

World  
Watch  
Research

## Sudan: Full Country Dossier

January 2024



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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## Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
World Watch List 2024.....	3
Copyright note.....	4
Sources and definitions.....	4
<b>WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Sudan.....</b>	<b>5</b>
Brief country details .....	5
Map of country.....	5
Dominant persecution engines and drivers .....	6
Brief description of the persecution situation .....	6
Summary of international obligations and rights violations.....	7
Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period .....	7
Specific examples of positive developments .....	8
External Links - Situation in brief .....	8
<b>WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Sudan .....</b>	<b>8</b>
Links for general background information.....	8
Recent history .....	9
Political and legal landscape .....	11
Religious landscape.....	13
Economic landscape.....	14
Social and cultural landscape .....	16
Technological landscape .....	17
Security situation .....	18

Trends analysis .....	19
External Links - Keys to understanding .....	20
<b>WWL 2024: Church information / Sudan .....</b>	<b>23</b>
Christian origins.....	23
Church spectrum today .....	23
Areas where Christians face most difficulties .....	24
Christian communities and how they are affected .....	25
External Links - Church information.....	25
<b>WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Sudan.....</b>	<b>26</b>
Reporting period .....	26
Position on the World Watch List .....	26
Persecution engines .....	27
Drivers of persecution .....	29
The Persecution pattern.....	31
Pressure in the 5 spheres of life .....	32
Violence.....	37
5 Year trends .....	39
Gender-specific religious persecution / Female .....	41
Gender-specific religious persecution / Male .....	43
Persecution of other religious minorities.....	44
Future outlook.....	44
External Links - Persecution Dynamics.....	46
<b>Further useful reports.....</b>	<b>47</b>

# Introduction

## World Watch List 2024

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

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	12.4	63	64	63	62	61
52	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	14.4	62	63	61	58	55
53	Nepal	12.1	10.4	9.5	13.2	12.3	4.4	62	61	64	66	64
54	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	64	64	63	62
55	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	1.1	61	60	59	56	56
56	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	10.6	61	58	55	53	56
57	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.7	61	62	62	62	60
58	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.2	10.8	11.5	9.7	5.9	60	57	63	62	65
59	Azerbaijan	13.2	9.9	9.6	11.9	13.6	1.7	60	59	60	56	57
60	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	9.7	10.7	12.1	0.9	60	60	59	58	60
61	Kyrgyzstan	13.2	10.3	11.3	10.5	12.2	1.3	59	59	58	58	57
62	Russian Federation	12.7	7.7	10.6	12.8	12.9	1.7	58	57	56	57	60
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	9.4	58	57	50	42	42
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	12.8	57	55	52	48	48
65	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	1.1	55	55	57	56	55
66	Honduras	7.9	4.7	12.2	7.3	9.9	12.6	55	53	48	46	39
67	Venezuela	6.0	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	10.7	53	56	51	39	42
68	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	8.9	52	49	44	43	41
69	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	7.2	52	48	43	47	45
70	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	15.9	52	51	48	47	48
71	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	52	51	46	43
72	Lebanon	11.0	10.2	7.0	6.1	6.6	7.2	48	40	11	-	35
73	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	3.7	47	44	44	43	43
74	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.6	46	46	43	43	44
75	Belarus	9.6	3.8	5.8	9.7	13.3	3.3	46	43	33	30	28
76	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	44	42	42	42
77	Ukraine	5.5	4.8	8.0	11.6	11.6	2.8	44	37	37	34	33
78	Israel	9.8	8.6	5.8	6.3	6.9	6.7	44	38	41	40	38

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## Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2024 reporting period was 1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/> and on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom): <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>.

# WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Sudan

## Brief country details

Sudan: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
47,095,000	2,013,000	4.3

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

## Map of country



Sudan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	87	8
WWL 2023	83	10
WWL 2022	79	13
WWL 2021	79	13
WWL 2020	85	7

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

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

### Brief description of the persecution situation

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.

Persecution in the country is very complex. As reported by the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Sudan), some Christians face charges based on apostasy:

- "Several cases involving persons facing criminal charges for adultery or apostasy went to court during the year [2022]. In one case, authorities in Gezira State in October 2021 charged a married couple with adultery based on the Islamic prohibition of a Muslim wo-

man marrying a Christian man. In addition to adultery, authorities charged the couple with violating marriage provisions of the law. According to the couple's lawyer, the pair could have been sentenced to 100 lashes, stoning, or "internal deportation or banishment" if found guilty. The couple was scheduled to attend a hearing in October [2022] at al-Baqir Criminal Court in Gezira State."

Since 15 April 2023 a war erupted between the army (led by Sudan's de facto ruler, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF, led by Burhan's deputy-turned-rival [Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo](#), known as "Hemedti") (Al-Jazeera, 16 April 2023). This conflict has led to massive displacement in the country. Foreign citizens were evacuated hastily, but many national civilians have been caught up in the fighting. Unlike many conflicts in the past, this time war is being waged in the heart of Sudan-Khartoum (See below: *Recent history*). Since the majority of Christians reside in Khartoum, it is possible that they will be forced to take sides in the conflict. In the lawless situation of civil war, it is anyway likely that violent actors will take advantage of the chaos and target Christians.

## 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 can 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

- [13 May 2023](#): The Al-Masalma Coptic Church came under attack in Omdurman and the church guard was also stabbed as armed looters took over the building (Premier Christian News, 17 May 2023)
- [14 May 2023](#): "In Khartoum, RSF troops have forcibly evacuated all priests from Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church including Bishop Elia, the Bishop of Khartoum and South Sudan to convert the building into a military base. CSW reports that the military forces intimidated and harassed church members for days before forcing them to leave on 14th May." (Premier Christian News, 17 May 2023)
- [19 May 2023](#): A Sudanese Council of Churches statement lists a number of churches facing pressure and violence from RSF militia in Khartoum state (Binews, 19 May 2023)



## Specific examples of positive developments

None.

## External Links - Situation in brief

- Brief description of the persecution situation: Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/16/who-is-hemedti-the-puppeteer-behind-sudans-feared-rsf-fighters>
- 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: 13 May 2023: - <https://premierchristian.news/en/news/article/sudan-multiple-churches-attacked-amid-continued-violence>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: 14 May 2023 - <https://premierchristian.news/en/news/article/sudan-multiple-churches-attacked-amid-continued-violence>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: 19 May 2023: - <https://blnews.net/2023/05/sudanese-council-of-churches-statement-on-the-ongoing-attacks-on-churches-of-christian-denominations-in-khartoum>

## WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Sudan

### Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/22 Sudan report	AI Sudan 2022	<a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/east-africa-the-horn-and-great-lakes/sudan/report-sudan/">https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/east-africa-the-horn-and-great-lakes/sudan/report-sudan/</a>	26 June 2023
BBC News Sudan profile - updated 17 April 2023	BBC Sudan profile	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14094995">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14094995</a>	26 June 2023
Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI Sudan Report 2022	<a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/SDN">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/SDN</a>	26 June 2023
CIA World Factbook - updated 20 June 2023	World Factbook Sudan	<a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/sudan/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/sudan/</a>	26 June 2023
Crisis24 Sudan report (Garda World, updated April 2023) – covering 193 countries	Crisis24 Sudan report	<a href="https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/sudan">https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/sudan</a>	26 June 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2022 – covering 167 countries	EIU Democracy Index 2022 / MENA pp.60-63	<a href="https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/DI-final-version-report.pdf">https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/DI-final-version-report.pdf</a>	26 June 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2023 Sudan	<a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>	26 June 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Sudan not included	Democracy Index 2023	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores</a>	
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2023 Sudan	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/sudan/freedom-world/2023">https://freedomhouse.org/country/sudan/freedom-world/2023</a>	26 June 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report – covering 70 countries	Freedom on the Net 2023 Sudan	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/sudan/freedom-net/2023">https://freedomhouse.org/country/sudan/freedom-net/2023</a>	2 January 2024
Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 – covering 170 countries	GIWPS 2021 Sudan profile	<a href="https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/sudan/">https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/sudan/</a>	26 June 2023
Girls Not Brides Sudan report	Girls Not Brides Sudan	<a href="https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/sudan/">https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/sudan/</a>	26 June 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 Sudan	HRW 2023 country chapter Sudan	<a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/sudan">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/sudan</a>	26 June 2023
Internet World Stats available in 2023	IWS 2023 Sudan	<a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#sd">https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#sd</a>	26 June 2023
Middle East Concern Sudan profile - CURRENTLY NOT FUNCTIONING	MEC Sudan profile	<a href="https://meconcern.org/countries/sudan/">https://meconcern.org/countries/sudan/</a>	26 June 2023
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2023 Sudan	<a href="https://rsf.org/en/sudan">https://rsf.org/en/sudan</a>	26 June 2023
Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2022 Sudan	<a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/sdn">https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/sdn</a>	26 June 2023
UNDP: Human Development Report Sudan	UNDP HDR 2022 Sudan	<a href="http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/SDN">http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/SDN</a>	26 June 2023
US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report Sudan	IRFR 2022 Sudan	<a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/sudan/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/sudan/</a>	26 June 2023
USCIRF 2023 country reports – covering 17 CPC / 11 SWL, Sudan not included	USCIRF 2023	<a href="https://www.uscifr.gov/countries">https://www.uscifr.gov/countries</a>	
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook Sudan - April 2023	Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Sudan	<a href="https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48f2fefc5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-sdn.pdf">https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48f2fefc5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-sdn.pdf</a>	26 June 2023
World Bank Sudan data 2021	World Bank Sudan data	<a href="https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=SDN">https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=SDN</a>	26 June 2023
World Bank Sudan overview – updated 30 March 2023	World Bank overview Sudan	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/sudan/overview#1">https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/sudan/overview#1</a>	26 June 2023

## 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 in 2019](#) (Al-Jazeera, 29 November 2019) 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 (Reuters, 1 July 2022). In July 2022, the military leadership indicated that it would step down, but protesters viewed this as a [ruse](#) (Al-Jazeera, 6 July 2022).

**2023:** In April, war erupted in the heart of Sudan-Khartoum. De facto ruler, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan is in command of the government forces fighting against Burhan's deputy-turned-rival Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (known as "Hemedti") commanding the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). This conflict has led to massive displacement and civilians are caught up in the fighting. The warring parties have their own supporters. It is alleged that Ethiopia, UAE and Khalifa Haftar of Libya support the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). It has also been [reported](#) that Wagner mercenaries support RSF (CNN, 21 April 2023). Egypt is allegedly supporting the Sudanese army, helping with tactical advice, intelligence and even logistics.

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 civilian representatives 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 with protestors demanding 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 2021:** 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.
- **April 2023:** Civil war erupted between the army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

## 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 2023 Index, with the country's status categorized as 'Not Free'.

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 2022 and the first months of 2023. But things changed for the worst in April. [On 15 April 2023](#), a disagreement about returning to civilian rule and the integration of RSF forces into the national army triggered a major conflict between RSF and the Sudanese army. The crisis has caused hundreds of thousands of civilians to flee to neighboring countries seeking safety (Toward Freedom, 18 April 2023).

### **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. Child marriage is widespread and (according to Girls Not Brides Sudan) 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	2,013,000	4.3
Muslim	43,434,000	92.2
Hindu	890	0.0
Buddhist	990	0.0
Ethno-religionist	1,144,000	2.4
Jewish	53	0.0
Bahai	2,900	0.0
Atheist	71,000	0.2
Agnostic	426,000	0.9
Other	2,000	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

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

The religious composition of Sudan is a controversial issue. World Christian Database (WCD 2023) estimates the Christian population at 4.3% and the Muslim majority at 92.2%. 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 2022 Sudan):

- "Almost all Muslims in the country identify as Sunni, although there are significant distinctions among followers of different Sunni traditions, particularly among Sufi orders.

Small Shia Muslim communities are based predominantly in Khartoum."

- "At least one Jewish family remains in the Khartoum area."
- ""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.
- "The Sudan Council of Churches reports the presence of 36 Christian denominations, of which 24 are registered denominations."
- "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 'indecent' 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 this coup. As if that was not enough, the clash between powerful paramilitary group RSF and the Sudanese army since April 2023 has brought the country to a stand-still, creating much anxiety for the Christian community and others.

## Economic landscape

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

- Sudan's economic freedom score is 32.8, making its economy the 173rd freest in the 2023 Index. Sudan is ranked 47th among 47 countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa region, and its overall score is well below the regional and world averages. The report states: "Rampant corruption and insufficient respect for private property rights are serious impediments to long-term development of the private sector."

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

- **GDP:** "The economy is expected to recover at a weak pace of 0.4 percent in 2023, weighed down by the slow resolution of Sudan's political crisis and as widespread social unrest and insecurity persist. Thereafter, GDP growth is expected to average around 2 percent be-

tween 2023 and 2025, driven by rising agricultural output and exports of livestock, as well as mining and services." This prediction was made before civil war broke out; it is possible that the outlook has now changed.

- **Poverty:** "Although official poverty statistics are not available after 2014, the percentage of the population living on less than US\$2.15 per day (2017 PPP) is estimated to have increased from 20.4 percent in 2018 to 32.9 percent in 2023. The protracted economic crisis contributed to an estimated 12-percentage-point increase in extreme poverty."
- **Inflation:** "Average annual inflation declined from 359.7 percent in 2021 to 164.2 percent in 2022, driven by a slowdown in base money growth due to reduced monetization."

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 Monetary 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). When war broke out between the army and the powerful paramilitary group in April 2023, this created another layer of crisis in the country.

### Gender perspective

Women are economically vulnerable within Sudan. This is in part due to [low education rates](#) for girls. UNICEF writes (UNICEF Sudan Education, accessed 2 January 2024):

- "[F]ollowing the pandemic, prolonged school closures and unequal mitigation strategies have negatively impacted 8.1 million children (aged 5 – 18) enrolled in school, as well as worsening the situation for 6.9 million children out of school, especially those living through



conflicts and crises. The girl child is especially vulnerable – evidence suggests that COVID-19's associated economic crises exacerbated gender inequalities in Sudan, and even more so among adolescent girls. The primary driver of dropout for girls has been economic—compounded by pregnancy, early marriage and FGM."

According to Islamic law, sons and daughters do not have equal inheritance rights in Sudan. 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 UNDP HDR Sudan and World Factbook Sudan:

- **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:** 65.3 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 172 out of 191 countries, with a human development value of 0.508.
- **Gender development index (GDI):** "The 2021 female HDI value for Sudan is 0.466 in contrast with 0.535 for males, resulting in a GDI value of 0.870.
- **Gender inequality index (GII):** "Sudan has a GI value of 0.553, ranking it 141 out of 170 countries in 2021."

### Refugees/IDPs

A [UNHCR](#) report states (UNHCR, Sudan Situation, 30 June - 6 July 2023):

- "As of July 5, 2023, there are estimated 2.9 million forcibly displaced due to the recent outbreak of conflict in Sudan including 2,231,513 internally and 631,608 in neighboring countries."
- The UNHCR also condemned the attack on refugees in the ongoing fighting: "On 25 June, 28 refugees hosted by Sudan were killed in Khartoum when the area in which they lived was engulfed by the fighting, with additional refugees injured in the incident."

In a crisis appeal (accessed 25 July 2023), [UNHCR](#) stated: "Prices of food, fuel and other basic goods are reportedly skyrocketing, making critical goods unaffordable for many people. Despite attempts at ceasefires, people are being displaced amid the clashes and are fleeing to neighboring countries like Chad and South Sudan, in urgent need of basic relief items and shelter."

## 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 Christian women and girls therefore has a significant negative impact on her wider family and community.

## Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2023 Sudan):

- **Internet users:** 28.8% of the population - survey date: December 2021 (most recent survey available)
- **Facebook users:** 2.9% penetration - survey date: December 2021

According to World Bank Sudan data:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 76 per 100 people, reduction from 80.3 from previous report. 68.1% of women use a mobile phone, according to Georgetown (GIWPS 2021 Sudan profile).

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 2020, 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 from 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 World Factbook Sudan:

- 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.

As of 15 April 2023, many things have changed in Sudan. The conflict between the Sudan army (reportedly backed by Egypt) and the RSF (allegedly backed by Ethiopia, UAE and Libyan warlord Field-Marshal Haftar), is putting the entire region at risk. Some [analysts](#) consider it possible that Egypt might decide to send troops to Sudan to reinforce the Sudanese army because of the close relationship between RSF and Ethiopia (Atlantic Council, 1 June 2023). The conflict has displaced millions from their homes. Refugees who were in Sudan from neighboring countries have faced tremendous challenges, too. Some [Sudanese](#) have fled to Chad, Egypt, Central African Republic and South Sudan (CNN, 25 May 2023).

## Trends analysis

### 1) Reform hopes 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 conduc-

ted 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. The conflict that erupted on 15 April 2023 has further exacerbated the already fragile and combustible situation.

## **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. The fighting in Khartoum between the Sudanese Army and the RSF is creating an environment where other armed groups can join the fighting or create their own platform to fight.

## **3) The conflict between the Sudanese Army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF)**

The conflict between the Sudanese Army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) that erupted in April 2023 has not only plunged the country into turmoil but also underscores the immense challenge of fostering a national consensus for a transition to democracy. It highlights the complexities and near-impossibility of achieving such unity. Former rebel groups, once in opposition to the Sudanese government, now align themselves with the army against the RSF. Despite the conflict's recent outbreak, it reveals a consistent trend, emphasizing the deep divisions within the ruling elite. These divisions persist despite widespread expectations from the Sudanese people and the international community for transformative changes following Omar al-Bashir's ousting.

## **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>
- Recent history: agreements - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-48511226>
- Recent history: peace deal in Juba - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sudan-darfur-idUSKBN25R14Y>
- Recent history: coup - <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/sudan-coup-2021-military-civilian-leaders-detained/>
- Recent history: General Abdel-Fattah al-Burhan - <https://apnews.com/article/sudan-who-is-abdel-fattah-burhan-3f2d4d660fab1b526f09f04808af7c8>
- 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>
- Recent history: sanctions - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/21/update-3-u-s-places-sanctions-on-sudans-central-reserve-police-over-protest-crackdown>
- Recent history: third anniversary - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/11/sudanese-protesters-mark-third-anniversary-of-bashirs-removal>
- Recent history: established in 2019 - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/29/sudan-approves-new-law-dismantling-omar-al-bashirs-regime>
- Recent history: released - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/28/sudan-hundreds-protesters-detained-mistreated>
- Recent history: lifted the state of emergency - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/29/sudan-lifts-state-of-emergency-imposed-since-last-years-coup>
- Recent history: seven protesters were shot dead - <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/internet-cut-sudans-capital-ahead-pro-democracy-protests-2022-06-30/>
- Recent history: ruse - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/7/6/sudan-protesters-skeptical-military-will-step-aside>
- Recent history: reported - <https://www.cnn.com/2023/04/20/africa/wagner-sudan-russia-libya-intl/index.html>
- Political and legal landscape: first trial - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/29/first-icc-trial-darfur-crimes-ali-mohammed-ali-known-ali-kosheib-or-kushayb>
- Political and legal landscape: On 15 April 2023 - <https://towardfreedom.org/story/archives/africa-archives/as-sudans-army-and-rapid-support-forces-battle-sudanese-left-calls-for-restoring-the-revolution/>
- Political and legal landscape: UNHRC, 18 April 2016 - <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/G1607916.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: revealing government secrets - <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2022/4/18/sudan-investigates-social-worker-fo-leaking-state-secrets-to-un>

- Political and legal landscape: CMI Sudan brief 2020 - <https://www.cmi.no/publications/7267-patriarchy-politics-and-womens-activism-in-post-revolution-sudan>
- Political and legal landscape: World Population Review 2021 - <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/countries-with-mandatory-military-service/>
- Religious landscape description: apostasy law - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/16/sudans-law-reforms-positive-first-step>
- Religious landscape description: announced - <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-09-04/sudan-ends-30-years-of-islamic-law-by-separating-religion-state>
- Economic landscape: 2023 Index of Economic Freedom: - <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/sudan>
- Economic landscape: economic situation - <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article64425>
- Economic landscape: major devaluation - <https://mg.co.za/article/2019-05-07-how-sudans-economic-crisis-had-a-role-in-protests-that-toppled-al-bashir/>
- 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>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR - <https://reporting.unhcr.org/sudan-situation-update-17>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR - [https://www.unhcr.org/us/?gclid=CjwKCAjw-7OIBhB8EiwAnoOEK0UwvVKvpjfl5QexQsKsg4Tv8JZWloYhp82sdeiabsv53NME-5nuShoCvw4QAvD\\_BwE](https://www.unhcr.org/us/?gclid=CjwKCAjw-7OIBhB8EiwAnoOEK0UwvVKvpjfl5QexQsKsg4Tv8JZWloYhp82sdeiabsv53NME-5nuShoCvw4QAvD_BwE)
- Technological landscape: BuddeComm research - <https://www.budde.com.au/Research/Sudan-Telecoms-Mobile-and-Broadband-Statistics-and-Analyses>
- Technological landscape: Space Watch - <https://spacewatch.global/2019/11/sudans-first-satellite-srss-1-launched-by-china/>
- Security situation: Darfur's Jebel Marra - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/02/sudan-au-un-peacekeepers-must-be-given-access-to-protect-civilians-in-jebel-marra/>
- Security situation: close the joint mission - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/06/sudan-fresh-evidence-of-government-sponsored-crimes-in-darfur-shows-drawdown-of-peacekeepers-premature-and-reckless/>
- Security situation: war was far from over - <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2021/4/21/inside-darfurs-rebel-held-mountains>
- Security situation: withdrew the last of its personnel - <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/sudan/>
- Security situation: deadly attack - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/01/22/deadly-darfur-attack-just-days-after-last-peacekeepers-leave>
- Security situation: 168 people - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/24/more-than-100-killed-in-violence-in-sudans-darfur-aid-group>
- Security situation: retake by force - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/containing-volatile-sudan-ethiopia-border-dispute>
- Security situation: analysts - <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/egypt-sudan-military-invasion/>
- Security situation: Sudanese - <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/05/25/africa/sudanese-cross-into-chad-intl/index.html>
- Trends analysis: death - <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/internet-cut-sudans-capital-ahead-pro-democracy-protests-2022-06-30/>
- Trends analysis: arrest - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/28/sudan-hundreds-protesters-detained-mistreated>
- 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>
- Trends analysis: to refrain - <https://www.voanews.com/a/african-union-urges-restraint-after-ethiopia-sudan-border-clashes-/6638230.html>

## WWL 2024: 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	106,000	5.3
Catholic	1,113,000	55.3
Protestant	836,000	41.5
Independent	21,600	1.1
Unaffiliated	34,600	1.7
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-98,400	-4.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,012,800</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		



Sudan: Church movements	Christians	%
Evangelical movement	438,000	21.8
Renewalist movement	148,000	7.4

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

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

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 2022 Sudan):

- "Christians reside throughout the country, 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, South Kordofan State, and in parts of Blue Nile State."

"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 migrants, 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, Seventh-day Adventist 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 categories of 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/](https://www.ancient.eu/Faras_Cathedral/)

# WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Sudan

## Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

## Position on the World Watch List

Sudan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	87	8
WWL 2023	83	10
WWL 2022	79	13
WWL 2021	79	13
WWL 2020	85	7

Sudan scored 87 points in World Watch List 2024, an increase of four points compared to WWL 2023, due mainly to a rise in levels of violence against Christians. WWL 2023 had also scored a four-point rise. However, in WWL 2021 and 2022, the country's score had dropped to 79 points, falling six points from the 2020 score. This decrease was caused by governmental changes in 2019, coupled with high hopes for democratic reforms. Unfortunately, these hopes were dashed in 2021 when the army conducted a coup, resulting in increased pressure on Christians. The community witnessed rising fear and intimidation, leading to church closures and continued deprivation of Christian rights.

Legal actions against church leaders persisted, indicating a potential return to the Islamic rule of President al-Bashir's era. An unsettling development in August 2022 was the establishment of a community police force akin to al-Bashir's morality police, further impacting Christians in Khartoum. In April 2023, another conflict emerged between the army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), resulting in attacks on Christians and seizures of their places of worship. Attending churches became increasingly challenging and perilous, marking a year of heightened suffering for the Christian community.

## 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 *Janjaweed* militia. These militias are very active in rural areas.

### **Dictatorial paranoia (Very strong)**

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 2023, 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							Very strong	Strong
Ethnic group leaders			Strong	Strong					
Non-Christian religious leaders	Very strong								
Violent religious groups	Very strong								Very strong
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Very strong		Medium	Medium					
One's own (extended) family	Strong		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. Please note that "-" denotes "not at all". 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.
- **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.
- **Government officials (Strong):** State security forces have still been harassing and intimidating Christians.
- **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 converts into renouncing their faith."

- **Organized crime networks (Strong):** The operation of Islamic militants in Sudan is multifaceted, with one key aspect being their involvement in criminal networks. These armed militants operate in conjunction with individuals engaged in organized crime and corruption, using these connections to finance their operations. Christians are often unable to speak out against these groups. In fact, these militants utilize the resources acquired through criminal network activity to persecute Christians.

#### Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Very strong):** 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 include 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

- **Violent religious groups (Very strong):** Various militant groups, such as the Janjaweed, have reemerged in various forms, maintaining their radical Islamic ideology. These groups operate within organized crime and corruption networks. They use these networks to buy weapons, collect information and engage in trafficking people, goods, and other materials. They view Christianity as a threat to their ideology and operations.
- **Organized crime networks (Strong):** Although officially illegal, many groups operating like gangsters towards Christians are state-sanctioned.
- **Government officials (Strong):** 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.

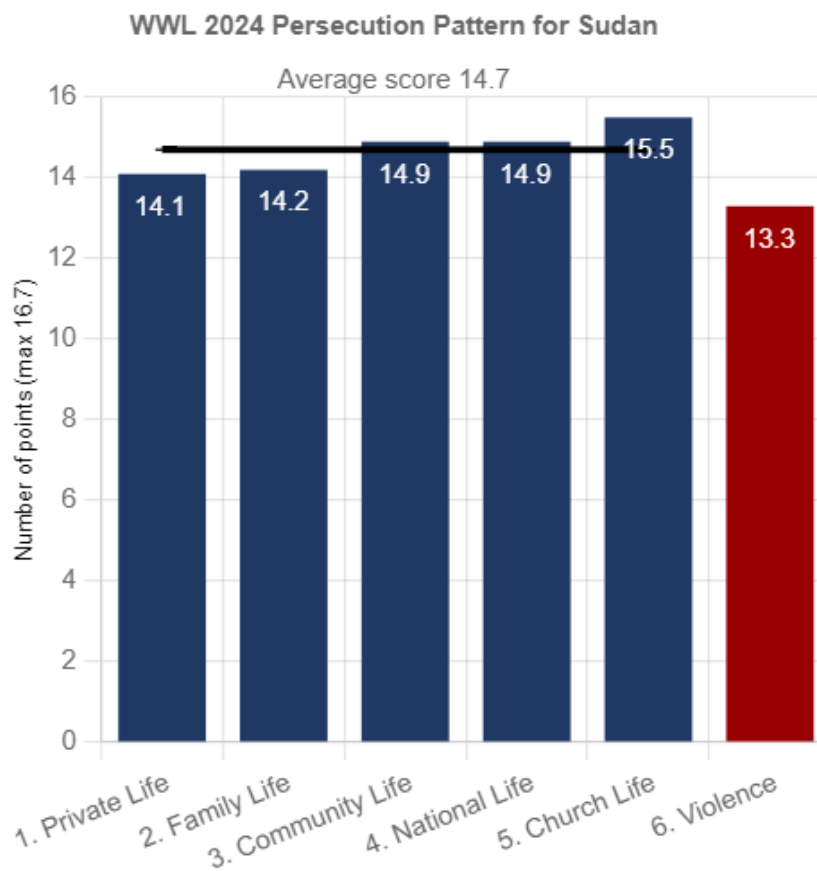
#### Drivers of Clan oppression / Ethno-religious hostility (blended)

- **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) and 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 play a role in persecution.

- **Extended family (Medium) and ordinary citizens (Medium):** Extended family and members of a given community are expected to follow certain norms as defined by the clan/tradition in the society. These norms/traditions 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



The WWL 2024 Persecution Pattern for Sudan shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Sudan is at the extreme level of 14.7, similar to WWL 2023.
- Pressure is strongest in the *Church sphere* (15.5), which reflects the fact that churches in the country face extreme challenges. This is followed by 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 rose to 13.3 points, up from 9.4 points in WWL 2023.



## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

*In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2024 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).*

### Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

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

The stringent restrictions on the private lives of Christians and the environment of fear and intimidation in Sudan hinder discussions about their faith beyond immediate family, posing considerable risks. Expressing beliefs openly, even within extended family or community circles, is heavily constrained. Heightened conflict between the RSF forces, Sudanese army, and the resurgence of extremist groups heightens threats to Sudanese Christians. Consequently, many navigate interactions cautiously, fearing repercussions for openly discussing their beliefs.

**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)**

In Sudan, Christians encounter profound challenges expressing their faith through written forms, particularly on online platforms like blogs and social media. The controlled nature of their private lives imposes severe constraints on religious activities. This limits the freedom to openly articulate Christian beliefs in written expressions, compelling many believers to conceal their faith. Expressing religious convictions in public spaces, particularly in rural areas, poses grave dangers for converts in particular. The ongoing conflict between the RSF forces and the Sudanese army since April 2023 has emboldened extremist factions, exacerbating the peril for Christians. Consequently, sharing one's faith through written mediums entails a high risk of persecution, mirroring the overall hazardous landscape for Christians striving to practice their faith openly.

**Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (3.50 points)**

The circumstances in Sudan severely restrict Christians from openly showcasing Christian symbols or images due to intense limitations they encounter. Controlled private lives force many to conceal their faith, hindering open expressions of identity. Restricted worship within homes, especially for Christian converts, mirrors broader constraints on practicing faith openly. Exhibiting Christian symbols in public, notably outside urban areas, poses grave risks and potential persecution. Escalating conflict between the RSF forces and Sudanese army since April 2023 heightens threats to Christians, exacerbated by extremist targeting. These conditions render Sudan a hazardous environment for visible expressions of faith.

**Block 1.6: It has been risky for Christians to access Christian radio or TV, or Christian material on the Internet. (3.50 points)**

In Sudan, Christians are hampered by severe restrictions on their private lives and converts in particular encounter substantial risks accessing Christian media like radio, TV, or online content.

## Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

**Block 2.6: Christian couples have been hindered in adopting children or serving as foster parents because of their faith. (4.00 points)**

The persecution of Christian couples aiming to adopt or foster children stem from pervasive constraints on family life, especially affecting non-traditional Christians without official recognition. Within the country's controlled environment, marked by authoritarian governance, clan pressures, Islamic influences and organized crime, Christian families face intricate challenges when they want to adopt or foster a child. Restrictions on adoption or fostering among Christians mirror the larger struggles they encounter in integrating their faith in a hostile environment which does not allow their full societal participation.

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

Christian weddings, especially for unregistered non-traditional Christians, face hurdles. State and majority religious beliefs often impede the recognition and celebration of these weddings, hindering couples from formalizing their union according to their faith. This poses a significant challenge, highlighting issues of religious freedom and the right to practice faith without restrictions.

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

In the context of the Sudanese environment of fear and intimidation on family life, Christian parents, particularly non-traditional ones lacking official recognition, grapple with a complex array of challenges. Dictatorial control, clan pressures, Islamic influence, and organized crime create a challenging landscape for parents seeking to raise their children in adherence to Christian beliefs. Negotiating this terrain, Christian parents strike a delicate balance between upholding their religious values and safeguarding their children's well-being in a society that does not make Christians welcome.

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

In a societal framework where non-traditional Christian family dynamics lack acknowledgment and face constraints, Christian children encounter challenges within the educational sphere. Dictatorial control, clan influences, Islamic pressures, and organized crime create a restrictive atmosphere that may compel these young individuals at schools and colleges to conform to teachings contrary to their Christian beliefs.

## 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)**

Christians find themselves entangled in a complex network of bias and challenges that infiltrate their daily lives. The specter of persecution looms over them, materializing in the form of harassment, threats, and barriers motivated by faith-related reasons. These adversities are exacerbated when individuals resist conforming to the practices of the majority religion, traditional attire expectations, or other identity markers like beard regulations. Within the communal sphere, meant to foster unity and shared resources, Christians, especially converts, navigate a landscape fraught with exclusion. Their Christian identity singles them out as outsiders, depriving them of fair access to communal resources, participation in public discussions, and even the right to engage in essential communal dialogues. These divisions, driven by religious differences, fracture the unity that should bind communities together, intensifying the isolation experienced by Christians and perpetuating a cycle of discrimination that hinders their active participation and well-being in society.

**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)**

Christians navigate a landscape where constant surveillance by local communities or private entities shapes their daily lives. This monitoring, encompassing activities such as reporting to authorities, surveillance, and scrutinizing communication channels like phone calls and emails, permeates their existence. This level of scrutiny extends into communal spaces, where Christians, especially converts, encounter exclusion, limiting their access to resources and stifling their participation in public discussions. Such monitoring deepens the rift between Christians and their communities, fostering an environment of isolation and perpetuating a cycle of discrimination, hindering their societal integration and overall well-being.

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

In a society where conformity to the dominant faith often dictates acceptance, Christians, particularly convert women, become vulnerable to targeted abduction, a distressing tactic aimed at suppressing their beliefs and erasing their identity. Forced into marriages with a Muslim against their will, many Christian women endure lives devoid of freedom and self-determination, illustrating the wider persecution they endure. This systematic practice, driven by Islamic intolerance, seeks to eradicate their Christian identity and assimilate them into a cultural and religious framework that contradicts their deeply held convictions.

**Block 3.6: Christians have been hindered in participating in communal institutions, forums, etc., for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points)**

Christians in Sudan face significant obstacles in engaging with communal institutions and forums due to their faith, especially for those who have converted. This targeted exclusion signifies the oppressive environment Christians encounter, where their religious beliefs create barriers to acceptance within the surrounding Islamic community. In Sudan's landscape of systematic discrimination, suspected or known Christians, notably converts, encounter resistance and isolation as they find themselves denied access to basic communal resources and privileges enjoyed by others without impediments. This discrimination extends to public forums and discussions, where Christians are often barred from expressing their views and contributing to decision-making processes. Such exclusion not only violates their rights as citizens but also intensifies their marginalization from wider society.

## 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)**

The constitutional and legal frameworks in place present notable constraints on religious freedoms, diverging from the principles outlined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The cultural, national, and legal systems seem systematically designed to establish an Islamic state, inhibiting the free practice and expression of faith for non-adherents to the predominant religion. These trends permeate various societal aspects, including holiday observances, educational curricula, and overarching policy decisions, reinforcing Islam's exclusive prevalence as the dominant religious entity.

**Block 4.4: Christians have been hindered in travelling for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points)**

In a nation deeply entrenched in Islam as its predominant cultural and legal foundation, Christians encounter significant hindrances when traveling for faith-related purposes. The overarching commitment to maintaining an Islamic state influences official policies and cultural norms, impacting Christians' ability to travel for religious activities. This includes limitations or challenges in attending religious gatherings, engaging in interfaith events, or pursuing educational opportunities beyond the established Islamic framework.

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

In a context where the primary objective is to maintain an Islamic state and cultivate an environment supportive of Islam, Christians often face discrimination when engaging with authorities for faith-related reasons. The deeply rooted Islamic culture, reinforced by national laws and societal practices, can result in systematic biases against Christians, influencing their interactions with various branches of authority, including local administration, government entities, and the armed forces. There is fear and intimidation: This environment has led to obstacles and biases hindering Christians' access to equal treatment, rights, and opportunities.

Addressing this issue necessitates a fundamental shift in how religious diversity is perceived and its impact on governance.

**Block 4.11: Christians have been subjected to smear campaigns or hate speech. (3.75 points)**

In Sudan's environment, which is fully oriented toward promoting Islam, Christians often find themselves targeted by smear campaigns and subjected to hate speech. The concerted efforts to uphold the nation as Islamic have led to discrimination and marginalization against religious minorities, including Christians. These campaigns and hateful rhetoric, often fueled by misconceptions and stereotypes about Christian beliefs and practices, create an environment of hostility.

## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

Church activities in Sudan face consistent monitoring, disruption and obstruction, reflecting a broader trend of religious discrimination and persecution. Churches experience deliberate interference, including destruction of physical spaces and confiscation of properties, disrupting the religious life and community ties of Christians. Government intervention extends to fracturing church leadership, undermining institutional cohesion and functionality. Even registered churches encounter persecution and operational hurdles, reflecting systemic impediments to religious gatherings and worship. The ongoing conflict between the Sudanese army and RSF forces exacerbates challenges for religious minorities.

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

The process of obtaining legal status or registration for churches in Sudan proves to be an uphill battle, emblematic of the pervasive religious discrimination and hostility towards non-Islamic faiths. Numerous Christian communities encounter daunting obstacles, including property destruction, confiscation, and intentional disruptions in church leadership, all undermining their effective functioning. The struggle for church registration remains a focal point amid these challenges.

**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)**

In Sudan, Christian communities encounter immense challenges in constructing or refurbishing church structures and reclaiming historic places of worship that were previously confiscated. The process is often impeded by bureaucratic obstacles and discriminatory practices, reflecting the broader difficulties Christians face in the country. Many churches endure destruction and confiscation, severely restricting their freedom to gather for worship and practice their faith openly. Government interference compounds these challenges by deliberately fostering division among church leaders, weakening the cohesion of Christian communities. Amid these hardships, the ongoing conflict between the Sudanese army and RSF forces adds another layer of complex-

ity, potentially worsening Christian communities' struggles to construct, renovate, or reclaim their sacred sites.

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

In Sudan, Christian churches encounter significant hindrances when organizing Christian activities beyond their church premises. The environment for freely practicing their faith faces numerous challenges, such as property destruction, confiscation, and intentional disruptions orchestrated within church leadership by government entities. Even with official registration, churches face persecution and limitations, showcasing the deeply rooted complexities Christians encounter in expressing their faith. The ongoing conflict between the Sudanese army and RSF forces adds further complications, potentially heightening obstacles for churches organizing activities outside their buildings.

## **Violence**

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

### **1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced.**

*Possible reasons for this may be:*

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

### **2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons**

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

### 3. The use of symbolic numbers

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

Sudan: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	5	0 *
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?	100 *	10 *
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	10 *	4
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	1
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	10 *	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 *	10 *
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	100 *	100 *
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	10 *	0

In the WWL 2024 reporting period:

- **Christians killed:** At least five.
- **Christians arrested:** At least ten were detained.

- **Churches attacked:** At least 100 churches were either attacked, damaged or closed.
- **Christian homes/shops attacked:** At least 20 Christian shops/homes were attacked in Sudan.

## 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

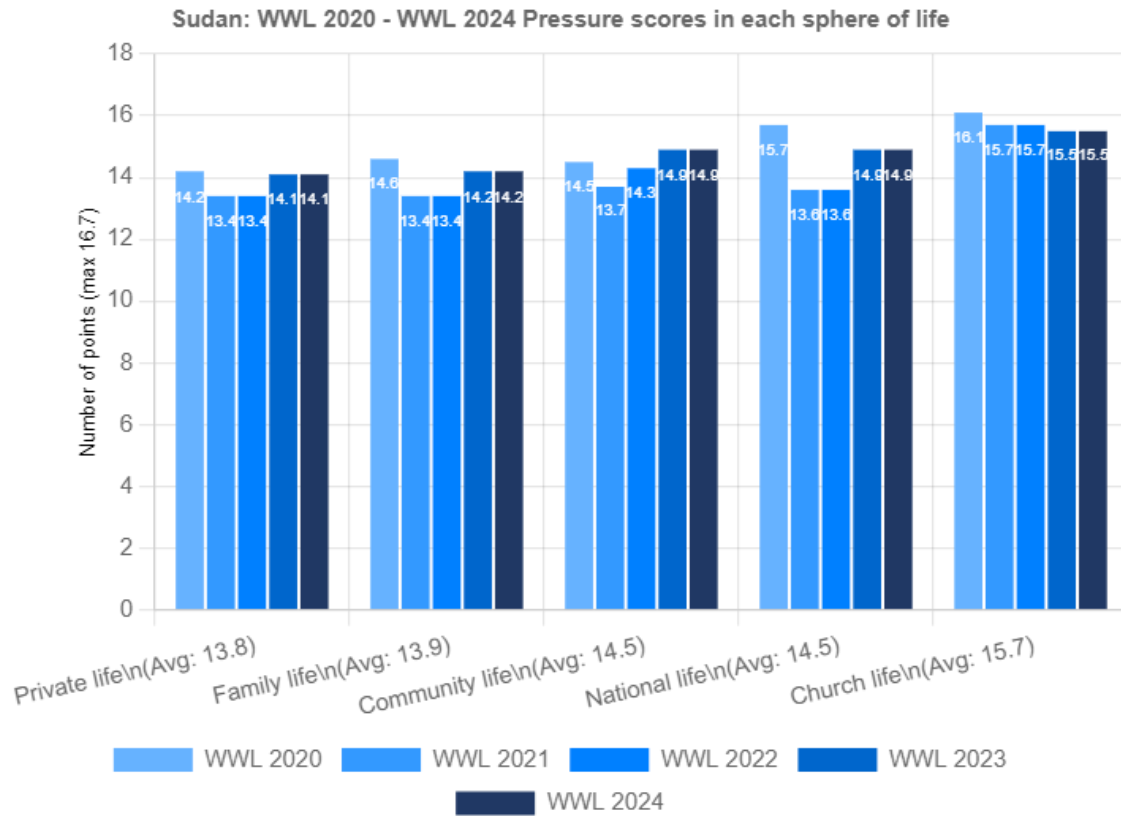
Sudan: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024	14.7
2023	14.7
2022	14.1
2021	14.0
2020	15.0

The trend since WWL 2021 indicates a consistent rise in persecution against Christians, almost back to the levels of WWL 2020. An initial decline in WWL 2021 and WWL 2022 coincided with the ousting of President al-Bashir, suggesting a potentially positive change. However, the trajectory changed dramatically in October 2021 when the army effectively sidelined the civilian part of the transitional government through a silent coup. The conflict that erupted in April 2023 further exacerbated the vulnerability of Christians, contributing to heightened violence and sustained pressure on the Christian community.

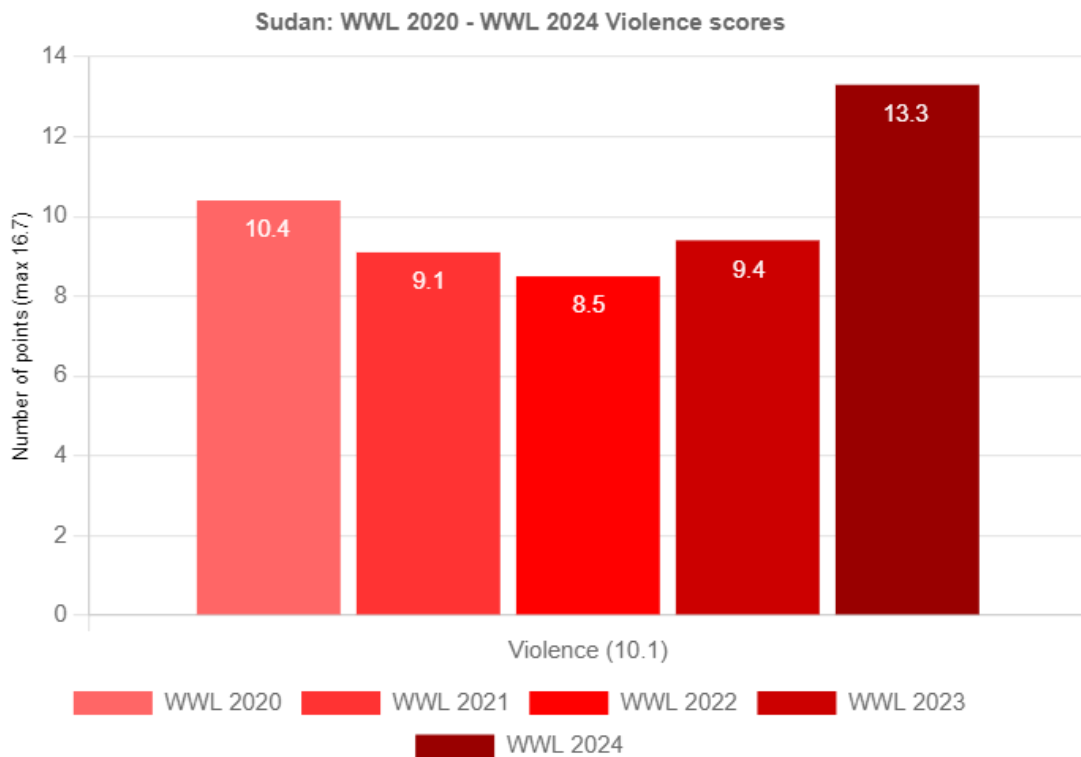
### 5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

The chart below depicting pressure on Christians across *Church*, *National*, and *Community spheres* over the past five reporting periods highlights consistent and extreme levels of persecution endured by Christians. Specifically, the *Church sphere* recorded the highest average five-year pressure at 15.7 points, indicating targeted challenges in religious practices and activities. Equally noteworthy are the significant scores in the *National* and *Community spheres*, each reaching 14.5 points on average, signifying extremely hostile governmental and societal influences. These findings strongly suggest concerted efforts, particularly by governmental bodies, to restrict religious expressions, control community engagement, and influence national dynamics, showcasing a sustained pattern of pressure targeting Christians in diverse facets of their lives.





### 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The chart above shows the progression of violence scores across the last five reporting periods, averaging 10.1 points. Starting from a very high level in WWL 2020, the scores consistently decreased annually, notably dropping to 8.5 points in WWL 2022. However, this decreasing trend reversed in WWL 2023, with an uptick to 9.4 points, and notably surged to 13.3 points in WWL 2024, marking a nearly four-point escalation.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced marriage; Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Trafficking; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Women have encountered rapid change in Sudan in the past few years. Under the transitional government 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) with more than 1,300 communities publicly declaring the end of the practice in 2023 ([Agenzia Fides](#), 12 April 2023). 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.

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 kids. A country expert explains: “Muslim husbands forbid talking about Christianity to children, and if that is done, they divorce the wife.” In early 2023, a young mother was chained in her home, subjected to electrical shocks at a psychiatric hospital and has lost her children because of the conversion to Christianity from Islam. After becoming a Christian, her husband tried to force her to renounce her faith by chaining her legs. Asserting that she was mad, he had then forcibly taken her to a psychiatric hospital. A local source states that “she continued to live in mental anguish”, adding that her parents and siblings who are all Muslim believe she is mentally ill for believing in Christ ([Morning Star News](#), 19 March 2023).

Christian women and girls, particularly converts, are vulnerable to rape, forced marriage and domestic violence. Women have become targets of rape as a weapon of war, with multiple reports being issued of civilians being raped by armed men in the Sudanese capital of Khartoum where fighting broke out in April 2023 ([DW](#), 24 May 2023). Two of the women raped stated that they were assaulted by member of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Since Sudan's conflict erupted in April between the Sudanese army and the RSF, more than 4,000 people have been killed and 4.5 million forced from their homes ([The Guardian](#), 29 August 2023).

The horrors of the conflict have been compounded by a wave of sexual violence say survivors, medics and activists ([VOA](#), 7 June 2023). Both Sudan's army chief, General Abdel-Fattah Buhari, and the RSF have accused their enemies of such attacks (ibid.). A country expert states: "There is not a single woman in Khartoum now who feels safe, not even in her home". Fear of reprisal prevents survivors from speaking out and accessing vital health and social care. Whilst the number of reported cases sits at 124, the true number is almost certainly running into the thousands ([The Guardian](#), 29 August 2023). "It is brutal, and it is all about humiliation and degrading human dignity" says an expert, "sometimes it is part of their strategy. To make people evacuate their houses, they threaten sexual violence against the women".

The situation is further complicated 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 them from coming forward. Additionally, it has been reported that policemen themselves have raped Christian girls, which feeds into a landscape of impunity for perpetrators. Further exacerbating the violence, just 16% of hospitals in Khartoum are functioning at full capacity, with health officials reporting that some centers are occupied by RSF forces, which control almost 90% of the capital ([The Guardian](#), 16 May 2023). Victims of physical and sexual violence, as well as women experiencing maternal and reproductive health issues, are thus unable to receive the help they need.

On a broader level, Islamic extremists have reportedly kidnapped Sudanese girls for marriage and/or sexual slavery. Some sources have reported seeing women and girls in chains on pick-up trucks and in cars ([UN](#), 3 November 2023): They are cases of women being kidnapped by the RSF for ransom. They are often raped whilst they are held hostage. Many have been taken to Chad or kept as sex slaves ([The Guardian](#), 29 August 2023). Women and girls in Sudan are subject to, and at risk of, horrific gender-based violence, with Christian women and girls facing increased persecution, stigma and risk.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied access to social community/networks; Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

The latest figures tracking the humanitarian situation in Sudan paint a bleak picture. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) laments that “Sudan is experiencing a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions” and that civilians are paying the price of the ongoing fighting. Millions of people – especially in Khartoum, Darfur, and Kordofan – lack access to food, water, shelter, electricity, education, health care and nutrition. Hunger and malnutrition were already at record levels before the fighting, now, an estimated 20.3 million people – 42% of the population – face acute food insecurity ([Dabanga Sudan](#), 2 November 2023). Indeed, half of Sudan’s population now require humanitarian assistance and protection. UN officials warn that conflict, displacement, and disease outbreaks threaten “to consume the entire country” ([UN News](#), 5 October 2023). Amidst ongoing fighting and a worsening humanitarian crisis, Christians face increased persecution, the effects of which are compounded by the national situation of conflict and insecurity.

The government of Sudan targets male Christians with a variety of serious false charges, including “terrorism”. Church leaders, who are predominately male, are the most frequent targets and government security forces monitor their activities daily. A country expert summarizes: “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.”

Men and boys in Sudan, particularly converts, are vulnerable to various forms of persecution, including difficulties in accessing employment opportunities and facing challenges in securing jobs. Additionally, they are prone to more severe forms of persecution such as killing, arrest, abduction, imprisonment, assault, and harassment. Christian converts, in particular, face the risk of beatings, imprisonment and even death. The persecution may lead to social isolation, with converts being expelled from their homes and shunned by their families. The absence of men, who are often the breadwinners and security providers for their families, can result in significant financial troubles and increased vulnerability. 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.

Preceding, but especially during the recent unrest, 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 shared: “The abduction of men/boys is designed to make the whole family susceptible to economic crises ... forcing the family to flee the area.” Threats of abduction, sexual violence and killings are seen as strategic weapons used by the RSF to force families to evacuate their homes and flee. The situation in Sudan is one of violence, humiliation and fear.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

Any religious group apart from Sunni Islam faces tremendous challenges to exercise their faith.

According to the US State Department [IRFR 2021 Sudan](#) (please note: In IRFR 2022, there were no similar reports):

- "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 have also faced sporadic harassment.

## Future outlook

In general:

- Society looks set to remain dominated by conservative Islam.
- The demolition of churches might cease.
- 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.
- The ongoing conflict (as of 15 April 2023) could open a door for jihadists such as the Islamic State group to infiltrate Sudan.

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 was strong feeling among the conservative Muslim community to derail any at-

tempt of reforming Sudan to make it a secular state. In a nutshell, the conflict that erupted in April 2023 has exacerbated the situation, providing opportunities and conveniences for certain Islamist factions to emerge from their dormant state. This trend is likely to persist for the foreseeable future.

### **Dictatorial paranoia**

Known for its poor record in human rights, the government of Sudan has continued violating the rights of Christians in the country. Until December 2019, it had been on the US State Department's list of "Countries of Particular Concern (CPC)" since 1999. 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 and church-run 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. At first there was a definite desire to reform the country and 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 such hopes. In fact, the military leaders established a community police in August 2022, which resembles al-Bashir's Morality Police. The current armed conflict between the president and his deputy (RSF leader) since April 2023 can only be resolved by negotiation. A peace deal bringing stability to the country would benefit the Christian community as well.

### **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 armed 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. The conflict that began in April 2023 has bolstered the strength of organized crime and corruption, offering a platform for both warring factions to utilize various illegal methods to gain advantage. Moreover, the engagement of those in power in this conflict creates an environment conducive to exploitation by criminal cartels, allowing them to capitalize on the situation due to the power vacuum and instability.

### **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](https://www.icc-cpi.int/CourtRecords/CR2009_01514.PDF)
- 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: Agenzia Fides - [https://fides.org/en/news/73640-AFRICA\\_SUDAN\\_Female\\_genital\\_mutilation\\_More\\_than\\_a\\_thousand\\_Sudanese\\_communities\\_abandon\\_the\\_cruel\\_practice](https://fides.org/en/news/73640-AFRICA_SUDAN_Female_genital_mutilation_More_than_a_thousand_Sudanese_communities_abandon_the_cruel_practice)
- 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 Female description: Morning Star News - <https://morningstarnews.org/2023/03/christian-mother-in-sudan-chained-called-mad-for-her-faith/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: DW - <https://www.dw.com/en/sudan-un-condemns-sexual-violence-amid-weeklong-cease-fire/a-65723621>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: The Guardian - <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/aug/29/women-in-sudan-facing-a-tragedy-of-sexual-violence-as-cases-rise>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: (VOA, 7 June 2023). - <https://www.voanews.com/a/no-woman-feels-safe-sexual-violence-rampant-in-sudan-war-/7127981.html>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: (The Guardian, 29 August 2023) - <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/aug/29/women-in-sudan-facing-a-tragedy-of-sexual-violence-as-cases-rise>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: The Guardian - <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/may/16/sudan-reports-of-women-being-raped-in-khartoum-by-armed-men>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: (UN, 3 November 2023) - <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/11/1143177>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: (The Guardian, 29 August 2023) - <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/aug/29/women-in-sudan-facing-a-tragedy-of-sexual-violence-as-cases-rise>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: Dabanga Sudan - <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/ocha-sudan-experiencing-humanitarian-crisis-of-epic-proportions>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: UN News - <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/10/1141907>

- Persecution of other religious minorities: IRFR 2021 Sudan - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/sudan/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Islamic cleric - <https://www.jns.org/sudanese-cleric-the-jews-epitomize-trickery-employ-trickery-against-allah/>

## Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

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

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