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## Djibouti: Full Country Dossier

March 2024



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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# Introduction

## World Watch List 2024

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

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

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## Sources and definitions

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

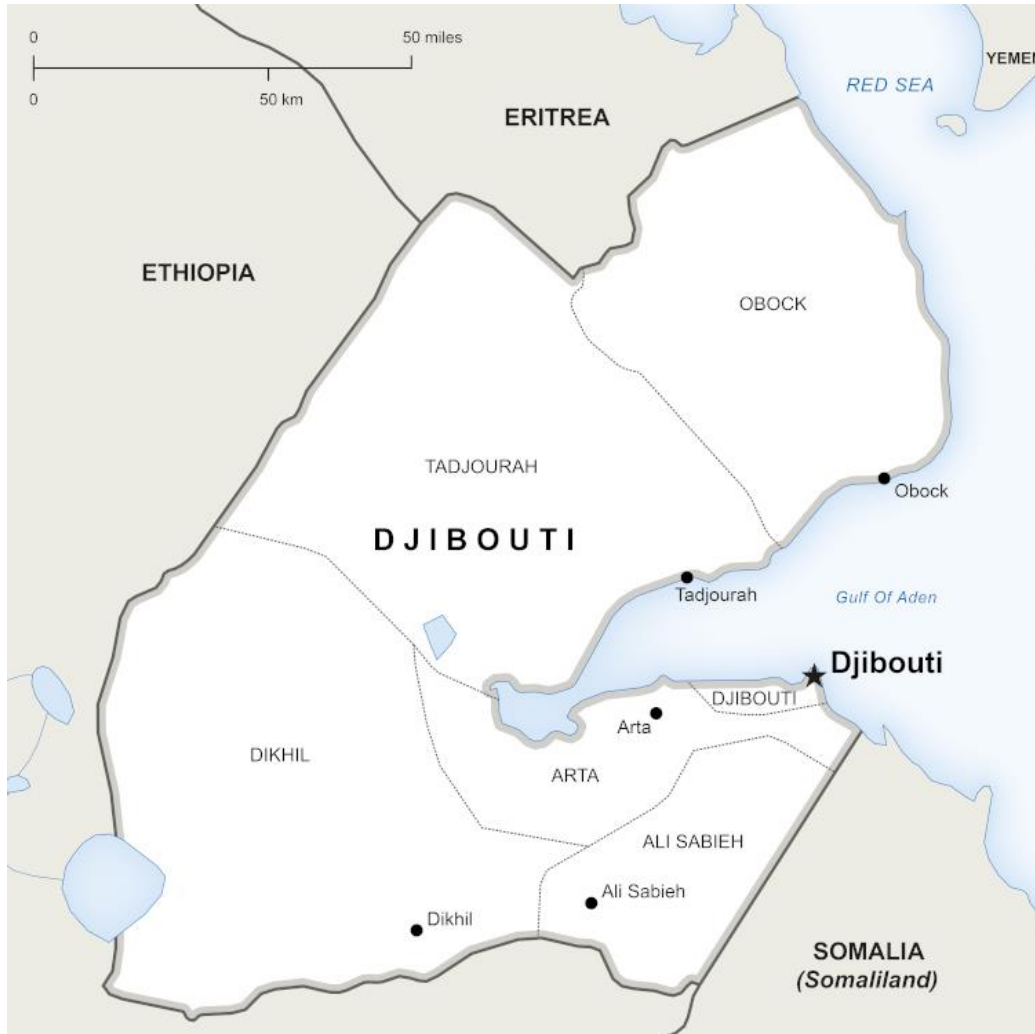
# WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Djibouti

## Brief country details

Djibouti: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
1,030,000	10,900	1.1

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

## Map of country



Djibouti: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	61	55
WWL 2023	60	56
WWL 2022	59	58
WWL 2021	56	59
WWL 2020	56	56

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Djibouti:	
Main persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Non-Christian religious leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family
Clan oppression	Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials, Political parties

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

### Brief description of the persecution situation

Persecution in Djibouti encompasses both structural (e.g., laws) and practical aspects. All laws and policies in the country are shaped by Sharia law. Christians with a Muslim background face great difficulties both from the local community and from their own family members. Hiding one's faith is one means of protection but the communal lifestyle makes this very difficult. If someone converts to Christianity or there are rumors of a possible conversion, that person will lose all inheritance rights. The local authorities do not protect Christians if they are attacked.

### Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- **Religious conversion restrictions:** Norms and customs in Djibouti prohibit conversion from Islam, making it difficult for individuals to change their faith openly. Known converts are specifically targeted by clan leaders and ostracized from their communities.
- **Lack of legal recognition for churches:** The Ethiopian Protestant Church operates without official registration, casting a cloud of fear over its congregation due to this lack of formal recognition.
- **Limitations on religious materials:** Only a very limited number of Christians are authorized to sell or distribute Christian materials, further limiting the community's ability to practice their faith openly.
- **Discrimination in government employment:** There are no Christians in high-level government positions, raising questions about discrimination in government employment, promotion, or hiring processes.
- **Workplace harassment:** Christians, especially known converts, face harassment at workplaces, adding another layer of difficulty in their day-to-day life.
- **Violence against female converts:** Female converts to Christianity are especially vulnerable, facing potential sexual attacks and forced marriages.
- **Legal constraints on proselytizing:** According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Djibouti), it is illegal for any faith group to proselytize in public, which limits the spread of Christianity in the country.

## Specific examples of positive developments

Even though not registered, Ethiopian Protestants are still operating.

# WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Djibouti

## Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/23 covering 156 countries, Djibouti not included	AI 2022/23 report	<a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/">https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/</a>	
BBC News Djibouti profile - updated 18 April 2023	BBC Djibouti profile	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13231761">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13231761</a>	20 March 2024
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI Djibouti Report 2022	<a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/DJI">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/DJI</a>	14 July 2023
CIA World Factbook Djibouti - updated 5 March 2024	World Factbook Djibouti	<a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/djibouti/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/djibouti/</a>	20 March 2024
Crisis24 Djibouti report (Garda World)	Crisis24 Djibouti report	<a href="https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/djibouti">https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/djibouti</a>	14 July 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Djibouti summary 2023	EIU Djibouti summary	<a href="https://country.eiu.com/djibouti">https://country.eiu.com/djibouti</a>	14 July 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2023 Djibouti	<a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>	14 July 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Djibouti not included	Democracy Index 2023	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores</a>	14 July 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2023 Djibouti	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/djibouti/freedom-world/2023">https://freedomhouse.org/country/djibouti/freedom-world/2023</a>	14 July 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report – covering 70 countries, Djibouti not included	Freedom on the Net 2023	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores</a>	
Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 – covering 170 countries	GIWPS 2021 Djibouti profile	<a href="https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/djibouti/">https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/djibouti/</a>	14 July 2023
Girls Not Brides Djibouti report	Girls Not Brides Djibouti	<a href="https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/djibouti/">https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/djibouti/</a>	14 July 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2024 (country chapter) – covering 100+ countries, Djibouti not included	HRW 2024 country chapter	<a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024</a>	
Internet World Stats available in 2023	IWS 2023 Djibouti	<a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#dj">https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#dj</a>	14 July 2023
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2023 Djibouti	<a href="https://rsf.org/en/djibouti">https://rsf.org/en/djibouti</a>	14 July 2023
Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2022 Djibouti	<a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/dji">https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/dji</a>	14 July 2023
UNDP: Human Development Report Djibouti - data updates as of 13 March 2024	UNDP HDR Djibouti	<a href="https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/DJI">https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/DJI</a>	20 March 2024
US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report Djibouti	IRFR 2022 Djibouti	<a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/djibouti/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/djibouti/</a>	14 July 2023
USCIRF 2023 covering 17 CPC / 11 SWL, Djibouti not included	USCIRF 2023	<a href="https://www.uscirf.gov/countries">https://www.uscirf.gov/countries</a>	
World Bank Djibouti data – 2021	World Bank Djibouti data	<a href="https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=DJI">https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=DJI</a>	14 July 2023
World Bank Djibouti overview – updated 18 December 2023	World Bank Djibouti overview	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/djibouti/overview">https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/djibouti/overview</a>	20 March 2024
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook Djibouti - April 2023	Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Djibouti	<a href="https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/65cf93926fdb3ea23b72f277fc249a72-0500042021/related/mpo-dji.pdf">https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/65cf93926fdb3ea23b72f277fc249a72-0500042021/related/mpo-dji.pdf</a>	14 July 2023

## Recent history

Djibouti became independent from France in 1977. After years of civil war (1991-2000), the first free multi-party elections took place in 2003. However, the ruling party has effectively gained control of all levels of power and the country no longer has an electoral democracy. President Guelleh, who first came to power in 1999, was re-elected for a [fifth term in April 2021](#), winning over 98% of the votes (Al-Jazeera, 10 April 2021). The main opposition group boycotted the election.

Djibouti is a country of contrasts. On the one hand, it has made considerable progress in developing its port, economy and banking sector, making it attractive for foreign business and military investment. On the other hand, it is likely that Djibouti will continue to face challenges such as serious unemployment, a severe lack of skilled workers, chronic drought and food insecurity, high electricity costs and underdeveloped government institutions. This mix of factors is already leading to poverty and political tension; a need is felt for more inclusive governmental policies, a more equal distribution of revenues across the population, an improved energy infrastructure and a significant decrease of corruption within the ruling elite. In Djibouti, these issues, as seen across many parts of Africa, are compounded by the country having a large youth population, which is particularly affected by the high unemployment. It is



expected that the trends described above will lead to a continuation of repressive actions keeping Djibouti society in line with elite interests.

In the geopolitically charged region of the Horn of Africa, Djibouti stands as a unique confluence of global military interests, hosting five foreign military bases from world powers like the USA, France and China, as well as other nations like Japan and Italy. The country's strategic importance is magnified by its proximity to key shipping routes and volatile regions, making it a coveted location for military outposts. The establishment of a Chinese military base in 2017 marked a watershed moment, intensifying the arena of global superpower rivalry right in Djibouti. This has turned the small nation into a crucible where competing geopolitical ambitions are constantly jockeying for influence and operational advantage, thereby increasing its own strategic value but also its vulnerability to the shifting dynamics of international relations.

### **Politics and the February 2023 election**

In its Global Freedom Index report 2023 report, Freedom House noted that: "Djibouti is a republic ruled by a powerful president, Ismail Omar Guelleh, who has been in office since 1999 and is not subject to term limits. While Djibouti technically has a multiparty political system, the ruling Union for a Presidential Majority (UMP) uses authoritarian means to maintain its dominant position. The opposition's ability to operate is severely constrained, and journalists and activists who air criticism of Guelleh or the UMP are regularly harassed or arrested."

As reported by [International IDEA](#) (accessed 21 March 2024):

- "On 24 February, Djibouti held a parliamentary election, and in a result that was widely anticipated President Ismail Omar Guelleh's ruling coalition, the Union for the Presidential Majority (UMP), received 94 per cent of the vote. This vote share translated into 58 of the National Assembly's 65 seats (up from 57 in 2018), with the remaining 7 seats won by the Djibouti Union for Democracy and Justice, the only opposition party to contest the elections. The result maintains Guelleh's control over the National Assembly, which has been dominated by the party he leads, the People's Rally for Progress (latterly through the UMP) since independence in 1977. Djibouti's main opposition parties boycotted the election, calling it 'a sham.' However, international observers from the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) characterized the poll as free and fair. Notwithstanding reports of low voter turnout from the local media and election observers, the government reported it to be 75.9 per cent (up from 61.8 per cent in 2018)."

### **Political and legal landscape**

According to Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index (EIU 2022 Djibouti, p.55):

- Djibouti is labeled an "authoritarian regime" and ranks #137 out of 167 countries examined, improved by two ranks from the previous year.

According to Freedom House (Global Freedom Index 2023 Djibouti):

- Djibouti is categorized as 'not free' with a score of 19/100.

- The electoral process is heavily biased, with the government holding a monopoly over it. The opposition has limited opportunities to compete effectively.
- Political pluralism is hindered by a restrictive registration process for opposition parties and the arrest and harassment of their members.
- Open discussion of sensitive political issues is restricted by defamation laws, and the government reportedly monitors social media and conducts surveillance.
- Freedom of assembly is protected constitutionally but not respected in practice. Unauthorized protests are violently dispersed and participants arrested.
- The media environment is tightly controlled. Journalists self-censor, defamation and false information are criminal offenses, and licenses for media outlets are hard to obtain for independent voices.
- Public proselytizing is illegal.

### Gender perspective

Djibouti’s political and legal landscape is additionally restrictive towards women and girls, in part as Sharia law forms the basis for family and personal status laws. Women are only allowed to marry a non-Muslim man if he converts to Islam (Family Code, Article 23), and whereas a husband has the right to divorce his wife unilaterally, she can only seek one under specific circumstances (Article 39.2). Djibouti lacks a comprehensive law that addresses violence against women, and whilst the 1995 Penal code criminalized acts of violence, it does not have a separate law that specifically addresses domestic violence ([UNFPA, Djibouti: Gender Justice and the Law, 2018](#)).

On a positive note, Djibouti has low rates of child marriage compared to other countries in the region (Girls Not Brides Djibouti) and saw a 15% increase in female representation in parliament in the February 2018 election, after a 25% quota was introduced in advance of the election ([Georgetown, Women, Peace and Security Index 2019/20, p.38](#)).

### Religious landscape

Djibouti: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	10,900	1.1
Muslim	1,004,000	97.5
Hindu	420	0.0
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethno-religionist	0	0.0
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	940	0.1

(Table continued below)

Djibouti: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Atheist	430	0.0
Agnostic	12,800	1.2
Other	0	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)

As outlined by the US State Department IRFR 2022 Djibouti:

- Islam is the state religion but the Constitution provides for religious freedom. Non-Sunni religious minorities - including Christians - have at times been treated unfairly. 94% of the population is Sunni Muslim. The Ministry of Islamic and Cultural Affairs oversees religious matters and has authority over mosques and private Islamic schools. Imams are civil service employees of the ministry.
- [In 2022], "the government launched an Institute of Peace named *Al-Mutasaweqa* (moderate thoughts) to host regional conferences, religious gatherings, and training. The institute aimed to bring together religious leaders of the region to discuss a peaceful interpretation of Islam and interfaith exchanges.
- "The government continued to permit a limited number of Christian missionaries to sell religious books and pamphlets at a bookstore in Djibouti City."

## Economic landscape

Djibouti is one of the poorest countries in the world. It imports 90% of the food it needs, which makes it highly dependent on international market prices. Moreover, the country has few exports and the majority of its imports come from France. Another large contributor to the nation's GDP comes from the rent of military bases to foreign powers (see below: *Security situation*). Djibouti's port, long considered the primary gateway for Ethiopia's international trade, faces increasing challenges as Ethiopia explores alternative trade routes. The detente between Ethiopia and Eritrea in mid-2018 was a significant development that offered Ethiopia other maritime options, thereby putting financial pressure on Djibouti's main source of income. Additionally, Ethiopia is looking towards the south, as Kenya plans to build a railway from Lamu to Moyale, further diversifying Ethiopia's trade routes. Ethiopia also has the option of using ports in Sudan, further complicating Djibouti's economic landscape. These developments could potentially compel Djibouti to adopt alternative or even destabilizing strategies to maintain its economic and regional relevance. As Ethiopia broadens its trade horizons, Djibouti is tasked with recalibrating its economic, diplomatic, and strategic initiatives to maintain its position in an increasingly competitive regional and global context.

According to Heritage Foundation's [Economic Freedom Country Profile Djibouti](#) (updated October 2023):

- Djibouti's economic freedom index score for 2024 is 55.8, placing it #112/184 globally and #14/49 in the Sub-Saharan Africa region. The score decreased by 0.3 points compared to

the 2023 score and is below the world average. The country needs significant institutional reforms, particularly in property rights and anti-corruption measures. The judicial system is also susceptible to political influence, and cumbersome regulations impede entrepreneurial growth. The country is categorized as "mostly unfree".

According to [African Economic Outlook \(AEO\) 2023](#):

- **Economic growth:** In 2022, GDP growth declined to 3.7% from 4.8% the previous year, mainly because of decreased port activity related to the Tigray conflict and less public investment. The pandemic's economic toll eased. Monetary policy shifted towards expansion to bolster the economy against various external pressures. The budget deficit shrank to 1% of GDP in 2022, largely due to increased tax revenue and less aid. This deficit was primarily financed through accumulated external debts, bank loans, and foreign borrowing. Concurrently, the current account surplus also narrowed to 25.1% of GDP in 2022, as exports declined more than imports and financial transfers decreased.
- **External debt:** The potential for external debt overload is elevated. The public debt saw a reduction, going from 74.1% of GDP in 2021 to 71.6% in 2022. As of 2022, foreign exchange reserves were sufficient to cover around three months of imports. The banking sector is generally stable and well-funded, although 2022 saw a mix of deposit withdrawals and renewed bank lending. A stringent policy on outstanding receivables led to a decline in the ratio of nonperforming loans, which fell from 16.2% at the end of 2019 to 5.5% in September 2022.
- **Inflation:** In 2022, the socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic eased, and inflation rose to 5.3% from 1.2% in 2021 due mainly to higher food prices.
- **Poverty:** In 2022, the poverty rate slightly decreased to 16.5% from 16.9% in 2021, thanks to government initiatives aimed at cushioning the impact of various economic and social shocks.
- **General economic outlook:** GDP is expected to rise to 5.4% in 2023 and 6.5% in 2024. Inflation is predicted to decrease to an average of 3% over 2023-24, although essential goods will remain costly. The budget deficit is anticipated to expand to 2.1% of GDP due to increased spending and investment. The current account surplus is likely to continue shrinking due to weaker exports and stagnant revenue from foreign military bases. Public debt is set to climb to 73% of GDP due to foreign loans for infrastructure. Foreign exchange reserves are expected to stay at around three months of import cover.

### Gender perspective

As highlighted by UN Human Development Indicators (UNDP HDR Djibouti), women and girls remain economically disadvantaged in Djibouti, primarily due to Sharia rules of inheritance (whereby daughters typically receive half the amount that sons receive), as well as reduced employment opportunities compared to men. According to [Georgetown's 2019/20 Women, Peace and Security](#) Index (p. 34), Djibouti scores particularly low in relation to financial inclusion for women.

## Social and cultural landscape

According to the World Factbook Djibouti and UNDP'S HDR Djibouti:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Somali 60%, Afar 35%, other 5% (mostly Yemeni Arab, also French, Ethiopian, and Italian)
- **Main languages:** French (official), Arabic (official), Somali, Afar
- **Urban population:** 78.4% (2022)
- **Rate of urbanization:** 1.56% (2020-2025 est.)
- **Population growth rate:** 1.97% (2022 est.)
- **Median age:** 24.9 years (male: 23 years; female: 26.4 years) (2020 est.)
- **Expected years of schooling:** 6.8 years
- **Literacy rate, adult (15 years and older):** Data not available
- **Employment to population ratio (15 years and older):** 54.0%
- **Unemployment, total (% of the labor force):** 10.3%
- **Unemployment, youth (ages 15-24):** 20.8 years
- **Human Development Index:** Djibouti ranked 166th out of 189 countries with a value of 0.524
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 67.1 years (65.3 according to CIA Factbook 2022 est.)

According to the [UNHCR Djibouti Operational Update](#) (29 February 2024):

- **Refugees:** As of 29 February 2024, Djibouti hosts over 31,500 refugees and asylum-seekers mainly from Somalia, Ethiopia, Yemen and Eritrea.

According to the US State Department's [2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices](#):

- Among the problems relating to human rights issues are: The use of excessive force, including torture; harsh prison conditions; arbitrary arrests and prolonged pretrial detention; denial of fair public trials; interference with privacy rights; harassing, abusing, and detaining government critics; restrictions on freedoms of speech, assembly, association and religion.
- "The governing coalition included representatives of all the country's major clans and ethnic groups, with minority groups also represented in senior positions. Nonetheless, there was discrimination based on ethnicity in employment and job advancement. The Somali Issas, the majority ethnic group, controlled the ruling party, the Union for a Presidential Majority, and shared political power with the Afar ethnic group. There were multiple rival subclans, and discrimination based on ethnicity and clan affiliation remained a factor in business and politics."

### Gender perspective

Within Djibouti's patriarchal, Islamic context, women and girls traditionally assume subordinate roles within the family and society, whereas men take up the position of head of the household. Domestic abuse is believed to be widespread, but rarely reported publicly. Rather, violence in the domestic sphere is often dealt with either within a family or traditional context. This discriminatory practice against women extends to education with girls' right to education, especially that of [pregnant girls and adolescent mothers](#), not guaranteed because of absence of

positive law or regulation required under the Convention on Rights of the Child to which Djibouti is a party (Statement by Amnesty International, 14 April 2022).

## Technological landscape

With regard to technological statistics, different outlets present varying numbers:

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2023 Djibouti):

- **Internet usage:** 54.3% of the total population - survey date: December 2021 (Most recent survey available at time of writing.)
- **Facebook usage:** 16.4% of the total population - survey date: January 2022

According to [DataReportal 2023](#):

- As of the beginning of 2023, Djibouti had 777,600 internet users, making up 68.9% of the population. In January 2023, there were 94,100 social media users, or 8.3% of the total population. Additionally, there were 462,500 active mobile connections, accounting for 41% of the population.

According to Napoleon Cat, ([February 2024](#)):

- Djibouti had 97,800 Facebook users, making up 9% of the country's total population.
- Most of these users were male, constituting 61.5% of the total.
- The age group of 25 to 34 was the most represented, with 39,200 users.
- Within this age bracket, the gender disparity was most pronounced, with men outnumbering women by 24,200.

According to [BuddeComm Research](#) (Publication date: September 2023):

- Djibouti's national telecom company holds a monopoly on all telecom services, stifling market potential and keeping prices high. While plans to privatize the company have been delayed, the government aims to sell up to a 40% stake by the end of 2022, inspired by Ethiopia's recent telecom liberalization. This is part of a broader plan to modernize Djibouti's economy.

## Security situation

Djibouti's future is intricately linked to both its immediate neighbors and broader geopolitical influences. It sits at a nexus of regional instability, with neighboring countries like Yemen and Ethiopia grappling with conflicts that could easily spill over into Djibouti. While the Tigray conflict has been somewhat mitigated by a peace agreement in Pretoria, Ethiopia's ongoing internal strife — such as the rise of the Amhara Militia Fano in July 2023 and persistent tensions in Oromia — poses an underlying threat to Djibouti and the Horn of Africa. The issue is further complicated by the deteriorating relationship between Ethiopia and Somalia, after Ethiopia's recent signing of a memorandum of understanding with Somaliland regarding access to the sea.

The country's unique strategic significance is amplified by the large concentration of foreign military bases, including those of the United States, Japan, France, Italy, Spain, China, and Saudi

Arabia. Both Russia and India have also shown interest in establishing a military presence. This multitude of international forces provides a layer of short-term stability and was further reinforced by the deployment of 960 Somali AMISOM security forces in 2022.

However, this very military concentration could also make Djibouti a target for jihadists eager to exploit regional vulnerabilities. Furthermore, while intercommunal violence is relatively rare, past incidents such as the clashes between the Afar and Issa ethnic groups in August 2021 indicate potential fault lines within the country.

In summary, the constant military presence may offer some level of immediate stability, but Djibouti's long-term stability is critically tied to the resolution of conflicts in neighboring countries, particularly Ethiopia. The country must navigate a complex and potentially volatile geopolitical landscape, balancing internal challenges with external threats and opportunities.

## Trends analysis

### 1) Djibouti's relative stability and democratic deficit

Djibouti's geopolitical location makes it a cornerstone in the high-stakes game of international diplomacy. This leverage allows President Guelleh's government to maintain alliances with both Western powers and other significant global players. In the WWL 2024 reporting period, Djibouti has seen no major shifts in terms of religious freedom. Despite the volatile situation in neighboring countries like Ethiopia and Yemen, Djibouti remains a pocket of stability in a region otherwise fraught with conflict. Yet, it is not a democracy, and the government under President Guelleh allows little room for dissent. For the foreseeable future, the status quo appears to be entrenched. However, Ethiopia's ongoing internal conflicts, coupled with Eritrea's emboldened stance, could unsettle Djibouti's stability and reverberate across the Horn of Africa.

### 2) The vulnerable state of the Church and the country's complex geopolitical dynamics

Internationally, there is a calculated tolerance of Djibouti's internal political repression and other human rights shortcomings in the interest of maintaining regional security. This often leads to overlooking human rights abuses in favor of stability, a trade-off that could incite anti-government sentiment. Christians in Djibouti could find themselves in a precarious situation, potentially subject to clampdowns, as the state aims to maintain strict control. Muslim groups could further radicalize, directing their ire at Christians who may be perceived as being aligned with the West.

The relationship between Djibouti and Western powers, notably France and the USA, offers some protection to Christians, but it is far from a guarantee for broader human rights like freedom of expression and association. This precarious balance could shift due to China's growing influence. Beijing has established its first overseas military base in Djibouti with an investment exceeding half a million dollars. China's presence could not only change the geopolitical calculus but also jeopardize religious freedom, given its own track record of religious repression.



### 3) Regional instability

The Horn of Africa is currently experiencing significant instability, with Ethiopia undergoing turbulent times. Additionally, Somaliland, with de facto independent status, is grappling with internal unrest. The strained relationship between Ethiopia and Somalia has garnered international attention, with external actors seeking to leverage the disagreement to exert pressure. Furthermore, although not situated in the Horn of Africa, the crisis in Sudan has regional implications. Amidst these complexities, Djibouti must navigate the intricate web of regional dynamics, often treading precarious paths.

In sum, while Djibouti maintains a façade of stability, it does so amidst a cocktail of internal political repression, geopolitical opportunism, and delicate international partnerships. Its long-term stability is deeply entwined with ongoing regional developments, especially the simmering conflicts in neighboring Ethiopia and the wider Horn of Africa.

### External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: fifth term in April 202 - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/10/veteran-ruler-guelleh-re-elected-djibouti-leader-for-fifth-term>
- Recent history: International IDEA - <https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/report/djibouti/february-2023>
- Political and legal landscape: UNFPA, Djibouti: Gender Justice and the Law, 2018 - [https://arabstates.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Djibouti%20Country%20Assessment%20-%20English\\_0.pdf](https://arabstates.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Djibouti%20Country%20Assessment%20-%20English_0.pdf)
- Political and legal landscape: Georgetown, Women, Peace and Security Index 2019/20, p.38 - <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WPS-Index-2019-20-Report.pdf>
- Economic landscape: Economic Freedom Country Profile Djibouti - <https://www.heritage.org/index/pages/country-pages/djibouti>
- Economic landscape: African Economic Outlook (AEO) 2023 - <https://www.afdb.org/en/countries-east-africa-djibouti/djibouti-economic-outlook>
- Economic landscape: Georgetown's 2019/20 Women, Peace and Security - <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WPS-Index-2019-20-Report.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR Djibouti Operational Update - <https://reporting.unhcr.org/djibouti-operational-update-7886>
- Social and cultural landscape: 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/djibouti/>
- Social and cultural landscape: pregnant girls and adolescent mothers - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/14/submission-committee-rights-child-review-djibouti>
- Technological landscape: DataReportal 2023 - <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-djibouti>
- Technological landscape: t - <https://napoleoncat.com/stats/facebook-users-in-djibouti/2023/01/>
- Technological landscape: February 2024 - <https://napoleoncat.com/stats/facebook-users-in-djibouti/2024/02/>
- Technological landscape: BuddeComm Research - <https://www.budde.com.au/Research/Djibouti-Telecoms-Mobile-and-Broadband-Statistics-and-Analyses>



## WWL 2024: Church information / Djibouti

### Christian origins

"Around the 1st century AD, Djibouti made up part of the powerful Ethiopian kingdom of Aksum, which included modern-day Eritrea and even stretched across the Red Sea to parts of southern Arabia. It was during the Aksumite era, in the 4th century AD, that Christianity first appeared in the region. As the empire of Aksum gradually fell into decline, a new influence arose that would forever supersede the Christian religion in Djibouti: Islam. It was introduced to the region around AD 825 by Arab traders from Southern Arabia." (Source: [Lonely Planet](#), accessed 9 September 2020)

The historical connections between Ethiopia and Djibouti have led to a sustained presence of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the country. European powers brought Roman Catholic and Protestant Christianity to the country following the arrival of French, who first gained a foothold in the region in 1883 (which was named "French Somaliland" in 1894). The Roman Catholic Church sent its first priest from Arabia to Djibouti in 1883. In 1940 the Reformed Church of France was established.

### Church spectrum today

Djibouti: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	2,000	18.3
Catholic	7,500	68.8
Protestant	440	4.0
Independent	500	4.6
Unaffiliated	390	3.6
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,830</b>	<b>99.4</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	400	3.7
Renewalist movement	530	4.9

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.

The Christian presence, which is partly over 100 years old, is divided up into various denominations, including Roman Catholics, Protestants, Ethiopian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox and a small convert community with a Muslim background.

## Areas where Christians face most difficulties

There are no specific hotspots.

## Christian communities and how they are affected

All Christian communities in Djibouti face challenges, each experiencing different levels of persecution.

**Communities of expatriate Christians:** Expatriate Christians in Djibouti, some of whom have lived in the country for decades, are not immune from persecution. In the past there was a level of tolerance. However, the tolerance towards Orthodox Christians originating from Ethiopia is withering away as radical Islam is rising. Congregations made up of French and US service personnel experience minimal restrictions.

**Historical Christian communities:** In the WWL analysis for Djibouti, this category has been combined with the category for expatriate Christians above. (The French Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Ethiopian Orthodox churches represent the only active Christian witness recognized by the government.)

**Converts to Christianity:** Christians with a Muslim background are few in number and face intense pressure from family, community and those fulfilling (religious) leadership roles at the community level. This is particularly true outside the city where the lifestyle is communal and pastoralist. Converts do not have the luxury of giving their children Christian names, or of celebrating Christian weddings and church festivals. They have to stay underground and live their Christian life in secret. Converts have even been discriminated against and harassed in refugee camps.

**Non-traditional Christian communities:** This group consists of Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations who are known for their interest in evangelization and hence face severe opposition.

## External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: Lonely Planet - <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/djibouti/history>

# WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Djibouti

## Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

## Position on the World Watch List

Djibouti: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	61	55
WWL 2023	60	56
WWL 2022	59	58
WWL 2021	56	59
WWL 2020	56	56

Djibouti rose 1 point in WWL 2024. The fact that the ruling government seeks to stay in power at all costs is critical for understanding the current state of affairs for Christians in this country which has an Islamic population of 97.4%. For the last five reporting periods, pressure on Christians had been stable. In the WWL 2024 reporting period, the increase of one point is attributed to the rise in the score of violence by 0.5 points. As a conservative society, those discovered leaving Islam and becoming Christians face being shunned, ridiculed and completely rejected by society. The country is located in a strategically important as well as volatile location; countries that have a major influence over the government have not put it under pressure to improve its human rights conditions for fear of losing access to the country. Thus, the government can oppress the population without any fear from the international community.

## Persecution engines

Djibouti: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
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

(Table continued below)

Djibouti: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Medium
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Not at all

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

### **Islamic oppression (Strong) blended with Clan oppression (Strong)**

Islam is deeply rooted in society and hence any other religion is regarded as alien. Furthermore, Djibouti's geographical location is very convenient both for international trade and for the transit of jihadists from the Horn of Africa to the Middle East and vice-versa. Around 94% of the Djiboutian population are Sunni Muslims. Radical Islam is growing in the country in a similar pattern to other East African countries and is of major concern for the government. The government attempts to control the content of the Muslim Friday sermons and who does the preaching. Since approximately 60% of the population are ethnic Somali, the growth of radical Islam in Somalia affects society in Djibouti too.

Djibouti is the home of the Afar and Issa ethnic groups. The Issa belong to the larger Somali tribe. Tribalism in the country is so deeply rooted that any attempt to accept Christianity is deemed a betrayal of the tribe and tribal faith (Islam). Christian converts will be isolated and treated badly for their faith.

### **Dictatorial paranoia (Medium)**

The fact that the ruling government seeks to stay in power at all costs is critical for understanding the current state of affairs for Christians in Djibouti. President Guelleh was elected in 1999; in the year 2000 the government and the radical faction of Afar Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD) signed a peace agreement finally putting an end to the civil war. President Guelleh does not want to be viewed as moderate by the radical forces in his party. Thus any people thought to be a threat to his political power are treated in a tough manner – this includes the Christian communities.

Djibouti is rated as “not free” in Freedom House's Global Freedom Index 2024. World Press Freedom 2023 published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) also lists Djibouti as one of worst countries regarding freedom of expression and information (at rank 162 out of 180).

According to the RSF report:

- "The government led by President Ismaïl Omar Guelleh, who was reelected for a fifth term in 2021, deploys a draconian arsenal that includes judicial harassment, illegal searches, arrests and physical violence in order to impose a reign of terror on the media."

## Drivers of persecution

Djibouti: Drivers of persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG			STRONG				MEDIUM	
Government officials								Medium	
Ethnic group leaders				Strong					
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong			Medium					
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong								
One's own (extended) family	Strong								
Political parties								Medium	

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

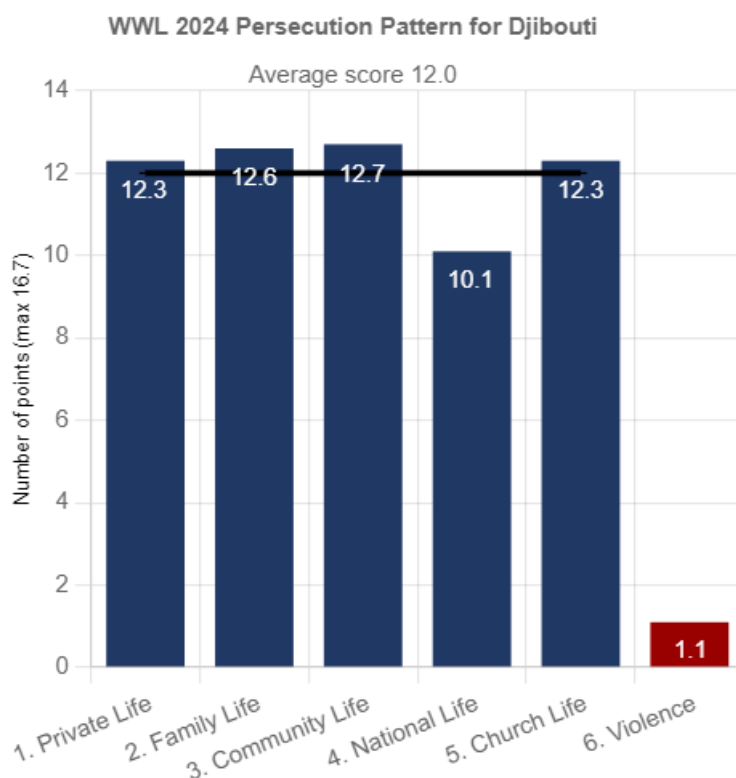
### Drivers of Islamic oppression / blended with Clan oppression

- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong/Medium):** Imams and sheiks create an environment of fear for Christians. They preach hate and animosity toward Christians and because of their radical messages, the government always monitors their Friday sermons. It causes severe opposition from both close and extended family members. Persecution can range from being denied participation in family activities to physical violence for refusing to renounce Christianity. It is worth mentioning here that family members react in this way not only because they care about Islam but also because they fear the societal rejection of the whole family which occurs if a family member is known to have become a Christian.
- **Ordinary citizens (Strong):** Djibouti has a 97.5% Muslim population and is a conservative society with the attitude: 'People should be converted to Islam, not Christianity'. Thus, if someone in the community does become a Christian, they will persecute that person.
- **Ethnic leaders (Strong):** Tribal leaders always make sure Islam is the faith adhered to by all members of the tribe. The tribal leaders of Afar and Issa are also very conservative Muslims and persecute Christians. Every convert knows that leaving Islam means betraying the clan.

### Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Medium):** Government officials and the ruling political party (to a lesser extent) have made the procedure for obtaining official church recognition very difficult and at times do not listen to the concerns of Christians.
- **Political party (Medium):** With the president at the helm, the ruling party has established itself in society and does not tolerate any 'freedom of religion'.

## The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2024 Persecution pattern for Djibouti shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Djibouti is very high at 12.0 points, similar to WWL 2023.
- The *Community sphere* scores the highest with 12.7 points, followed by the *Family spheres* (12.6 points), and the *Church and Private spheres* (12.3 points each).
- The *National sphere* scored lowest with 10.1 points.
- The score for violence is 1.1, a 0.5 increase from the WWL 2023 score of 0.6 point.

## 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://open Doors analytical.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). (3.50 points)**

In Djibouti's Muslim-majority society, Christian converts often avoid discussing their faith with non-family members due to the risk of social ostracism and personal harm. This discretion is a necessary measure to maintain safety and community relations.

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

In Djibouti, converting to Christianity faces strong societal opposition. Converts are not legally punished but endure severe social repercussions, including hostility and discrimination.

**Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (3.25 points)**

Christians, particularly converts, face serious risks when meeting with other Christians. Societal norms and conservative elements strongly discourage deviations from Islam. If discovered, these gatherings can lead to severe consequences, including the loss of social benefits, expulsion from the community and possibly bodily harm..

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

Christians, especially converts, are at risk when practicing Christian worship, even in private. Societal norms are strongly against individuals found engaging in Christian practices, such as prayer or Bible reading. Converts risk severe societal repercussions like beatings and expulsion from the family.

## Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

**Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.50 points)**

Christian families, particularly those of converts, often hesitate to teach their children about Christianity. There is a prevailing fear that if children speak about their Christian upbringing in the wider community, it could lead to problems such as discrimination or social ostracism.

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

Children of known Christian families in Djibouti often face harassment and discrimination. This problem extends to various communal spaces, including schools, where these children may encounter bullying and other forms of mistreatment.

**Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.25 points)**

Christian families grapple with challenges in educating their children, as Christian students may face pressure to attend teachings contrary to their faith. This complex situation affects the core values and principles instilled within Christian families, placing their children in circumstances where they are compelled to engage with anti-Christian or majority religion teachings. Refusing to do so can lead to harassment.

**Block 2.11: Spouses of converts have been put under pressure (successfully or unsuccessfully) by others to divorce. (3.25 points)**

Pressure to divorce in Djibouti becomes more pronounced when the husband is a Christian convert. In these instances, wives face significant societal pressure, which directly impacts their marriage, often resulting in divorce.

## 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)**

Issues like adhering to specific dress codes and restrictions on eating in public during Ramadan exemplify the difficulties Christians encounter daily. This environment, particularly in the capital, limits their rights and freedoms, with converts facing heightened societal disapproval, harassment and economic impacts.

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

Being monitored in the community is a reality Christians in Djibouti have to live with. Community youth, elders, and others keep a close watch on their activities, often reporting to police and community elders.

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

Christians, excluding expatriates, face obstacles in accessing and sharing essential community resources, like clean drinking water. This reflects broader issues of religious inequality within the community.

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

The pressure on Christians to participate in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events. Some Christians may attend such events to minimize potential repercussions, highlighting the compromises made within their minority status.

**Block 3.6: Christians have been hindered in participating in communal institutions, forums, etc., for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)**

The prevailing societal attitudes create an unwelcome environment, making it challenging for Christians to engage in community activities. This particularly impacts converts and non-traditional Christians.



## Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

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

The Constitution and legal framework of the country is contrary to Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. With a significant Muslim majority and the explicit designation of Islam as the state religion, the legal and regulatory landscape demonstrates a discernible bias towards Islam, restricting the freedom of religion for individuals practicing other faiths.

### **Block 4.5: Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (local administration, government, army, etc.) for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)**

Christians in Djibouti experience discrimination when dealing with authorities at various levels. This often leads to hesitation among Christians to take their cases to the authorities, apply for government jobs, or engage openly with official entities. While expatriate Christians may face somewhat less pressure, a noticeable bias still affects their interactions with authorities, influencing their ability to engage freely and confidently in these settings.

### **Block 4.6: Christians have been barred from public office, or has promotion been hindered for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)**

While no explicit legal provisions bar Christians from public office or hinder their promotion, indicators suggest an underlying discriminatory environment. The requirement for the president to adhere to the Muslim faith creates a structural impediment for non-Muslims, including Christians, impacting their opportunities in public service. Societal discrimination compounds these challenges, hindering professional advancement based on religious identity.

### **Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.00 points)**

Christians face hindrances in expressing their views or opinions in public. While not uniformly applied, this restriction creates an environment where Christians may self-censor to avoid potential consequences. This must be understood in the context of the country's limited freedom of expression. Organizations like Reporters Without Borders classify Djibouti as one of the worst countries regarding freedom of expression, which further complicates the situation for Christians who already face challenges.

## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

### **Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (4.00 points)**

Churches face challenges in obtaining permits as well as societal concerns about potential offensiveness. Thus both the authorities and society in general restrict the organizing of events outside church compounds, further hampering public expression of the Christian faith.

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

Obtaining registration or legal status for churches involves a complex and bureaucratic process, including a cumbersome background investigation by the Ministry of Interior. Muslim and non-Muslim foreign religious groups face additional requirements, such as approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and signing annual agreements specifying their activities. The lengthy registration procedure, coupled with operational restrictions during the process, highlights the significant challenges faced by churches in obtaining official recognition and legal status.

**Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored. (3.75 points)**

Christian preaching, teaching, and the distribution of materials in Djibouti are under indirect but close monitoring, reflecting a significant level of control over church activities. What Christians say, whom they meet in church, and the materials they distribute are all closely observed.

**Block 5.16: Churches, Christian organizations, institutions or groups have been prevented from using mass media to present their faith (e.g. via local or national radio, TV, Internet, social media, cell phones). (3.75 points)**

Christian communities and institutions face considerable barriers in utilizing mass media to present their faith, despite the technical possibility. Highly restrictive conditions and risks associated with media usage limit the effective communication of Christian beliefs. The unavailability of local media platforms to churches and restrictions on using religious channels locally highlight the challenges Christians encounter in expressing and disseminating their faith through mainstream media.

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

Churches face impediments in establishing and maintaining schools, charitable endeavors, and medical initiatives. The absence of local registration for Djiboutian churches results in challenges for church-run organizations, which are often anyway perceived as being foreign. Christian institutions face strict limitations on their activities and on whom they are allowed to serve.

## 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.

Djibouti: 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)?	0	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?	0	0
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	0	0

(Table continued below)

Djibouti: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	10 *	0
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	10 *	0
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	0	2
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?	0	0
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	0	1
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	0

## 5 Year trends

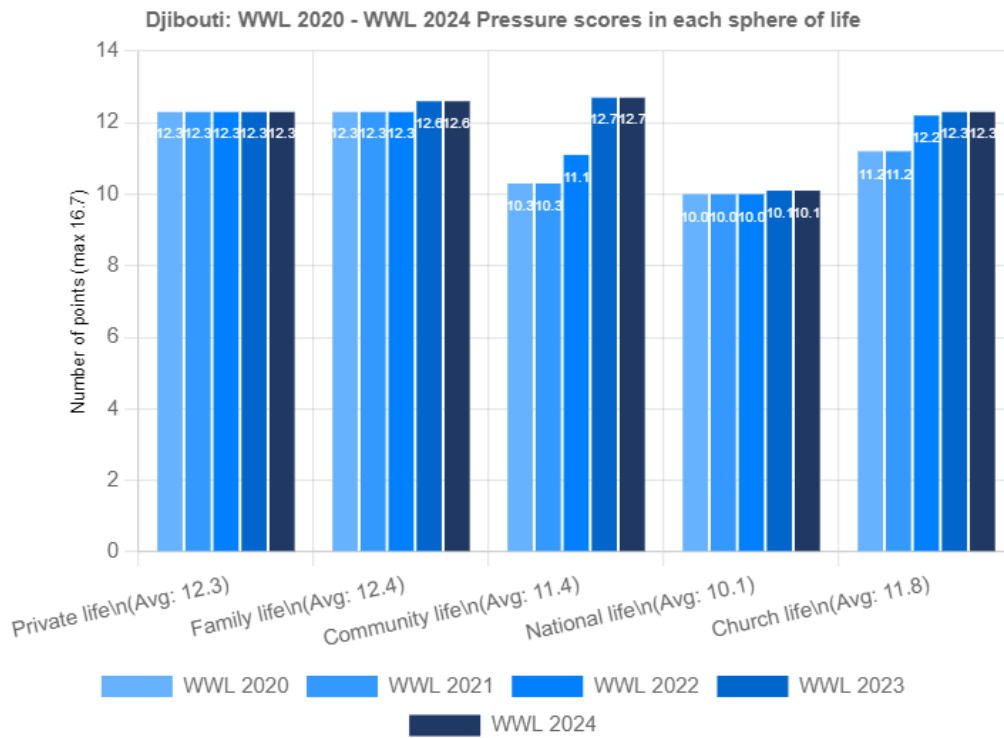
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Djibouti: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024	12.0
2023	12.0
2022	11.6
2021	11.2
2020	11.2

The table above indicates that average pressure has consistently been over 11.0 points since WWL 2020. These very high scores, which have stabilized at the 12.6 point mark since WWL 2023, suggest that Djibouti would rank among the toughest countries for Christians if the violence score were also very high.

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



The graph above shows that the pressure on Christians has been very stable in the *Private*, *Family* and *National spheres of life*. The recent increases in pressure have been most visible in the *Community* and *Church spheres of life* during WWL 2023 and WWL 2024.

## 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



Violence in the country is very low, ranging from 0.0 to 1.1 and averaging 0.6 point. As pointed out above, if violence against Christians was as prevalent in Djibouti as in other countries in the region, the country would score much higher overall and rank among the worst countries for persecution.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Those who are found to be converts in Djibouti face harsh treatment. Female converts in Djibouti are vulnerable to physical beatings and house arrest (particularly in rural areas). Although not common, reports in the past indicated that in some instances, Christian women have been abducted by radical Muslims and forced to marry Muslims without their consent. “When a Muslim converts to Christianity, his or her family abducts or forces him or her to marry. This situation has a disproportionate impact on women and girls ... In reality, one girl converts, and her family kidnaps her, and forces her to marry an elderly Muslim man,” a country expert confirmed. The majority of those who enter pre-arranged marriages do so under pressure from their families and local communities who are eager to see them return to Islam. Female converts may be forced to marry older religious leaders in an effort to influence their faith. Among the Afar, forced marriage is regulated by the custom called *absouma*, where the parents organize the marriage to strengthen ties between villages or tribes. In an Afar family, if the girl refuses the husband that the family has proposed, she is rejected and punished. Often, her only chance is to try and run away or to accept the marriage ([UNHCR, Djibouti - Forced marriage, 4 March 2013](#)).

Converts who are already married face various forms of pressure from their spouse and extended families. If a newly converted Christian woman refuses to recant her new-found faith, she will likely face divorce. Whilst men in poverty-ridden Djibouti would normally want to escape the burden of looking after the children in a case of divorce, sources state that families of devoted Muslims will not allow the woman to claim custody and raise the children as Christians. According to a country expert, women automatically lose their custodial rights upon conversion as it becomes virtually “impossible to trust her with the children”. Whether they succeed in claiming custody rights or not, female converts are usually crippled financially without a stable income and by the denial of inheritance rights.

The wife is a pivotal member of the family unit in Djibouti, with women playing a major role in raising children and representing the family at societal events. The persecution of women and girls therefore has a significant negative impact on the wider family and community.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	-
Security	Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

According to WCD figures (accessed March 2023), 97.5% of Djibouti’s population are Muslim, meaning Christians make up a very small minority (1.1%). Although data on the persecution dynamics here is sparse, Christian men in Djibouti are at risk of physical attacks, verbal harassment and intimidation. Some can be forced out of their homes, leaving them displaced and economically vulnerable. Christian leaders in Djibouti – the majority of whom are men – are at greater risk of persecution. A country expert remarks: “In Djibouti, pastors and church leaders are the principal targets of persecution. Officials and the general public keep track of whether or not they meet converts and preach the gospel in the neighborhood.” Being known in the country as a Christian leader also exposes family members to serious threats.

As men are typically the breadwinners in Djibouti, their absence throws the family into emotional and financial turmoil. It also compromises the family’s physical security, particularly in remote parts of the country, as a husband/father’s absence could lead to looting of the family property and attacks on his wife and daughters.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

Other religious minority groups in the country are Jehovah’s Witnesses, Hindus, Jews and Bahai. Country researchers did not find any concrete evidence to suggest that they also face pressure or violence. However, considering the fact that it is illegal for any faith to proselytize in public, those belonging to Jehovah's Witnesses probably face severe challenges in the country.

## Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

### Islamic oppression blended with Clan oppression

Islam is the state religion and clan-based life is part and parcel of Djiboutian society. The general attitude of government and society towards Christians and other non-Muslim minorities is negative and is likely to continue to be so. Expecting this to change in the near future is not real-

stic, especially since Djibouti is located at a crucial location for jihadist transit.

### **Dictatorial paranoia**

Theoretically, the Djiboutian government upholds the constitutional protection of religious freedom. However, in practice, the government attempts to control all religious institutions. The government's negative attitude towards Christians might increase in the future due to an intensification of foreign investments from neighboring Gulf countries in a series of economic sectors (including Islamic banking). This engine will remain potent for the foreseeable future.

### **Regional dynamics**

The Horn of Africa is becoming extremely volatile. Ethiopia, one of the anchor states in the region, has been at war in the Tigray region in recent months. Somalia is not progressing towards democracy as hoped. Egypt and Ethiopia have locked horns over the Nile Dam. Ethiopia and Sudan have border issues. Eritrea is becoming emboldened by what is happening in Ethiopia. Such pressure from the region could cause Djibouti to enter a crisis, which would mean danger to Christians in the country and beyond. On the other hand, the fact that Djibouti is so crucial for international trade (particularly its shipping lines), Western countries might do all it takes to keep the country stable. That would mean propping up the dictatorial regime in the country. At one point in 2022, rebels in Ethiopia were trying to cut the route that connects Addis Ababa to Djibouti and also tried to control the capital city. The conflict in Ethiopia will have serious ramifications in terms of further destabilizing the region if the [November 2022](#) peace agreement between Ethiopia and the rebel forces fails to hold (Reliefweb, 3 November 2022). That would seriously affect Djibouti in many ways. Meanwhile, the [bilateral meeting](#) on regional issues of mutual concern held by the Djiboutian president with the Ethiopian prime minister in March 2022 was intended to create a more stable economic and security environment in the region (Africanews, 28 March 2022).

In general, the region is facing serious troubles. Ethiopia is experiencing difficulties with Somalia following a Memorandum of Understanding with Somaliland, which has its own internal problems. Additionally, although not directly bordering Djibouti, Sudan is also grappling with significant issues which can affect the whole region.

## **External Links - Persecution Dynamics**

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: (UNHCR, Djibouti - Forced marriage, 4 March 2013). - <https://webarchive.archive.unhcr.org/20230519153302/https://www.refworld.org/docid/51cc2bfa4.html>
- Future outlook: November 2022 - <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/cessation-hostilities-agreement-between-government-federal-democratic-republic-ethiopia-and-tigray-peoples-liberation-front-tplf>
- Future outlook: bilateral meeting - <https://www.africanews.com/2022/03/28/djiboutian-president-meets-ethiopian-prime-minister-in-addis-ababa/>

## **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=Djibouti>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>.