had stopped working in September 2020 mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic; and that over 20 percent of households were unable to buy bread and cereals as well as milk and milk products as price increases were felt by most households".

- *Inflation:* The monetization of the large fiscal deficit drove inflation into triple digits. Living conditions continued to deteriorate. A combination of key reforms, stabilization efforts and external support give hope for 2021.

South Sudan's secession in 2011 caused a watershed in Sudan's economic history. Sudan lost about 80% of its agricultural and water resources, in addition to the loss of about 75% of oil reserves and about 90% of total exports and about 50% of government revenues. Following the loss of oil and population, economic growth contracted by 4.4% in 2012. Even as it concluded an agreement with South Sudan to cover the export of oil from South Sudan, as well as US$3.03bn of "transitional assistance" to be paid by South Sudan, Omar al-Bashir announced a series of

deep budget cuts in June 2012 to control a ballooning fiscal deficit. Moreover, the World Bank projected that Sudan would fall back into the low-income country category, with 47% of Sudan's population living below the poverty line. The International Monitory Fund (IMF) also pushed for austerity measures. As described above, in 2018 the country saw a series of demonstrations protesting about the poor economic situation (Sudan Tribune, 5 January 2018), which finally led to the overthrow of the president in 2019. According to a country observer writing in the Mail & Guardian on 11 May 2018, the collapse started with "a major devaluation of the Sudanese

pound in an effort to make the official rate for the pound drop to that of the black market. With the International Monetary Fund pushing for austerity and the rate of inflation hovering around 70%, the camel's back was finally broken."

Before the October 2021 coup, the Transitional Council had shown willing to negotiate with South Sudan to ease the economic crisis and obtain payment for letting South Sudanese petroleum use its pipelines. The comprehensive US sanctions which were lifted in October 2017 also had a tremendous impact on the economy (CIA Factbook). The country is also attempting to develop non-oil revenues, such as gold mining and agriculture while carrying out austerity measures to reduce expenditure.

In early March 2022, Sudan announced it would float the country's currency as economic conditions deteriorated further (AP News, 7 March 2022).

Gender perspective

Women are economically vulnerable within Sudan. This is in part due to low education rates for girls; as of 2016, illiteracy rates for women stood at 50% compared to 30% for men (UNICEF, Sudan/Education, accessed 23 July 2021). According to Islamic law, sons and daughters do not have equal inheritance rights in Sudan (OECD, 2019). Under the 1991 Muslim Personal Law Act (Articles 356, 357, 359, and 373), a woman inherits half of the property of her brother(s). Under customary law, widows are commonly expected to marry a male relative within her deceased husband's family.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the UNDP's HDI profile and the CIA Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Unspecified Sudanese Arab (approximately 70%), Fur, Beja, Nuba, Fallata, Masalit, Dajo, Gimir, Tunjur, Berti (over 500 ethnic groups)
- **Main languages:** Arabic (official), English (official), Nubian, Ta Bedawie, Fur
- **Median age:** 19.7 years
- **Urban population:** 36.% (2022 est.)
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 67.12 years (2022 est.)
- **Expected years of schooling:** 7.9 years
- **Literacy rate, adult (15 and older):** 60.7%
- **Employment to population ratio (15 and older):** 40.4%
- **Unemployment, total of labor force:** 16.5%
- **Unemployment, youth (age 15-24):** 31.4%

- *Human Development Index:* Sudan ranks 170 out of 189 countries, with a human development value of 0.510.
- *Gender development index (GDI):* 0.860 (The GDI measures the differences in life expectancy, years of education and GNI per capita per gender).
- *Gender inequality index (GII):* 0.545.

According to UNHCR (as of 31 May 2022):

- *Refugees:* 1.1 million, mainly Eritreans, Ethiopians and South Sudanese
- *IDPs:* 3.03 million, 74% of whom are living in formal camps

In general, Sudan has a rich history and culture and belonged to the Nuba Kingdom. This is the country where the art of building pyramids may have first started (National Geographic, 28 December 2022).

Gender perspective

Sudan has a patriarchal society in which men and women are expected to assume traditional gender roles. The pervading societal belief that women belong in the home and should undertake domestic responsibilities has prevented many girls from accessing school. A lack of education serves to fuel the widespread practice of early or forced marriage, as girls feel ill-equipped to search for an alternative route. Women play a leading role in raising children, representing the family at societal events and helping with agricultural duties. The persecution of women and girls therefore has a significant negative impact on her wider family and community.

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2022):

- *Internet usage:* 28.8% of the population – survey date: December 2021 (most recent at time of writing)
- *Facebook usage:* 2.9% of the population – survey date: December 2021

According to the World Bank country profile:

- *Mobile phone subscriptions:* 80.3 per 100 people.
  68.1% of women use a mobile phone, according to Georgetown, "Women, Peace and Security Index 2019/20.

According to BuddeComm research (publication date: January 2023):

- "The difficult economic conditions have meant that for several years telcos have reported revenue under hyperinflationary reporting standards. Pressure on revenue has made it difficult for operators to invest in infrastructure upgrades, and so provide improved services to customers. Despite this, the number of mobile subscribers increased 7.% in 20201, year-on-year. This level of growth is expected to have been maintained in 2022, though could slow from 2023 as the acute influences resulting the pandemic begin to wane."

- "The country's poor fixed-line infrastructure has helped the development of mobile broadband services. Sudatel, Cameroon's Camtel, and Chad-based SudaChad Telecom's planned investment, the WE-Africa-NA terrestrial fibre link, will connect from Port-Sudan then on to Kribi in Cameroon, passing through Chad. The new build aims to respond to rising data demand in all three countries, particularly as usage has been accelerated since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic with digital and data services gaining traction."

According to the CIA Factbook:

- Compared to other countries in the region, Sudan has a well-equipped cellular communications system which covers most of the major cities with ongoing upgrades (2020). "Following the establishment of Sudan's civilian-led transitional government in August 2019, government-owned broadcasters became increasingly independent from government and military control. Following the October 2021 military takeover, additional restrictions were imposed on these government-owned broadcasters, which now practice a heightened degree of self-censorship but still operate more independently than in the pre-2019 environment".

According to Space Watch reporting in November 2019, Sudan's Chinese built-satellite was launched (from China) on 3 November 2019. In common with countries such as Ethiopia and Egypt, Sudan has been developing space technologies in a bid to support economic growth and improve the capabilities of its military and agricultural sectors.

The majority of Christians in the country reside in cities, which generally have better infrastructure and technology than rural areas.

Security situation

Despite South Sudan's independence, armed conflict over dwindling resources and political power (typical aspects of Sudan's post-independence situation) has persisted. While the root causes of the conflict remain constant (e.g. political marginalization, land dispossession and unimplemented promises), ethnic dynamics in the various regions of Sudan and South Sudan have kept changing. For example, in Abyei, a province that is being claimed by both Sudan and South Sudan, the Misserya Arabs (the government of Sudan's main local supporters) have grown increasingly frustrated with Khartoum, while the Ngok Dinka tribe (which enjoys support from the government of South Sudan) has become vocal and strong. Although Sudan's political system is based on a decentralized system of governance and multi-party politics, real power had always been wielded by President al-Bashir and his ruling Islamist National Congress Party (NCP). The independence of South Sudan, which signaled the end of the Government of National Unity and the withdrawal of the South's representatives from parliament, further reinforced the dominance of President al-Bashir's political party. It also signaled the start of another civil war: SPLA-North versus the government of Sudan.

This war resulted from the fact that the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA - signed in January 2005) failed to solve the problem of the marginalization of Sudan's peripheral regions, in particular, the so-called 'three areas', consisting of Abyei, South Kordofan and Blue Nile. Located strategically along Sudan's volatile North-South border and possessing considerable

natural resources (including oil), finding solutions to the contested issues in these three areas has long been deemed critical for the stability of the two countries. Dominated by two main tribes, Abyei in particular was influential in the domestic politics of both Sudan and South Sudan. The Ngok Dinka tribe, a subset of South Sudan's largest ethnic group, have traditionally lived in Abyei, and have strong representation in the leadership of both the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). During the civil war years, the Dinka - which has a largely African Christian population - was heavily displaced. At the same time, the Misserya, a largely Arab Muslim nomadic tribe which migrates through the region to graze their cattle, form an important constituency of the NCP and fought against the Ngok Dinka during the civil war. This problem is expected to continue in the foreseeable future.

Under President al-Bashir, there had been a coordinated effort by the government to mobilize and militarize tribal militias (including but not limited to Arab militias) known as *Janjaweed*. The aim was to use these groups to work towards creating an Islamic state at the expense of other religious groups in the country. Several reports by different human right groups have accused these militias of committing gross violations of human rights against non-Arab citizens of Sudan.

In late January 2018, the joint African Union-United Nations peacekeeping mission to Darfur agreed with the Sudanese government to open a temporary base in Darfur's Jebel Marra, as mandated by the June 2017 UN Security Council resolution, in the wake of sectarian violence and a suspected chemical attack that caused horrific suffering to civilians (AI, 1 February 2018). Reports of abuse by government forces and affiliated militias continued to surface, including attacks that damaged or destroyed at least 45 villages in Jebel Marra between July 2018 and February 2019. Meanwhile, possible plans to close the joint mission unnerved civilians who relied on the base for protection (AI, 11 June 2019). Rebel groups signed a peace agreement with the government in October 2020, but in 2021, it was reported that the war was far from over (The New Humanitarian, 21 April 2021).

The United Nations African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), which operated in the war-torn Darfur region between 2007 and the end of its mandate in July 2021, withdrew the last of its personnel in December 2021 (CIA Factbook). Predictably, just days after the last international peacekeepers left, a deadly attack was launched against civilians in west Darfur by ethnic Arab militia (Al-Jazeera, 22 January 2022). In April 2022, at least 168 people were killed in fighting between Arabs and non-Arabs in the Darfur region, with the notorious *Janjaweed* blamed for the latest attacks (Al-Jazeera, 24 April 2022).

In late 2020 and 2021, thousands of refugees from Ethiopia crossed the border to escape the conflict between Ethiopian government and Tigray forces. What exacerbated the matter was that Sudan also has a border dispute with Ethiopia concerning Fashaga which it decided to retake by force, disregarding the land-use agreement the two countries had signed in 2007 (ICG, 24 June 2021). At the moment, Ethiopia is distracted by the crisis in Tigray, but it is likely that the issue could flare up in the near future putting the countries at risk of engaging in military confrontation.

Trends analysis

1) Reform hopes have been dashed

In 2019, it was hoped that Sudan was entering a new era. For the first time in three decades, the nation was being ruled without al-Bashir at the helm. Many reforms were promised. However, the Transitional Council that was established between the army and civilian representatives struggled to press on with the pledged reform. In the end, in October 2021, a coup was conducted which resulted in government rule returning to the army. Significant numbers of protesters demanded the restoration of civilian rule. This resulted in the [death](#) (Reuters, 1 July 2022) and [arrest](#) (HRW, 28 April 2022) of many protestors. There are indications that the country

might even go back to Islamic rule. For example, in August 2022, a community police force was established which [is seen](#) as being an attempt to bring back the Public Order Police (a.k.a. the Morality Police), which was disbanded after al-Bashir was removed from power (Dabanga, 19 August 2022). The economy is still suffering and inflation also remains a serious problem.

2) Peace treaties have been signed but many issues will take years to resolve

Sudan is one of the most complex countries in Africa. After a civil war that lasted more than two decades, South Sudan decided to go its own way and become an independent nation in 2011. That did not end the problems, however. There are still major issues to be dealt with in Darfur, the Blue Nile and Kordofan areas. The Transitional Council showed its commitment by adopting the 2019 Draft Constitutional Declaration. It was followed by agreements with different rebel groups in October 2019 and January 2020. It seemed the discussions were progressing well despite outstanding issues such as Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR), economic challenges, accountability and social justice. Many of these issues could take years to resolve and they need extreme care as the conflicts in the southern part of the country and Darfur continue to flare up despite the agreements signed. It remains to be seen how the military leaders of the October 2021 coup will deal with these matters. Sudan is also in a border-dispute with Ethiopia and there have been clashes. In June 2022, the African Union urged the two nations [to refrain](#) from using force (VOA, 29 June 2022). Historically, these two countries had been supporting rebel groups to deliberately weaken each other.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: demonstrations - https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/01/29/sudan-stop-abuse-peaceful-demonstrators
- Recent history: Countries of Particular Concern - https://www.edition.cnn.com/2018/12/11/politics/pompeo-religious-freedom-designations/index.html
- Recent history: killing - https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/12/sudan-shooting-of-protestors-must-be-immediately-investigated/
- Recent history: 37 protesters - https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/12/sudan-protesters-dead-in-government-crackdown-on-protests/
- Recent history: brutal crackdown - https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/sudan/bashir-moves-sudan-dangerous-new-ground
- Recent history: removed al-Bashir from office - https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-47891470
- Recent history: charged - https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/05/sudan-omar-al-bashir-must-face-justice-for-recent-and-past-crimes

- Recent history: killed scores of protesters - https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/06/sudan-soaring-violence-calls-for-urgent-international-response/
- Recent history: admitted - https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/06/sudan-urgent-un-and-au-investigation-needed-after-military-admits-deadly-decision-on-protestor-crackdown/
- Recent history: charged with corruption - https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/sudan-toppled-president-omar-al-bashir-charged-corruption-190613173532177.html
- Recent history: forced to resign - https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/12/world/africa/sudan-al-bashir-extradition.html
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- Recent history: General Abdel-Fattah al-Burhan - https://apnews.com/article/sudan-who-is-abdel-fattah-burhan-3f2d4d660fabf1b526f09f04808af7c8
- Recent history: halt to the firing - https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/24/sudan-pm-calls-for-halt-to-post-coup-sackings
- Recent history: dismissed - https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/27/reinstated-sudanese-pm-hamdok-dismisses-police-chiefs
- Recent history: conditionally accepted the offer - https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/16/sudan-pro-democracy-group-to-take-part-in-un-brokered-talks
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- Recent history: third anniversary - https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/11/sudanese-protesters-mark-third-anniversary-of-bashirs-removal
- Recent history: released - https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/28/sudan-hundreds-protesters-detained-mistreated
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- Economic landscape: comprehensive US sanctions - https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/su.html
- Economic landscape: float the country's currency - https://apnews.com/article/business-middle-east-africa-sudan-18cea17691dfc66eab610402d4c06d2d
- Economic landscape: low education rates - https://www.unicef.org/sudan/education
- Economic landscape: inheritance rights - https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/SD.pdf
- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR - https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-population-dashboard-overview-refugees-and-idps-sudan-31-may-2022
- Social and cultural landscape: art of building pyramids - https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/sudan-archaeology-pyramdis-kush-nubia
- Technological landscape: 68.1% - https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WPS-Index-2019-20-Report.pdf
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- Trends analysis: is seen - https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/outrage-in-sudan-as-new-force-reminiscent-of-public-order-police-is-installed#:~:text=On%20August%2012%2C%20the%20Director,loosened%20up%20too%20much%20recently%E2%80%9D.
- Trends analysis: to refrain - https://www.voanews.com/a/african-union-urges-restraint-after-ethiopia-sudan-border-clashes-/6638230.html

WWL 2023: Church information / Sudan

Christian origins

Christianity has a long history in Sudan. The [discovery](#) of one of the oldest cathedrals in the world is a testament to this (Ancient History Encyclopedia, accessed 7 January 2023): "The Cathedral of Faras, a city in ancient Nubia and once the capital of the Kingdom of Faras (aka Nobatia), was built and rebuilt from the 8th to 11th century CE. Its interior was decorated with hundreds of frescoes which are amongst the finest examples of early Christian art seen anywhere."

Christianity had been very influential in Sudan from the 4th century onwards and for nearly a millennium the majority of the population was Christian. Christians suffered when invading Arabs brought Islam - especially in the northern part of the country - and gradually Islamized the region by the 15th century. However, the Greek Orthodox and Ethiopian Orthodox churches survived. Following the defeat of the self-proclaimed Islamic Mahdi and his supporters by the British in 1898, many Christian groups entered the country. Roman Catholics, Anglicans (via the Church Missionary Society) and American Presbyterians also came from their base in Egypt. The

Anglican Sudan United Mission, the Africa Inland Mission, and the Sudan Interior Mission all followed. Several African-initiated churches have also become established. Many missionaries went to South Sudan from Khartoum.

As indicated above, the role of Christianity started diminishing with the arrival of Islam, especially after the rise of the Mahdist movement of the 19th century. The situation worsened after the independence of Sudan in the second half of the 20th century, as powerful Islamists took over political power. When al-Bashir assumed office by coup in the 1980s, he proclaimed that Sharia law would be the source of all laws in the country. As a result, the Christian influence further decreased.

Church spectrum today

Sudan: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	104,000	5.2
Catholic	1,109,000	55.5
Protestant	829,000	41.5
Independent	21,400	1.1
Unaffiliated	34,400	1.7
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-97,600	-4.9
Total	**2,000,200**	**100.0**
(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)		

Evangelical movement	432,000	21.6
Renewalist movement	147,000	7.4

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

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

Generally speaking, Christians are found throughout the country. However, they live primarily in major cities, such as Khartoum, Port Sudan, Kassala, Gedaref, El Obeid, and El Fasher. Christians also are concentrated in some parts of the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile State.

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2021):

"Relatively small but long-established groups of Coptic Orthodox and Greek Orthodox Christians are in Khartoum, El Obeid in North Kordofan, River Nile State, Gezira State, and eastern parts of the country. Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox communities largely made up of refugees and mi-

grants are in Khartoum and the eastern part of the country. Other larger Christian groups include the Roman Catholic Church, Episcopal Anglican Church, SCOC, Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SPEC), and the Presbyterian Church of Sudan. Smaller Christian groups include the Africa Inland Church, Armenian Apostolic Church, Sudan Interior Church, Sudan Pentecostal Church ...".

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

- Pressure and violence targeting Christians has always been more intense outside the capital city.
- In addition to the simple harassments and threats that Christians face in their daily lives, it is very important to distinguish what is going on in Darfur, the Nuba Mountain and the Blue Nile regions of the country from what is taking place in other parts of the country. In these areas there are armed conflicts directly affecting Christians.

Christian communities and how they are affected

In Sudan, all Christian communities face some form of persecution. However, the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians who are ethnic Africans or converts with a Muslim background are particularly high. Over the years, many of them have been arrested and charged with crimes such as espionage; many churches have been demolished; many Christians have been attacked indiscriminately in areas such as the Nuba Mountains region where government forces and rebel groups are in conflict. Many churches are under pressure to close down.

Communities of expatriate Christians: Expatriates are being forced to close their churches. These are groups mainly from Western countries and South Sudan. Their churches have been denied registration and many have faced demolition. Some expatriate Christians face arrest and

detention without due process of law.

Historical Christian communities: Christians belonging to historical churches such as the Coptic Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches face persecution resulting from both *Islamic oppression* and *Dictatorial paranoia*. In the past two decades, a program of church demolition was implemented. Under al-Bashir's government many churches including those belonging to the Historical Christian communities were targeted. Under the Transitional Council things improved, but what was lost has not been returned. Attempts to get property back have not been successful.

Converts to Christianity: This group, which consists mainly of Christians with a Muslim background, experiences the most intense pressure. Not only do converts feel the pressure of persecution in the *National* and *Church spheres of the life*, but also in severe form from family and neighbors in their *Community, Family* and *Private life*.

Non-traditional Christian communities: Sudanese Christians who belong to Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal denominations also face persecution in the form of *Islamic oppression* and *Dictatorial paranoia*. This group is also facing the prospect of having most of its churches in the country closed down.

External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: discovery - https://www.ancient.eu/Faras_Cathedral/

WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Sudan

Reporting period

1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022

Position on the World Watch List

Sudan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	83	10
WWL 2022	79	13
WWL 2021	79	13
WWL 2020	85	7
WWL 2019	87	6

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

Sudan scored 83 points in WWL 2023 an increase by four points from WWL 2022 and WWL 2021 (79 points). It is important to note that Sudan had dropped six points in WWL 2021 due to the change in policy and legal framework introduced by the short-lived Transitional Council. That hope for change vanished in October 2021 when the army effectively conducted a coup and took back complete control. Christians were arrested due to their faith. Above all fear and intimida-

 tion swept the Christian community.

The average pressure on Christians and churches is at an extreme level; the churches which had been forced to close have not been re-opened and Christians are still deprived of their rights in many ways; indeed, the government has continued to take legal action against certain church leaders. There are some clear indications that the country might be returning to Islamic rule, similar to what had been the case under President al-Bashir. A clear indication of this was the creation of a community police-force in August 2022. This police-force has a similar task and level of authority as al-Bashir's morality police that had been tormenting Christians in Khartoum for years.

Persecution engines

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

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

Islamic oppression (Very strong)

This persecution engine is rooted in the Muslim Brotherhood ideology advocated by the founder of the (up until April 2019) ruling party, Hassan al-Turabi, who helped Omar al-Bashir consolidate power during a bloodless coup in 1989. From then on, the Sudanese government worked towards forming an Islamic state at the expense of other religious groups in the country and has been accused of supporting radical Islamic militants for the past three decades. The USA first labeled Sudan as a state sponsor of terrorism on 12 August 1993 for knowingly harboring local and international terrorists and for allowing the country to be used as a transit point for terrorists and weapons. Osama Bin Laden was there before he moved to Afghanistan, for example.

Historically, Islam - including its radical tendencies such as the 19th century Mahdist movement (African History, The History of Sudanese nationalism, accessed 7 January 2023) - is firmly rooted in Sudanese society. Even though the overwhelming majority of the population in the country is Sunni Muslim, the government of Sudan under al-Bashir also had strong ties with Shia Iran.

Sharia law is the foundation of Sudan's legal system and Sudan's elite has aimed at enforcing an Islamic regime in the country. Under al-Bashir, apostasy was criminalized and punishable by the death penalty. Blasphemy laws were used countrywide to prosecute Christians. Although this is now changing, Islamic law is still very much in place (World Watch Monitor - WWM, 18 August 2020). This engine also has a nationalist element. There are also violent Islamic militants still active that were part of the former Sudanese president's J*anjaweed* militia. These militias are very active in rural areas.

Dictatorial paranoia (Medium)

Up until April 2019, Sudan was run by an authoritarian regime ever since al-Bashir came to power through a coup in 1989. The influence of the government in private and public life was enormous. The Darfur crisis continued unabated, the conflict with Sudan's People Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) showed no sign of reaching a permanent solution even though ceasefire agreements were reached (WWM, 14 November 2017). Some argue that the agreements were made due to the pressure of sanctions from the US government and that the Sudanese government complied in the hope that the sanctions would be lifted. Whenever ex-President al-Bashir's government faced socio-economic and political challenges, support among the population at large was revived by using inflammatory language against the West. This, in turn, had an adverse effect on Sudanese Christians, as the government regarded Christians as being agents of Western countries.

There seems to be a symbiotic relationship between *Islamic oppression* and *Dictatorial paranoia* since those leading the regime under al-Bashir were mainly people adhering to radical Islamic ideology; indeed, the National Congress Party (NCP) served as a means to strengthen the Islamic agenda. This implies that the role of the government in the persecution of Christians was not only driven by totalitarian tendencies but also by Islamist sympathies as well. In the past three decades, the willingness of the ex-president to opportunistically discard beliefs and promises in exchange for hanging on to power became increasingly evident. Almost all of his decisions – whether related to supporting armed militias groups or cracking down on all forms of dissent – were motivated mainly, if not solely, by the desire to stay in power at all costs. He was able to do this despite the International Criminal Court (ICC) indicting him of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide for what happened in Sudan under his leadership and issued a warrant for his arrest in 2009 (ICC, 4 March 2009).

The country has continued to be rated 'not free'. In Freedom House's Global Freedom Index 2022, the country scored very low (10/100).

Organized corruption and crime (Strong)

The government of Sudan under ex-President al-Bashir employed all means available to stay in power, including the mobilization of tribal militias (See above: *Security situation*). There have been allegations of gross violations of human rights against the non-Arab citizens and Christians are among the minorities who are victims of this sort of organized crime.

Clan oppression (Strong), blended with Ethno-religious hostility (Strong)

The Sudanese population consists of about 19 different ethnic groups and almost 600 subgroups. Most of the inhabitants of the southern parts of the country are of ethnic African origin, and Arabs live predominantly in the northern parts of the country. Due to the deeply religious nature of the Sudanese people, most of the population are adherents of Christianity or Islam, however, indigenous religions are also in existence. For many years, the Arabs from the North have tried to spread not only Islam but also a specific cultural and ethnic identity associated with Arabism. This led to decades of civil war and was ultimately responsible for the independence of South Sudan. However, even today, this is happening all over the country. The

majority of the ethnic Africans are Christians, which makes them a particular target.

Drivers of persecution

Sudan: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG		STRONG	STRONG				VERY STRONG	STRONG
Government officials	Strong							Strong	Medium
Ethnic group leaders			Strong	Strong					Medium
Non-Christian religious leaders	Very strong								
Violent religious groups	Very strong								
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs			Medium	Medium					
Political parties								Medium	
Organized crime cartels or networks	Strong								Strong

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

Drivers of Islamic oppression

- *Non-Christian religious leaders (Very strong):* Imams in mosques and madrassas preach anti-Christian sentiment. This comes mainly from radical Muslim clerics wanting to see Sudan become an Islamic state. There is also a Shia influence through Iran.
- *Ordinary citizens (Very strong):* Followers of Wahhabism and advocates of Sharia law (as the basis for regulating all aspects of life in Sudan) are closing the spaces available for the Christian life. Islam is deeply embedded in Sudanese society and everyone is encouraged to follow the government policy of one religion, one culture and one language. This quickly leads to the persecution of Christians.

- *Government officials (Medium):* State security forces continue to harass and intimidate Christians.
- *Violent religious groups (Very strong):* Militias organized by the government are responsible for killing Christians and for the destruction of property of Christians all over the country.
  Extended family (Strong): Both at the individual and family level, citizens have been involved in persecuting Christians in the country. A country expert states: "Family members fear that conversion to Christianity of a family member could lead to the whole family being barred from attending community activities for no fault of their own. Thus they will do whatever it takes to pressure coverts into renouncing their faith."

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- *Government officials (Medium):* Despite the change in the leadership at the top level, government officials are still a significant driver of persecution and have continued to impede Christians' rights - for example, where Christians have tried to reclaim their church buildings. Government officials are also forcing Christians to go to school on Sundays. Ten years ago an arrest warrant was issued against al-Bashir by the International Criminal Court for crimes that included many against the Christian minority. While al-Bashir was charged in his position as head of state, there were numerous officials at various levels of government involved.
- *Political parties (Medium):* The long-ruling National Congress Party (which was founded in 1996 and was led by Omar al-Bashir until he was deposed in April 2019) is Islamist and has also pushed for (and participated in) the persecution of Christians.

Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- *Organized crime networks (Strong):* Although officially illegal, many groups which operate like gangsters towards Christians are state-sanctioned.
- *Government officials (Medium):* Sudan is one of the most corrupt countries in Africa. Politicians and corruption networks have been conspiring against Christians and undermining the rule of law. They work hand in hand so that Christians lose their churches and other property before courts of law.
- *Ethnic leaders (Medium):* Ethnic leaders also work against Christians within the existing networks of nepotism and corruption.

Drivers of Clan oppression / Ethno-religious hostility (blended)

- *Ethnic leaders (Strong):* Some ethnic leaders have received government backing, especially where their ethnic groups see ethnicity and Islam as one and the same. Thus if they see one of their members converting to Christianity, they will persecute them. These government-supported groups with Arab ethnic background also seek to exert pressure on non-Arabs, especially on ethnic African Christians. Most of the inhabitants of the southern parts of the country are of ethnic African origin and Christian (or Ethno-religionist); Arabs live predominantly in the North. For many years, Arabs from the North have tried to spread not only Islam as a religion but also the Arab cultural and ethnic identity. This played a major

part in the decades-long civil war that resulted in the loss of millions of lives, bodily injury and displacement of millions of others from their homes. Norms in the community also plays their own role in terms of persecution.

- **Extended family (community members) (Medium)**: Extended family and members of a given community are expected to follow certain norms as defined by clan tradition. These often stand in contradiction to Christian values. In this context, Christian converts face pressure to assimilate their behavior, dress code, and other communal practices. If they deviate from those practices, they are likely to face hostile pressure and violence.

The Persecution pattern

WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Sudan
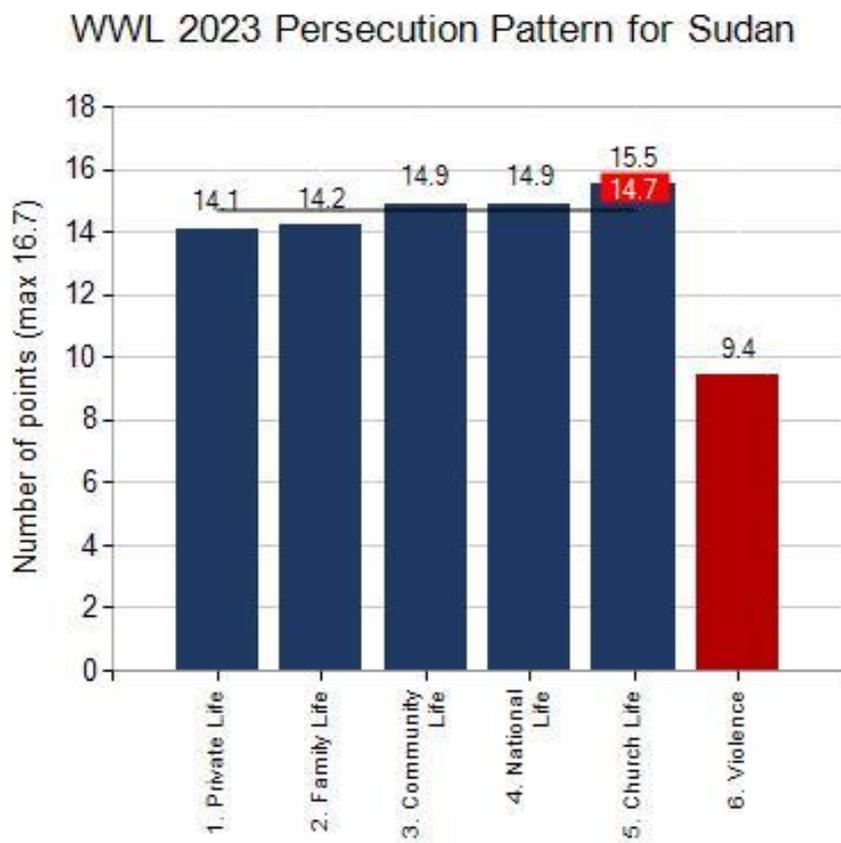
The WWL 2023 Persecution pattern for Sudan shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Sudan is at the extreme level of 14.7 points up from 14.1 points in WWL 2022.
- Pressure is strongest in the *Church sphere (15.5)*, which reflects the fact that churches in the country face enormous challenges. This is followed by the *Community* and *National spheres (14.9)*, an indication that Christians do not enjoy equality in the communities where they live, and the country they belong to.
- The score for violence was 9.4 up from 8.5 points in WWL 2022.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2023 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the "WWL Scoring example" in the WWL Methodology, available at: https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (4.00 points)

Speaking about faith other than Islam is highly discouraged, and risky. Debates and discussion about religion are taboo, especially if questions are about Islam and Christianity. As a result, Christians tend to avoid talking about their faith to guests or other members of the local community for safety reasons: It could be seen as evangelizing and lead to arrest or mob attack.

Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.50 points)

Expression of faith or anything that is contrary to what the community sees as anti-Islam is risky. It creates a hostile environment. In this context of hostility toward Christians, the country remains a risky place to openly demonstrate Christian faith. If Christians mention details about their faith in written form, it is likely that they will be traced and attacked. That is why Christians often prefer to meet and pray privately, not publicly. This affects all categories of Christianity in the country; but converts are affected most.

Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (3.50 points)

For Christians to meet as a Christian group can be dangerous, especially outside the major cities. Although not a policy of the government, a gathering of Christians is seen as a serious threat to the community by locals and community leaders. Meeting with other Christians (especially for converts) always carries the danger of abduction or arrest by government security agents. This is one of the issues that all Christian communities in the country face. There is constant surveillance and follow-up action by the community and the police. Even though things did improve under the Transitional Council, problems remain.

Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.25 points)

Even though the government pledged to change the anti-conversion laws in the criminal code, there are still many provisions in other laws that are directed against conversion. So, despite the proposal by the government to repeal the apostasy law (and other laws that restrict human rights), it is clear that there are still fears for the safety of converts, especially in rural areas. Converts cannot talk about their conversion in public. They can be ostracized, discriminated against and expelled. Local communities still think in general that anyone leaving Islam should be punished by death.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.3: Christians have been hindered in celebrating a Christian wedding for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points)

Christians in Sudan have never been free in its fullest sense. In Sudanese culture, religion is central to society and confers rights and privileges on individuals. In this context, Christian social ceremonies have been difficult; for instance, in the case of Christians marrying. If a marriage is between a Muslim and a Christian, the Christian is expected to convert to Islam. While the law (to a certain extent) allows that non-Muslims will not be subjected to the application of Islamic law, in practice a Christian wedding will not take place as smoothly as a wedding between Muslims.

Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.75 points)

Raising children with Christian values and principles is not easy in Sudan. Converts often refrain from raising their children as Christians because the children might inadvertently reveal the faith of their parents to others. Linking this to the school system, a country expert noted: "It is very tough to raise children according to Christian belief and faith. The school system, the welfare system and society in general complicate many things. In public schools located in majority Muslim areas of the country, the government requires instruction in Islam. In state schools in areas where Muslims are not a majority, students have a choice of studying Islam or Christianity. However, Christian courses are not offered in the majority of state schools."

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

Sudan has been a country with a strict understanding of Islam for over 100 years. This has led to a focus which makes the country hostile to non-Muslims. In this context, no one is immune from such hostility, including children. Children from Christian families are often harassed in school or playgrounds due to their parent's faith. As a result of this, Christians (especially converts) often hesitate or avoid talking about their faith to their children. The way they dress and/or the displaying any symbols that indicate their Christians faith, is all widely regarded as a sign of inferiority among Islamic groups in the country and can cause acts of discrimination, intolerance and persecution.

Block 2.12: Christian spouses of non-Christians have been excluded from the right or opportunity to claim custody of the children in divorce cases. (3.00 points)

Christians in Sudan face challenges in many aspects including family rights. This has to be seen in the context of Sudan being a majority Muslim nation and very conservative. Such exclusion is to make sure that the next generation remains Muslim majority and is all too common as an initial reaction when one parent converts to Christianity. Hence, in the case of separation of a Christian convert and non-Christian parent, the family of Muslim faith will take the child into their custody by force. This is fundamentally in contradiction to the best interest of the child as well as to the principle of fairness.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

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

This is one of the most common challenges that Christians face in Sudan. At community level, Christians have been struggling to live out their Christian faith. In the past, community leaders and Morality Police used to work hand in hand to suppress Christians in the community, especially in (but not limited to) Khartoum. After the departure of President al-Bashir and changes in the political system, especially the repeal of Public Order Law in December 2019, the role of such police decreased. However, that does not mean that Christians in society (especially women) are now free – they are still required to adhere to strict dress code by community leaders. Sharing community resources, dress code and other requirements are unreasonably placed on the shoulders of Christians. Even after the change that followed the removal of al-Bashir all the values that were established by the previous regime are still in place. To make things worse, in August 2022, the military regime has established a community police which human rights groups claim is an indirect re-establishment of the Morality Police (The Guardian, 19 August 2022).

Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (3.75 points)

The past three years has been a point of distraction from the real problem at the community level. Until the coup was conducted in late 2021, the international community had been focusing on the changes that were promised following al-Bashir's departure. However, at the local level there have been no real changes that can back up what the Transitional Council pledged to deliver. In fact, the militias that were part of the al-Bashir regime have actually gone back to the village level, making the lives of Christians very difficult. What has made this more worrying is the creation of the community policeforce in August 2022.

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

Forced marriage or abduction by community members is occurring, even though there are no reports on this in mainstream media. Female Christian converts and suspected converts are often forced to marry older community leaders or imams. In some places, there are also real threats of abduction by armed groups.

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

Religion is a key component of many rights and privileges in the community. It is well noted that the general attitude in society is that Sudanese citizens should be Muslim. The government uses all available opportunities to downgrade and punish Christians by restricting them from using community resources. In this context, all categories of Christians in the country struggle to ac-

cess their share of local community resources. In the cities, this means Christians incur extra costs to get what they need for daily life. Outside the urban areas, daily life is extremely difficult if community resources are unavailable for Christians.

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. (3.75 points)

In late 2020 there was great discussion about how Sudan was taking a giant leap toward changing some of the country's most repressive laws - for example, the repeal of the apostasy law and other policies and regulations that were restricting freedom of religión and human rights. However, at the practical level, such changes never became evident in the life of the people. In fact, except for the apostasy provision, most of the the other restrictive laws concerning religion remain in place. Since the October 2021 coup, things are not going as it was initially hoped.

Block 4.7: Christians have been hindered in running their own businesses without interference for faith-related reasons (e.g. personnel policy, client admission policy). (3.75 points)

As mentioned above, religion – i.e., Islam – plays a pivotal role in every aspect of Sudanese society and government structures at all levels. There are many methods that those who persecute Christians use to target Christians when it comes to running their businesses. It has been reported that - compared to Muslim business-owners - it is very difficult for non-Muslims to get a license for starting up a business. Most Christian business-owners are discriminated against by customers because of their religion. In the majority of cases, while dealing with the government, it is very difficult for Christian business-owners to win government-sponsored bids because of the discriminatory attitude of the officials in charge of the offices responsible for these bids. Following the removal of al-Bashir, Sudan looked set to become a secular state, which would have helped improve this situation for Christians. The October 2021 coup dashed those hopes.

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

It is a well-documented fact that freedom of expression in the country is restricted. These restrictions emanate from two main sources: The government and community leaders. The Church is hindered from expressing its faith, practices and opinions in public because the authorities fear they would thereby be giving Christians the chance to influence others to become Christians. The censorship affects everyone; for Christians, the risks of speaking out are higher as the state is likely to give impunity (in whole or part) to anyone reacting against those whose comments could be understood as a criticism of the government or local officials. Here also, in the pre-October 2021 coup situation, there was hope that this was going to change as announced by the Transitional Council. The October coup has changed all dynamics in the country. Some Christians are particularly targeted by the government due to the assumption that 'Christians are against the coup/the army.'

Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (3.50 points)

Many organizations including Christian organizations in Sudan showed support for the political change in the country. With al-Bashir's ousting from power, the hope was that the Transitional Council would usher in new reforms that could be implemented immediately. However, the army and military intelligence have hijacked such support. Now, where organizations are perceived to be critical of state institutions or are overt about the evangelistic effect of their work, they will experience hindrances. Many international NGOs are barred from the country when they are found to be Christian-based. There are still some Christian organizations operating in the country despite the challenges.

The country has numerous political parties but none have a Christian agenda.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

Christians and churches have always been under constant surveillance by neighbors and the state security apparatus. While Christians in the capital city and other major cities are subject to monitoring and obstruction mainly from government sources, churches in the remote parts of the country, especially in areas affected by the civil war, are subject to more obstruction and monitoring from both government and non-government groups. As a result, it is often the case that Christians cannot enjoy their right to collective worship, association and assembly to its fullest extent.

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. (3.75 points)

When al-Bashir was removed from power, it was hoped that all the churches that were forced to close down would be allowed to re-open again. However, Christians have found it difficult to build new churches, the major obstacle being the government officers responsible for issuing the required permits. Even if a permit is issued, Christians then face challenges from local Islamic leaders and radical Muslims on a daily basis; the majority of the Muslim population has been encouraged to believe that Sudan should be Muslim nation that does not allow any Christian symbols in the country.

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

This is another area where churches face particular pressure. Whatever activities churches want to carry out, they are required by the local authorities to only operate inside their church compounds. Undertaking any church-related activities outside churches without express permission from local authorities will result in the arrest of the individuals taking part. Society is very conservative and does not want to see non-Muslim gatherings in the country. It is also very risky for Christians to do so, as they can be attacked by Muslim mobs.

Block 5.9: Christians have experienced interference when choosing their own religious leaders. (3.75 points)

This issue was prevalent under al-Bashir. The problems that started under that regime are still continuing for many churches. People in the government believe that if church leaders are not closely controlled, they will form conspiracies with foreigners and weaken the state. At times, church infighting is the result of the government's attempt to infiltrate church leadership.

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.*

Sudan: Violence Block question	WWL 2023	WWL 2022
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	5
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	10 *	10 *
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	4	3
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	1	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	0	0
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	10 *	10 *
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	10 *	10 *
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	100 *	100 *
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	10 *	10 *
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?	10 *	0
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	100 *	10
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	0

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

The table below shows that the average pressure on Christians has been at an extreme level over all 5 WWL reporting periods. Whereas WWL 2019 - WWL 2021 show a slight decrease (trend), WWL 2021 started showing an uptick reaching 14.7 in WWL 2023 from 14.1 in WWL 2022. The initial decrease becomes evident, coinciding with the ousting of President al-Bashir. But the reform seems botched when in October 2022 the army conducted a silent coup to effec-

tively sidelined the civilian part of the transitional government.

Sudan: WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2023	14.7
2022	14.1
2021	14.0
2020	15.0
2019	15.2

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Sudan
(Spheres of life)
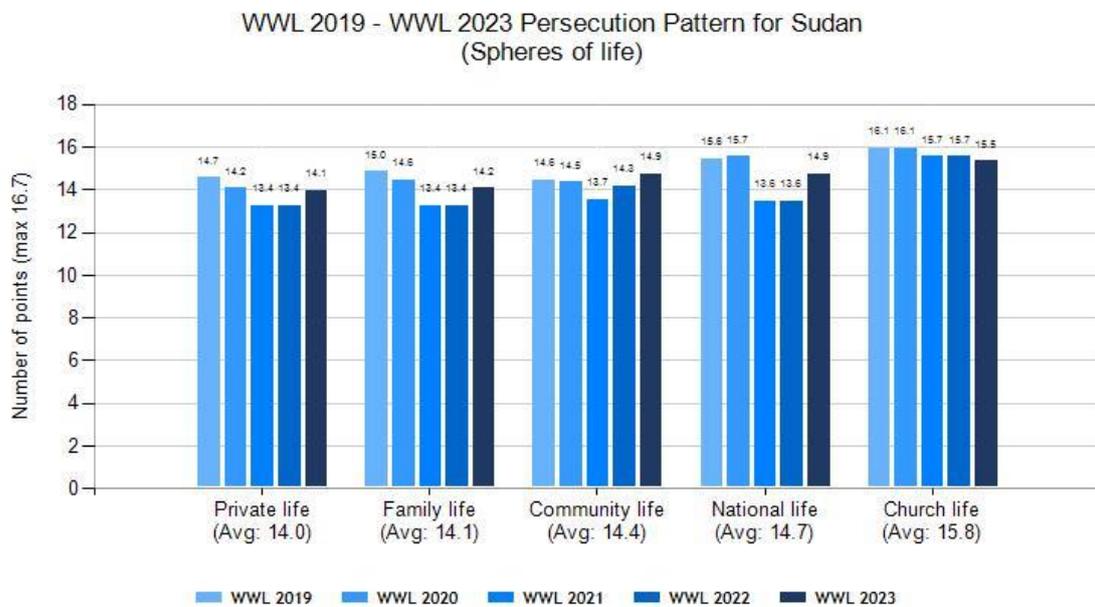
The chart above shows the pressure on Christians in the various *spheres of life* over the last five reporting periods. It can clearly be seen that the average pressure on Christians in all *spheres of life* has been at extreme levels. The *Church* and *National spheres* scored highest (15.8 and 14.7 points respectively), an indication that church worship and activities are particularly being targeted, with the government playing a key role.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

The chart below depicts the scores for violence over the last five reporting periods - 9.6 points in average. The scores had been clearly decreasing each year from a very high level in WWL 2019 to a lower but still very high level of 8.5 points in WWL 2022. However, the trend was reversed in WWL 2023 by an increase in score to 9.4 points.

WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Sudan
(Violence)
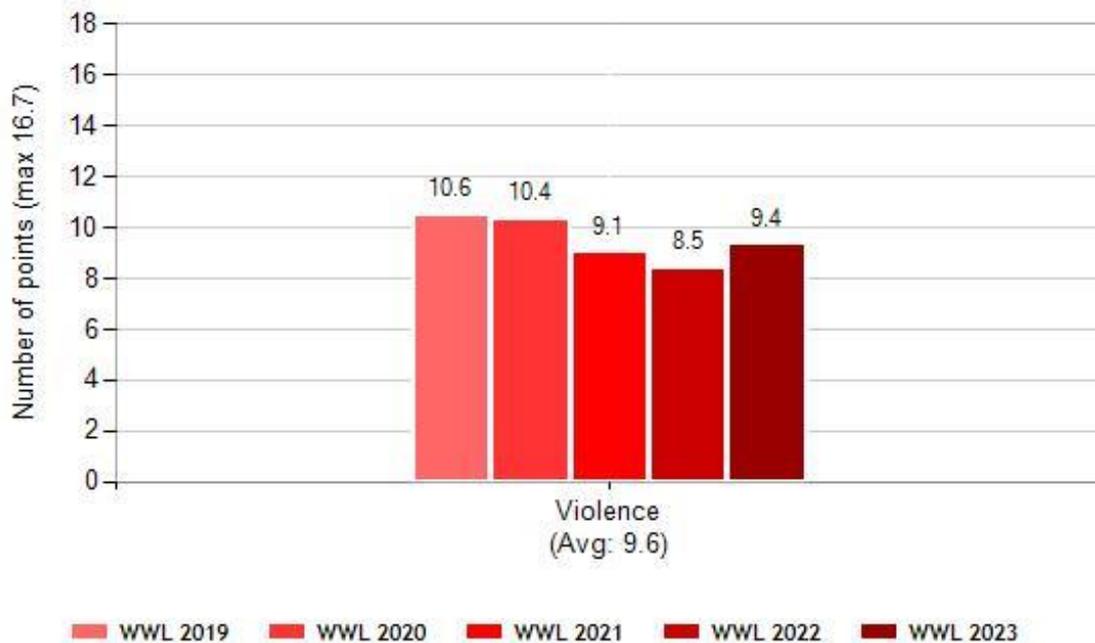
Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Discrimination/harassment via education
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Trafficking; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Women have encountered rapid change in Sudan in the past few years. Under the Transitional Council in 2020, there were positive changes impacting women's rights and safety, including the elimination of the apostasy law, the removal of permits from male relatives for women to travel, and the banning of FGM (Human Rights Watch, 16 July 2020). It was also announced that Sudan's transitional government had agreed to separate religion from the state, ending 30 years of Islamic rule (Bloomberg, 4 September 2020). However, in 2021, COVID-19 and the deteriorating economic conditions led to increases in domestic violence, including physical and sexual violence, and an increase in forced marriage (UN News, 19 July 2021). The October 2021 military coup only further stymied the progress on women's rights, with women reportedly facing increased targeted violence amid the unrest (SUWRA, 20 February, 2022).

Female Christians continue to face tremendous challenges and are at a disadvantage in society simply because of their gender. Continuing gaps in protective legislation remain avenues for religious persecution.

Christian women and girls, particularly converts, are vulnerable to rape, forced marriage and domestic violence. On a broader level, Islamic extremists have reportedly kidnapped Sudanese girls for marriage and/or sexual slavery. Converts may also be isolated within the home to reduce the embarrassment and shame of the conversion on the family, as well as to ensure they cannot meet with other Christians. Converts will also be denied inheritance and if already married, divorced from their husbands and separated from their children. A country expert explained: "Muslim husbands forbid talking about Christianity to children, and if that is done, they divorce the wife."

Furthermore, it is challenging for women and girls to report sexual crimes and domestic violence to the authorities. The testimony of women is not considered equivalent to that of men, and there is significant social stigma attached to rape that deters from coming forward. Additionally, it has been reported that policemen themselves have raped Christian girls, which feeds into a landscape of impunity for perpetrators. Women play a major role in raising their children, representing the family at societal events and helping their husbands with agricultural tasks. The persecution of women and girls therefore has a rippling negative impact on the wider family and community.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; False charges; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Violent Islamic militancy continues to plague many African nations and has led to an increase in the persecution of Christians. The government of Sudan targets male Christians with a variety of serious false charges, including "terrorism". The prosecution of four male Christian converts from Islam under the decriminalized apostasy law raises serious concerns over the progress of the religious freedom reforms made by the Transitional Council in 2020. Although these charges were later dismissed, church leaders have also reportedly been threatened with apostasy charges for engaging in church activities (HRWF, 21 September 2022). Church leaders, who are predominately male, are the most frequent targets and government security forces monitor their activities daily. A country expert stated: "Pastors and other Christian leaders have been

special targets of harassment for faith-related reasons. ... [It] has been mostly tied with wanting to rebuild churches in communities which had burned down churches."

Christian men and boys, particularly converts, are vulnerable to beatings, imprisonment, harassment within the workplace and displacement. Converts may be forced out of their homes and shunned by their families. Others feel forced to leave their home due to the pressure of persecution.

Men are usually the head of households and providers of the family in Sudan. If they are unable to provide for their families due to persecution, the family will experience trouble financially. Men are particularly important for security; in remote parts of the country, absence can lead to family property being looted and wives and daughters being sexually attacked. Hence, Christian men and boys become prime targets for abduction and killing by radical groups like Janjaweed due to the cascading effect their absence creates. As a country expert reported: "The abduction of men and boys is designed to make the whole family susceptible to economic crises ... forcing the family to flee the area."

Persecution of other religious minorities

Any religious group apart from Sunni Islam faces tremendous difficulties in exercising their faith.

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2021):

- "Individuals from minority religious groups, including Shia and other Muslim minorities, stated they avoided expressing beliefs or discussing religious practices that differed from the Sunni majority. Local media stated they exercised self-censorship to avoid covering religious issues, due to concern about receiving negative reactions or reprisals from the majority Sunni community."
- On January 6 [2021], protestors rallied and burned Israeli flags outside the cabinet offices in Khartoum after the government signed the Abraham Accords, which was seen as a step toward normalizing ties with Israel.

The Jewish community has been known to face serious challenges in Sudan: In February 2019, an Islamic cleric stated in a TV broadcast that "Jews epitomize all trickery" (Jewish News Syndicate, 21 February 2019).

The Bahai community is not recognized in the country and can only operate in secret.

Jehovah's Witnesses also face sporadic harassment.

Future outlook

In general:

- Society will remain dominated by conservative Islam.
- Christians will continue to find it difficult to obtain building permits for new churches as those in power will seek to avoid offending local conservative Muslims.
- However, the demolition of churches might cease.

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Islamic oppression

Besides the authoritarian government which installed itself in October 2021, radical imams and even radical armed groups like the Janjaweed militia are targeting Christians. *Islamic oppression* is likely to remain in operation in the coming years because it is so deeply embedded in society. In fact, there has been strong feeling within the conservative Muslim population to derail any attempt at reforming Sudan to make it a secular state.

Dictatorial paranoia

Known for its poor record in human rights, the government of Sudan has continued violating the rights of Christians in the country. From 1999 to 2019, Sudan had been on the US State Department's list of "Countries of Particular Concern (CPC)". Pressure from the international community helped the release of some Christians who were detained because of their faith; however, the government has not changed its general attitude and behavior towards Christians. The looting and destruction of churches, hospitals and schools are all common, especially in the Nuba Mountains region. It remains to be seen whether *Dictatorial paranoia* will continue to be as strong in the future now that al-Bashir has been removed from power. Early indications showed that there was a definite desire to reform the country and it is in this context that the USA [removed](#) Sudan from the CPC category, moving it to the Special Watch List in December 2019 (Sudan Tribune, 20 December 2019). The Transitional Council moved with surprising speed by proposing drastic changes to some of the draconian laws that were used to suppress dissidents and Christians. However, the October 2021 coup dashed all hopes of real reform. In fact, the military regime established a community police force in August 2022, which resembles al-Bashir's disbanded Morality Police.

Organized corruption and crime

Organized corruption in the country has served to protect the interests of the ruling party and president. The ex-president was behind the creation of the *Janjaweed* militias who became his most trusted force in the country. These militias were behind the killing, rape and displacement of civilians in the Darfur region - including Christian civilians. Although in a post-Bashir situation it is to be expected that these militias will play a less dominant role, they are likely to remain potent enough to persecute Christians.

Clan oppression (Strong), blended with Ethno-religious hostility (Strong)

Many social, political and economic issues in the country involve a mixture of factors. In the past, al-Bashir had used ethnicity (Arab) and religion (Islam) to rally his supporters. He successfully presented Christians as villains and Christianity as the source of the problems which Sudanese society needed to combat. Despite his fall from power in April 2019, ethnic groups still possess huge political leverage in the country. Now that the army has seized power, there is a bigger chance that this engine will become stronger.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines description: 19th century Mahdist movement - http://oxfordre.com/africanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277734-e-256
- Persecution engines description: Islamic law is still very much in place - https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2020/08/ngos-say-changes-to-sudans-islamic-laws-dont-go-far-enough/
- Persecution engines description: ceasefire agreements - https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/11/ceasefire-holds-but-food-shortage-threatens-sudans-nuba-people/
- Persecution engines description: war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide - https://www.icc-cpi.int/CourtRecords/CR2009_01514.PDF
- Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.75 points): in August 2022 - https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/aug/19/sudan-community-squad-morality-policing-fears
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Human Rights Watch - https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/16/sudans-law-reforms-positive-first-step
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: announced - https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-09-04/sudan-ends-30-years-of-islamic-law-by-separating-religion-state
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: UN News - https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/07/1096132
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: SUWRA - https://suwra.org/blog/2022/02/20/report-sudanese-women-rights-between-democratic-transition-and-military-coup/
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: , 20 February, 2022 - https://suwra.org/blog/2022/02/20/report-sudanese-women-rights-between-democratic-transition-and-military-coup/
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: dismissed - https://hrwf.eu/sudan-apostasy-charges-against-christians-in-sudan-dismissed/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CThe%20men%20refused%20and%20were,July%2C%20according%20to%20local%20sources.
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Islamic cleric - https://www.jns.org/sudanese-cleric-the-jews-epitomize-trickery-employ-trickery-against-allah/
- Future outlook: removed - https://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article68734

Further useful reports

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

- https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/
- https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Sudan