World
Watch
Research

Kenya: Full Country Dossier

March 2024

Contents

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

Copyright note

Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading "External links". In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the "Keys to Understanding" chapter under the heading "Links for general background information". Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 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 / Kenya

Brief country details

Kenya: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
57,459,000	47,077,000	81.9

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

Map of country

Kenya: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	63	51
WWL 2023	64	51
WWL 2022	63	51
WWL 2021	62	49
WWL 2020	61	44

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

Over the past decade, Kenya has been grappling with a relentless surge in attacks from al-Shabaab, one of Africa's most lethal jihadist groups. This situation has placed Christians, particularly those with a Muslim background in the northeastern and coastal regions, under continuous threat of violence, not only from militants but also from their own families. Many have opted to relocate to safer areas such as Nairobi, further fracturing already vulnerable communities. Al-Shabaab's operations have grown significantly, as evidenced by data from WWR reports and from Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), which recorded a twofold increase in incidents involving the group in June 2023 alone. This escalation comes at a time when Kenya and Somalia are reopening border points, and the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) is withdrawing, raising fears of a potential uptick in violence.

Although al-Shabaab's violence targets security forces and civilians alike, for the group, these victims often serve as either collateral damage or as obstacles to be cleared before reaching their primary targets: Christians. Their unwavering focus on targeting Christians has caused a mass exodus of essential service providers like teachers and healthcare workers from the northeastern regions. The rise in attacks, coupled with a local culture of corruption and organized crime that fails to punish faith-based persecution, amplifies the climate of fear and insecurity for Christians, who are increasingly finding northeastern Kenya too dangerous to inhabit.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

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

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

- Christian converts face opposition from their families and are threatened with loss of child custody (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christian children are harassed because of their parents' faith (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Christians and their activities are monitored by the surrounding community (ICCPR Art. 17)
- Christian female converts are forced to marry non-Christian men (ICCPR Art. 23; CEDAW Art. 16 and ICESCR Art. 10)
- Perpetrators of violence against Christians are left unpunished (ICCPR Art. 2)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

Detailing the issue of converts can be sensitive and potentially dangerous. To maintain safety and avoid exacerbating the situation, it is prudent to focus on the broader impact of the incidents:

- At least five individuals from the religious community were tragically killed.
- Properties associated with this religious group were subjected to damage or attacks.
- A significant number of community members, at least twenty, endured physical and emotional abuse.
- Due to rising concerns for their safety, a minimum of ten individuals felt compelled to flee their homes.

Specific examples of positive developments

The August 2022 presidential election was carried out peacefully. Power was transferred [without serious problems](#) despite some fears among international and local actors due to the history of post-election violence in the country (Carnegie Europe, 6 October 2022).

External Links - Situation in brief

- Brief description of the persecution situation: WWR reports - https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Kenya
- Brief description of the persecution situation: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) - https://acleddata.com/2024/01/19/kenya-situation-update-january-2024-al-shabaab-pastoralist-militias-and-the-m23/

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx
- Specific examples of positive developments: without serious problems - https://carnegieeurope.eu/2022/10/06/kenya-s-watershed-election-implications-for-eu-policy-pub-88060

WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Kenya

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/23 Kenya report	AI Kenya 2022	https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/east-africa-the-horn-and-great-lakes/kenya/report-kenya/	13 July 2023
BBC News Kenya profile - updated 4 July 2023	BBC Kenya profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13681341	15 March 2024
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI Kenya Report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/KEN	13 July 2023
Crisis24 Kenya report (Garda World)	Crisis24 Kenya report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/kenya	13 July 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2022 – covering 167 countries	EIU Democracy Index 2022 - Sub-Saharan Africa pp.55-60	https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/DI-final-version-report.pdf	13 July 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2023 Kenya	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	13 July 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Kenya not included	Democracy Index 2023	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2023 Kenya	https://freedomhouse.org/country/kenya/freedom-world/2023	13 July 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report – covering 70 countries	Freedom on the Net 2023 Kenya	https://freedomhouse.org/country/kenya/freedom-net/2023	15 March 2024
Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 – covering 170 countries	GIWPS 2021 Kenya profile	https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/kenya/	13 July 2023
Girls Not Brides Kenya report	Girls Not Brides Kenya	https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/kenya/	13 July 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 - Kenya country chapter	HRW 2023 Kenya country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/kenya	13 July 2023
Internet World Stats available in 2023	IWS 2023 Kenya	https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#ke	13 July 2023
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2023 Kenya	https://rsf.org/en/kenya	13 July 2023
Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2022 Kenya	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/ken	13 July 2023
UNDP: Human Development Report Kenya - data updates as of 8 September 2022	UNDP HDR Kenya	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/KEN	13 July 2023
US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report Kenya	IRFR 2022 Kenya	https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/kenya/	13 July 2023
USCIRF 2023 covering 17 CPC / 11 SWL, Kenya not included	USCIRF 2023	https://www.uscirf.gov/countries	
World Bank Kenya data – 2021	World Bank Kenya data	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&Id=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=KEN	13 July 2023
World Bank Kenya overview – updated 19 September 2023	World Bank overview	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kenya/overview	15 March 2024
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook Kenya - April 2023	Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Kenya	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2fefc5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-ken.pdf	13 July 2023
World Factbook Kenya - updated 13 March 2024	World Factbook Kenya	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/kenya/	15 March 2024

Recent history

Since the nation's founding in 1964, tribal-based politics continue to serve as the dominant political trend in the country. However, the new Constitution in 2010, the peaceful elections of March 2013 when Uhuru Kenyatta (the son of Kenya's first president) won the vote for the presidential office, and the devolution of power into a county system, have all helped mitigate some of the tension arising from the ethno-based politics. On a backdrop of serious socio-economic challenges (see below) the increasing incursions of al-Shabaab militants and the general instability in Somalia is a major security concern, particularly in the light of the attacks in 2013 - 2015 in Nairobi and the north-east, especially the attacks on the Westgate shopping mall in September 2013 and Garissa University in April 2015. It is expected that civil unrest and anti-corruption and anti-government sentiment will grow significantly as corruption remains en-

demic and highly visible. Against this backdrop, devolution of power from the center to localities could be a positive step forward in bringing a regionally more equal level of development and political stability with regards to the country's ethnic tensions.

A major event in 2017 were the general elections held in August. After the Kenyan Supreme Court annulled the result, repeat elections were held in October 2017, again with President Uhuru Kenyatta leading in the polls. The elections were carried out peacefully (in contrast to the 2007 elections which resulted in violence causing the deaths of over 1,200 people). This election proved to be a milestone in working towards reconciliation between the different ethnic groups in Kenya. Also, in 2018, both the president and main opposition leader eventually announced that they had agreed to work together (DW, 13 March 2018).

Before that announcement, however, veteran opposition leader Raila Odinga, who ran in the August 2017 presidential election as a candidate, continued to contest incumbent President Uhuru Kenyatta's victory. On 30 January 2018, Odinga took the unprecedented step of organizing a mock inauguration ceremony as the 'people's president' (The Guardian, 30 January 2018), despite warnings from international civil society organizations about the deeper crisis this move could cause in the country (International Crisis Group - ICG, 29 January 2018). On the same day, Kenyan authorities designated the National Resistance Movement (NRM), an activist wing of Odinga's political coalition, a criminal group in an attempt to crackdown on politicians and lawyers affiliated with Odinga (The Standard, 31 January 2018). In early 2018, the authorities in Kenya blocked the transmission of at least three television stations for defying the government's order against covering Odinga's mock inauguration ceremony (Human Rights Watch - HRW, World Report 2019).

In early March 2018, President Kenyatta and opposition leader Odinga vowed to resolve their differences and agreed on a peace deal, signaling an end to an ongoing public feud between the two camps and easing political tensions in the country (Al-Jazeera, 10 March 2018). However, this welcome development could not reverse the government's harsh treatment of opposition voices and members of the media (HRW, World Report 2019). The government's measures – already seen as stifling freedom of expression and the media - took a new turn on 16 May 2018, when Kenyatta signed a new law on cybercrime that introduced new offenses and imposed harsh penalties in relation to news reporting (HRW, World Report 2019). However, the harshest fines and provisions that criminalized "false or fictitious" news were later deleted after being judged unconstitutional by the High Court.

Further suspected al-Shabaab attacks were reported in June 2021 as Kenya continued its military operation in Somalia. In June 2021, the USA approved sending special operations troops to collaborate with Kenyan government forces combating al-Shabaab (The Citizen, 13 June 2021). Christians are often targeted by al-Shabaab and, as a result, many Christians (including civil servants, teachers, health workers etc.) have moved from the northeast leaving schools and healthcare institutions empty.

On 9 August 2022, Kenyans went to the polls and Deputy President William Ruto was declared the president-elect, winning with 50.49% of the vote. Opposition leader Raila Odinga came in second with 48.85%. After Odinga rejected the outcome, the election had to be decided by the Supreme Court which affirmed Ruto's win and was satisfied that the conduct of the election and

declaration of the results met the requirements of the Constitution. There was no serious violence reported while the dispute was resolved by the court (Source: Carnegie Europe, 6 October 2022).

In 2023, the opposition, led by Raila Odinga, escalated its political activities by staging numerous protests across the country. Raila Odinga even intensified his stance by threatening to transition the protests from a weekly to a daily occurrence. These opposition-led protests were not always peaceful and frequently resulted in clashes between the police and protesters. As reported by The Guardian on 19 July 2023, violent confrontations in Kisumu, a stronghold of the opposition, led to two fatalities.

Political and legal landscape

Kenya is not yet considered to be a true electoral democracy and has seen a relative decline in political and civil liberties. This decline occurred as a parallel development to the ethnic and religious tensions and incidents of violence which occurred nationwide following the 2007 - 2008 elections and in advance of the elections held in 2013. In terms of its level of democracy, Kenya is ranked at the lower end of the "hybrid regimes", showing it to be more democratic than authoritarian regimes, but not as democratic as "flawed democracies". However, despite this, the country has been making progress following the 2010 constitutional referendum.

With regard to the Constitution, several provisions were amended in 2017 to ensure civil liberties (Constitution of Kenya Amendment Bill, 2017). For example, freedom of speech and press has been strengthened. Under Article 8, the Constitution clearly lays out that the country has no official state religion. Article 32 of the Constitution provides for freedom of religion, the right to assemble with others to manifest their religion through worship, practice, teaching or observance, including observance of a day of worship and that a person shall not be compelled to act or engage in any act that is contrary to the person's belief or religion. It also provides under Article 27(4) for the equality of all persons and equal access to and benefits from the law with no adverse distinction based on religion.

As a result of these amendments, many things have started changing: Kenya's press environment remains one of the most vibrant in all of Africa and many privately-owned media outlets are known for routinely criticizing the government and officials. Also, the independence of the judiciary has been strengthened, which was previously subservient to the executive branch. Moreover, the Islamic (*Kadhi*) court system is subordinate to the superior courts of Kenya and is reserved for those adhering to Islam and who voluntarily submit to the courts' jurisdiction. Kadhi courts only adjudicate cases related to personal status, marriage, divorce or inheritance.

In 2021, a Building Bridges Initiative-driven (BBI) constitutional referendum which was to be held in June or July 2021 was ruled as unconstitutional by Kenya's High Court on 13 May 2021. The suspended bill was to promote the sharing of power among competing ethnic groups in order to reduce cyclical election violence (Al-Jazeera, 14 May 2021). The atmosphere at the August 2022 election was very tense and, as mentioned in *Recent history* above, the results were challenged before the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court upheld the results as announced by the electoral commission and William Ruto was sworn in as new president in September 2022.

The government generally respects the constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion. However, according to Freedom House (Global Freedom Index 2023 Kenya / D2), while freedom of religion appears to be widely respected by the government, counterterrorism operations against Somalia-based al-Shabaab have left Muslims exposed to state violence and intimidation. Muslim groups also complain about unequal development opportunities and religion-based discrimination. At the same time, al-Shabaab militants have at times specifically targeted Christians in Kenya. In general, however, civil liberties and the rule of law are being eroded by several factors such as deeply entrenched official and societal corruption and an ineffective police force. The Inspector-General of Police recently revealed that about 2000 Kenyan police officers were mentally unfit to serve and carry out their law enforcement work (Africanews, 20 April 2022). This contributes to crimes being seriously underreported, and domestic violence, trafficking and forced labor typically not being investigated. It has even enabled Islamic militants to transport weapons and ammunition in and out of the country undetected.

Rating the country 'partly not free', Freedom House (Global Freedom Index 2023 Kenya) provides a succinct yet comprehensive overview of Kenya's complicated socio-political landscape. According to the report, while Kenya does hold regular multiparty elections, the country grapples with rampant corruption and excessive force by security agencies. The media and civil society are dynamic but face restrictive laws and intimidation.

The key developments of 2022 further substantiate this nuanced picture. Presidential elections took place in August, where William Ruto, the then deputy president, narrowly defeated opposition candidate Raila Odinga with 50.49% of the vote. Odinga's subsequent petition to the Supreme Court to contest the election results was rejected, and Ruto was inaugurated. However, not all was smooth sailing for the new administration. In the months of October and November 2022, Director of Public Prosecutions Noordin Haji dismissed corruption charges against several allies of President Ruto, including the newly elected deputy president Rigathi Gachagua. This move drew sharp criticism from legal experts and opposition leaders.

In 2022, at least 39 bodies were discovered in the River Yala. Although an investigation was ongoing, President Ruto took the surprising step of attributing these deaths to the Special Service Unit (SSU), a police force previously implicated in forced disappearances and extrajudicial killings (Kenya Talk, 16 October 2022). The SSU was subsequently dissolved by Ruto in October (Capital News, 16 October 2022).

With the devolution of power to local counties, Christians have faced extreme pressure in those counties dominated by the Muslim community. This is particularly the case in counties bordering Somalia and the coastal region.

Gender perspective

According to Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index (2019/20, p.39), Kenya was in the top ten countries that showed the greatest improvements since 2017 in relation to formal legal discrimination. Men and women have broadly equal rights in relation to marriage, divorce, inheritance and child custody. An ongoing issue of concern however is the high rate of child marriage, despite the minimum age of marriage being set at 18, with no exceptions (BBC News, 15 July 2020). According to Girls Not Brides Kenya, 23% of girls – predominately those in the

northeastern and coastal regions – marry before the age of 18. A 2017 CEDAW report further highlighted areas of concern, such as limited access to justice, the negative impact of polygamous marriages on women, and the underrepresentation of women in parliament. Whilst Kenya's legislation addresses domestic violence and rape (Protection Against Domestic Violence Act 2015; Sexual Offences Act), victims are slow to come forward due to a lack of awareness of their legal rights, high social tolerance for violence against women and the belief that domestic violence is a private, rather than state matter. Violence against women is sometimes committed in the open, as evidenced by a boda-boda (motorbike taxi) drivers' attack on a female diplomat in broad daylight in the capital Nairobi (Africanews, 14 March 2022).

Religious landscape

Kenya: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	47,077,000	81.9
Muslim	4,545,000	7.9
Hindu	287,000	0.5
Buddhist	1,900	0.0
Ethno-religionist	4,765,000	8.3
Jewish	300	0.0
Bahai	565,000	1.0
Atheist	2,400	0.0
Agnostic	48,900	0.1
Other	165,540	0.3
OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.		

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

The Kenyan Constitution guarantees freedom of religion. Christians have had the lion's share in shaping modern Kenya. It is a Christian majority nation with Christians making up an estimated 81.93% (WCD 2023 estimate) of the population. Christians tend to be concentrated in the west and central sections of the country while the Muslim population is particularly concentrated in the eastern coastal regions. Many Kenyans include native beliefs in their religious practices.

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Kenya):

- "The five largest ethnic groups (the Kikuyu, Luhya, Kalenjin, Luo, and Kamba) are predominately Christian."
- "In June [2022], the government lifted a seven-year ban on the registration of new religious societies. On July 13, the Registrar of Societies issued strict new guidelines for applicants seeking to register new religious societies, including a requirement that the applicants hold

a diploma or degree from a recognized theological institution. Applicants must also show proof of tax compliance, be in good standing in the community, and must be recommended by a registered religious society in good standing."

Economic landscape

Kenya's economy is indeed one of the largest in Africa, consistently ranking among the top ten. It is also the second-largest economy in East Africa, following Ethiopia. The country has a diverse economy with key sectors including agriculture, manufacturing, construction, tourism, and increasingly, information technology and financial services. Nairobi, the capital, serves as a major commercial hub, not only for Kenya but also for the East African region.

Despite its economic strengths, Kenya still faces numerous challenges that are inextricably linked with its political and social issues, such as corruption and political instability. These problems can serve as roadblocks to foreign investment and economic growth. Moreover, the income inequality and high rates of unemployment are other significant issues that the country needs to tackle for sustainable development.

The government has undertaken various initiatives to stimulate economic growth, such as Vision 2030, aimed at transforming Kenya into a newly industrialized, middle-income nation. However, for these plans to be fully realized, the political will to address underlying systemic issues is crucial.

The contrast between Kenya's economic potential and its current socio-political challenges provides a complex backdrop for its development trajectory. While the country has the ingredients to continue as a major economic player in Africa, much depends on how it addresses its internal challenges.

Kenya's economic recovery is to be supported by external aid as well. In an effort to help accelerate the country's economic transformation post-pandemic, the World Bank approved in March 2022 a $750 million boost in Development Policy Operation (DPO) fund for strengthening fiscal sustainability through reforms directed at greater transparency and the fight against corruption (World Bank Press Release, 16 March 2022).

According to a World Bank Press Release published on 20 December 2023:

"Kenya's economic performance strengthened in 2023 despite continued challenges, with real GDP growth accelerating from 4.8% in 2022 to an estimated 5% in 2023. This is according to the 28th edition of Kenya Economic Update (KEU) which adds that the improved growth performance is attributed to a strong rebound in agriculture sector in 2023 which had faced a persistent and severe drought as well as a moderate growth in the services sector."

"The recovery of agriculture has led to improvements in food supply and coupled with monetary policy tightening has helped reduce inflationary pressures. In 2023, tourism continued to expand, credit to the private sector improved and manufacturing activity is expected to improve from the anticipated growth in agro-processing sector."

"The economy however still faces several challenges to sustain its growth momentum such as heightened fiscal and external vulnerabilities manifested through high public debt, elevated cost of living, exchange rate pressures, global economic uncertainties, and tight global financial conditions."

According to World Bank's Kenya overview:

- **Poverty:** Making economic growth more inclusive is a top priority for Kenya. Over the past two decades, the country has seen improvements in living standards and a reduction in poverty rates from 36.7% in 2005 to 27.2% in 2019, based on the $2.15 a day poverty line. However, the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically increased poverty levels, particularly in urban areas. This was further exacerbated by a severe drought across various regions and a rise in food prices. Kenya also grapples with significant regional disparities in poverty incidence. Currently, only 30% of the workforce is engaged in non-farm wage jobs. The country is on the cusp of its largest-ever youth cohort entering the workforce over the next decade. Capitalizing on this demographic dividend through job opportunities and sustained structural transformation is a key priority for the nation.

According to the 2023 Index of Economic Freedom (accessed September 2023):

Kenya's economic freedom score for 2023 stands at 52.5, positioning it as the 135th freest economy globally. This score remains virtually unchanged from the previous year. In the context of the Sub-Saharan Africa region, Kenya ranks 29th out of 47 countries and falls below both global and regional averages in terms of economic freedom. The underpinnings of economic freedom in Kenya are fragile and exhibit regional disparities. Poor property rights protections and rampant corruption act as deterrents to entrepreneurial ventures. The rule of law is tenuous, and the judiciary faces significant political influence, undermining the effectiveness of local courts. Despite the pressing need for reforms, progress in enhancing the management of public finance remains slow.

Gender perspective

Gender gaps in relation to education access and labor force participation are small. However, women and girls continue to remain more economically vulnerable within Kenya's patriarchal society. Cultural and societal norms related to family obligations often impede women's career advancement (Open Capital, 2020) and customary practices often deny women and girls of their due inheritance.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the UNDP HDR Kenya and World Factbook Kenya:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Kenya has more than 40 ethnic groups. Kikuyu 17.1%, Luhya 14.3%, Kalenjin 13.4%, Luo 10.7%, Kamba 9.8%, Somali 5.8%, Kisii 5.7%, Mijikenda 5.2%, Meru 4.2%, Maasai 2.5%, Turkana 2.1%, non-Kenyan 1%, other 8.2% (2019 est.)
- **Main languages:** English (official), Kiswahili (official), numerous indigenous languages
- **Average rate of population growth:** 2.12% (2022 est.)
- **Overall urban population:** 29% (2022 est.)

- *Median age:* 20 years
- *Average expected years of schooling:* 11.3 years (11.0 for girls, 11.7 for boys)
- *Average literacy rate, adult (15 years and older):* 81.5%
- *Overall employment to population ratio (15 years and older):* 72.7%
- *Unemployment, total (% of labor force):* 2.6%
- *Unemployment, youth (15-24 years):* 7.2%
- *Labor force participation rate (ages 15 and older):* 74.7% (Gender gap is minimal, with 72.1% of women in the workforce compared to 77.3% of men)
- *Human Development Index:* Kenya is ranked 143rd out of 189 countries with a human development value of 0.601 points
- *Life expectancy at birth:* 66.7 years (69.69 years according the CIA Factbook, 2022 est.)
- *Gender Development Index (GDI):* 0.937
- *Gender Inequality Index (GII):* 0.518 This score is a composite measure reflecting inequality in relation to reproductive health, empowerment and the labor market. Providing an indication of how it performs, Kenya ranked 126th out of 162 countries in 2019.

According to (UNHCR Operational Data Portal, 29 February 2024):

- *Refugees in Kenya:* 744,747 registered refugees and asylum seekers. The majority of refugees originate from Somalia, DRC, Burundi, Ethiopia and Sudan.

According to IDMC (as of end of 2022):

- *IDPs:* 30,000

Gender perspective

Whilst women are not legally obliged to obey their husbands, social norms place men at the head of the household in both rural and urban settings. Domestic violence is widely tolerated, and reportedly increased as a result of COVID-19 restrictions (HRW, 8 April 2020). Widespread protests against gender-based violence occurred in 2019 (HRW, 17 April 2019).

Technological landscape

Different reports, present different numbers:

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2023):

- *Internet usage:* As of December 2021, Kenya had 46,870,422 internet users, accounting for an 84.1% penetration rate.
- *Facebook usage:* In January 2022, there were 12,445,700 Facebook users in the country, representing a 22.3% penetration rate.

According to the Data Reportal 2023 report:

- There were 17.86 million internet users in Kenya at the start of 2023, when internet penetration stood at 32.7 percent.
- Kenya was home to 10.55 million social media users in January 2023, equating to 19.3 percent of the total population.

- A total of 63.94 million cellular mobile connections were active in Kenya in early 2023, with this figure equivalent to 117.2 percent of the total population.

According to BuddeComm Research (Last updated 27 November 2023):

- "Kenya's telecom market continues to undergo considerable changes in the wake of increased competition, improved international connectivity, and rapid developments in the mobile market. The country is directly connected to a number of submarine cables. Mombasa is the landing point for LIT's newly completed East and West Africa terrestrial network, while Nairobi country serves as a key junction for onward connectivity to Ethiopia, the Arabian states, and the Far East. While the additional internet capacity has meant that the cost of internet access has fallen dramatically in recent years, allowing services to be affordable to a far greater proportion of the population, the telecom infrastructure remains woefully inadequate. Many millions of people lack any internet access, and what services are available are comparatively slow and expensive."

Kenya is one of the few countries in Sub-Saharan Africa with relatively advanced technology. It was in Kenya that M-Pesa (mobile money) was first invented in 2007, a system whereby subscribers send cash to other phone-users by a simple SMS message. The country's young talents are also becoming entrepreneurs. A Newsweek article from 27 December 2016 stated: "New innovations are destroying old ways of doing business, and smart young startup entrepreneurs are at the forefront of this quiet but historic transformation. Teams of skilled developers and programmers have sprung up in innovation hubs, incubators, and accelerators across the country to build information and telecom solutions that capitalize on the country's mix of challenges and opportunities."

A Harvard Business Review article from 18 February 2021 states: "Kenya is an example in becoming a global hub of Fintech Innovations, having seen skyrocketing mobile penetration rates, with subscriptions surpassing the total population amount by 12%. In recent times, Kenya's Equity Bank has collaborated with international telco Airtel to give users an innovative product – Equitel, a mobile virtual network operator competing with Safaricom's M-Pesa, which is pushing for financial inclusion even further by offering a full suite of banking services on mobile devices".

Kenya is a member of the East African Economic Community and it wants to see technology playing a key role in the economic development of the region (UNESCO, 4 July 2018). The country is listed as having the highest number of "tech hubs" in Sub-Saharan Africa after South Africa (Kenyan Wall Street, 24 February 2020).

Security situation

Despite being a Christian-majority country, Kenya has witnessed a surge in religious persecution, largely orchestrated by al-Shabaab, Africa's deadliest jihadist group. Christians residing near the north-eastern border with Somalia face a particularly perilous environment. The group's activities, deeply rooted in local communities, make it extremely difficult to combat despite an increased military presence and foreign intelligence coordination. Attacks from al-Shabaab have had a significant socio-cultural impact, forcing many churches to close and compelling Christians,

especially those with Muslim backgrounds, to relocate to safer places like Nairobi or even abandon the region altogether.

Recent geopolitical shifts like the reopening of the Kenya-Somalia border points and the withdrawal of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) have coincided with a marked increase in al-Shabaab's activities. Data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED, 7 July 2023) reveals that incidents involving al-Shabaab nearly doubled in June 2023, highlighting the group's adaptability in using locally sourced improvised explosive devices (IEDs). While the primary focus of these attacks has been Kenyan security forces, civilians have not been spared; they are often viewed by al-Shabaab as either collateral damage or obstacles that need to be cleared to reach their main target: Christians.

Such indiscriminate violence is further exacerbated by systemic issues like organized crime, corruption, and a lack of accountability for human rights violations by security forces. Several reports by Human Rights Watch point out that Kenyan authorities have failed to investigate and hold those responsible for security forces abuses accountable. This culture of impunity permeates various layers of society and has made northeastern Kenya a hazardous area for Christians, leading to an exodus of essential service providers like teachers and healthcare workers. Furthermore, the country's unresolved security issues extend to its handling of refugee camps and alleged human rights violations, as seen in the Kenyan authorities' ultimatum to the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR, to plan for the closure of Daadab and Kakuma refugee camps without providing concrete evidence for alleged security risks (Al-Jazeera, 28 May 2022).

Gender perspective

In this complex and volatile environment, Christians in northeastern Kenya live in a state of perpetual insecurity. In this context of Islamist attacks, women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual assault and rape. In extreme cases they may face abduction by al-Shabaab and be subjected to sexual slavery, as well as intense pressure to convert to Islam (The Standard, 23 December 2017). Christian boys and men risk physical assault and death at the hands of radical Muslims, particularly in the north-eastern region.

Trends analysis

1) Kenya's shifting status as a regional model for stability

For many decades, Kenya was seen as a stable country and a regional model for political stability. However, things began to deteriorate from mid-2005 onwards, and the post-election violence of 2007/8 signaled that all was not well. Despite the volatile atmosphere, Kenya has managed to hold periodic elections, including those in 2017 and 2022, where power was transferred peacefully. Nonetheless, as of the WWL 2024 reporting period, the nation can no longer be regarded as a regional model for stability. The general political environment remains unsettled, and although the latest elections proceeded without major incidents, Kenya's history serves as a grim reminder of the potential human cost of post-election violence. Weekly protests by the opposition group are also making the situation more intense. This situation can be partly attributed to regional instability and the political dynamics in Kenya.

2) The persistent challenge of institutionalized corruption

In both the WWL 2023 and WWL 2024 reporting periods, it was evident that institutionalized corruption remained a pressing issue. According to Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Index (CPI 2022), Kenya ranked #123 out of 180 countries, scoring a mere 32 points. This environment of corruption has had multiple repercussions, including making it difficult for the government to keep Kenyan Christians safe, especially with the ongoing activities of al-Shabaab and the deteriorating situation in neighboring Somalia. Investigations into violence against Christians are seldom properly handled by the police. On a more hopeful note, there have been some instances of high-level corruption cases being exposed, and a limited willingness among leaders to be transparent. Although these are marginal improvements, they might encourage foreign organizations to bring aid to communities impoverished partly due to this corruption, as trust among donors starts to rebuild gradually.

3) The escalating humanitarian crisis in the north-eastern region due to attacks on Christians

Christians in the north-eastern counties of Garissa, Mandera, and Wajir have been subjected to continuous threats and attacks from al-Shabaab. This has resulted in an exodus of Christian teachers, nurses and humanitarian workers from these areas. The educational system has been especially hard-hit with the state transferring about 2,000 teachers out of the troubled areas. As of February 2018, 250 schools were reportedly closed due to al-Shabaab's activities. Although some have reopened, nearly a hundred schools across these counties still operate with just a headmaster and no other teaching staff.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: agreed to work together - https://www.dw.com/en/political-confusion-reigns-in-kenya-after-odinga-kenyatta-deal/a-42958386
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WWL 2024: Church information / Kenya

Christian origins

Christianity was introduced into the region of present-day Kenya by the Portuguese during the 16th century. The Portuguese were driven out of the coastal region of Kenya in 1698 by the forces of Oman. As a result, Christianity could not establish itself in Kenya until 1844 when the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) sent Johann Ludwig Krapf. In 1862, British Methodists came to Mombasa. White Fathers of the Roman Catholic Church came to Kenya in 1889. In 1910, Pentecostalism arrived with representatives of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada. The Salvation Army started work in Kenya in 1921.

The arrival of Christianity from abroad was followed by the establishment of indigenous churches in the country: The Momiya Luo Mission was established by former Anglicans in 1914. The African Church of the Holy Spirit was founded in 1927. The Kenya Foundation of the Prophets Church was also established in 1927, the National Independent Church of Africa in 1929, and the Gospel Furthering Bible Church in 1936.

Church spectrum today

Kenya: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	388,000	0.8
Catholic	13,001,000	27.6
Protestant	27,783,000	59.0
Independent	9,595,000	20.4
Unaffiliated	820,000	1.7
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-4,511,000	-9.6
Total	**47,076,000**	**100.0**
(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)		
Evangelical movement	17,384,000	36.9
Renewalist movement	18,702,000	39.7

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.*

Christians dominate the central and western regions, and the majority of the major cities in the country. Muslim communities dominate the northeastern, eastern and coastal areas of the country, where life for Christians is very much more difficult.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Christians living in and around the north-eastern part of the country have to live with the fear that they can be targeted at any time. Hotspots for attacks by al-Shabaab include Mombasa, Mandera, Garissa, Wajir, Lamu and Tana River. In these areas, there are many local informers to assist in organizing attacks on churches and Christians. As a result, many Christians have decided to leave these areas and move to the center of the country.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Three categories of Christian communities in the country face persecution, but the level of persecution varies depending upon where they live and which Christian groups they belong to.

Communities of expatriate Christians: Expatriate Christians in Kenya are not involuntarily isolated and are hence not treated as a separate WWL category for scoring and analysis.

Historical Christian communities: Churches in this category can be found in many parts of the country. The persecution they face and the intensity of the persecution depend on the regions in which they live. In areas where Islam is dominant, the persecution is from *Islamic oppression* and the intensity is very high.

Converts to Christianity: Christians with a Muslim background are mainly found in Muslim-dominated areas in the north-eastern region and along the coast (including Mombasa). In general, these converts face different persecution dynamics to those Christians from a non-Muslim background. They face intense pressure at the hands of family and friends and, if discovered by groups like al-Shabaab, they can be killed as well. Christian converts are also targeted by mobs or smaller groups from the local Islamic communities.

Non-traditional Christian communities: This category includes groups such as Baptist, Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic congregations. They can be found throughout the country. This group is the most active type of Christianity in the country and as a result, it can face severe forms of persecution.

WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Kenya

Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

Position on the World Watch List

Kenya: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	63	51
WWL 2023	64	51
WWL 2022	63	51
WWL 2021	62	49
WWL 2020	61	44

Kenya's score decreased in WWL 2024 by one point but kept its ranking at #51. The very high level of persecution has remained more or less constant over the last five WWL reporting periods, which is very worrying for a country that has a Christian population of almost 82%. Although all Christian categories are at times targeted by Islamic militants (particularly al-Shabaab), Christians with a Muslim background in the northeastern and coastal regions live under constant threat of attack, even from their closest relatives. Co-opted officials do not take measures against those who target Christians for their faith, and this, in turn, encourages further acts of persecution.

Persecution engines

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

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

Islamic oppression (Very strong)

Kenya is overwhelmingly a Christian-majority nation, with about 82% of its inhabitants identifying as Christians. Despite this, Islamic oppression is a significant concern, particularly in the northeastern and coastal regions. According to the World Christian Database (WCD 2023), approximately 7.9% of Kenyans are Muslims, the majority being Sunni. These Muslim populations have not only concentrated themselves in specific geographic regions but have also become increasingly vocal about what they view as marginalization in broader Kenyan society.

Fueled by extremist ideologies originating from Somalia, politicians from Muslim-majority areas in Kenya aim to eradicate Christian influence in their regions. The dire situation is exacerbated in the northeastern counties, where radical Muslims, both local and those infiltrating from Somalia, have targeted Christians, leading to numerous deaths. A country researcher elaborated on the situation, stating that counties such as Mandera, Wajir, Garissa, Lamu, Kilifi, and Kwale have historically been under strong Islamic influence and continue to witness medium to very strong levels of *Islamic oppression*. The issue of Islamic militancy has been escalating since the 1990s. The Islamic Party of Kenya, founded in 1992, was banned in 1994, causing a period of protests and fragmentation among Islamist groups. The fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban in 2021 has emboldened similar groups like al-Shabaab, fueling the belief that foreign forces in Somalia will eventually withdraw, paving the way for their expansion into Kenya and beyond. In the WWL 2024 reporting period, al-Shabaab made significant attempts to reclaim some of the territory it lost. The group has persistently pursued its goal of creating a country fully governed by Islamic law. Al-Shabaab has maintained its ideology, consistently viewing Christians as enemies.

Clan oppression (Medium)

In the northeastern region of Kenya, leaving Islam is equated with abandoning one's clan, particularly within the Somali community. Ethnic and community leaders in this region also frequently share anti-Christian sentiments, aligning themselves ideologically with jihadist groups. This reinforces a cycle of discrimination and persecution for converts from Islam to Christianity that is difficult to break.

Organized corruption and crime (Medium)

Corruption is a rampant issue in Kenya, as indicated by its Corruption Perceptions Index score of 30/100 (CPI 2022). This corruption has a direct impact on the persecution landscape in Kenya, as it inhibits effective legal repercussions against perpetrators. Key institutions like the parliament, judiciary, and the executive have been compromised, limiting access to justice and protection for Christian communities. There have even been reports that al-Shabaab has successfully executed attacks in the past through bribing officials to smuggle weapons, adding another layer to the existing challenges.

Drivers of persecution

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

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

Drivers of Islamic oppression

- *Violent religious groups (Very strong)*: The terrorist organization al-Shabaab, originating from Somalia, poses the most significant threat to religious freedom in Kenya. In addition to targeting the Kenyan government for its involvement in Somalia, the group is explicitly anti-Christian and seeks to eliminate Christian influences in areas they control or influence. Their ties extend to other militant groups across Africa, such as Boko Haram in Nigeria and various Algerian factions, thereby providing them with additional resources and ideological backing.

- *Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):* Religious teachers in Islamic educational institutions like madrassas play a significant role in promoting antagonistic views toward Christians. These leaders often use their platforms to indoctrinate young minds with extremist ideologies, paving the way for future persecution. In coastal and northeastern Kenya, Islamic clerics have been known to issue fatwas against converts to Christianity, thereby escalating the threats against them.

- *Citizens - people from broader society (Strong):* In regions where Muslims are the majority, local communities often view Christians as outsiders or invaders. This sentiment has been fueled by the extremist rhetoric of groups like al-Shabaab, making life increasingly difficult for Christians, especially those who have converted from Islam. The social ostracization extends to various aspects of life, including business, education, and social interactions, effectively creating second-class citizens out of Christian community members.

- *Family members (Strong):* For those who convert to Christianity, family can often become a significant source of persecution. The notion of abandoning Islam is perceived not just as

a personal choice but as an act of betrayal against the family, community, and broader ethnic group. There have been instances where family members themselves have carried out acts of violence against converts, emphasizing the deeply rooted nature of this form of persecution.

- **Organized crime cartels (Medium):** In an unsettling symbiosis, violent religious groups often collaborate with organized criminal networks to finance their activities, including human trafficking, drug smuggling, and arms dealing. These funds help sustain their operations and expand their reach while corrupting the system from within, making it difficult for law enforcement to take effective action.

Drivers of Clan oppression

- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** The concept of ethnicity and religious identity is often intertwined in northeastern Kenya. Ethnic leaders, especially among Somali communities, often amplify the anti-Christian narratives promulgated by Islamic extremists. Leaving Islam becomes tantamount to betraying one's ethnic identity, leading to a dual form of persecution that is both religious and ethnic in nature. The anti-Christian sentiment is thereby ingrained not just in religious communities but also within broader ethnic lines.

Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- **Organized crime networks (Medium):** The compromised state of rule of law, exacerbated by widespread corruption, denies persecuted Christians any substantial course for redress. Organized crime syndicates exploit this lack of accountability, enabling and financing various forms of persecution.
- **Government officials (Medium):** Corruption within government circles aggravates the situation. Law enforcement and judicial officials are sometimes bribed to act against Christians, either by concocting false charges or by ignoring complaints from the Christian community, thus perpetuating a cycle of impunity for the persecutors.
- **Violent religious groups (Medium):** In some instances, such as the 2015 attack on Garissa University, militant groups like al-Shabaab have been known to bribe officials to smuggle weapons and ammunition into the country. This relationship between corruption and religious extremism further endangers the Christian community, who find themselves vulnerable and unprotected.

The Persecution pattern

WWL 2024 Persecution Pattern for Kenya

Average score 10.1
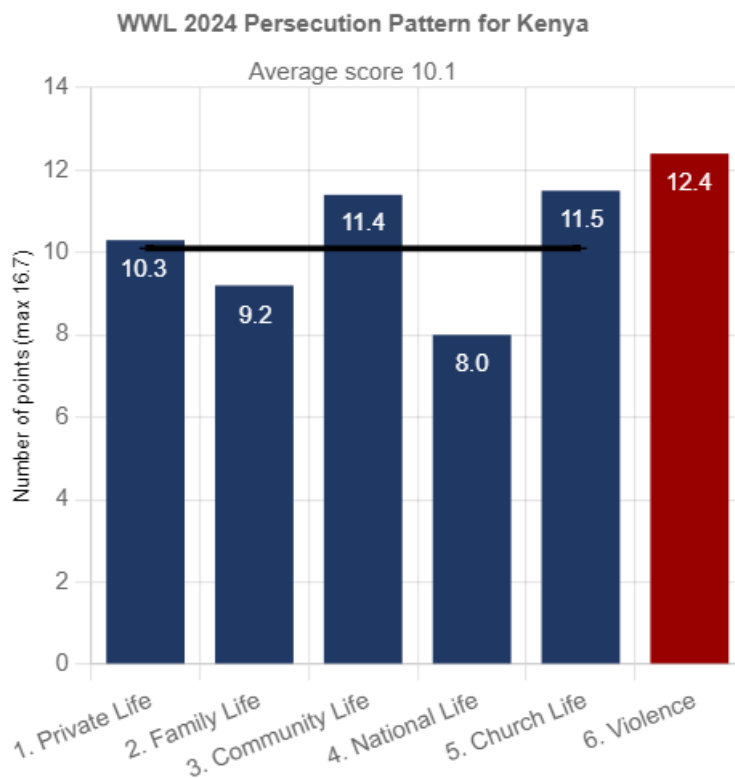
The WWL 2024 Persecution pattern for Kenya shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Kenya reached 10.1 points.
- In nearly all *spheres of life*, pressure on Christians is above nine points, with the *Church sphere* experiencing the most pressure (11.5 points), particularly in the northeastern and coastal regions.
- Very high and high pressure is also noted in the *Community* and *Private spheres of life*, with scores of 11.4 and 10.3 points respectively. This indicates significant challenges for Christians in their everyday lives in the northeast due to community, family pressures, and threats from al-Shabaab and its supporters.
- The violence score is extremely high at 12.4 points, but showing a slight decrease from the WWL 2023 of 13.3 points.

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 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (2.75 points)

In the Northeast and coastal regions of Kenya, Christians experience significant challenges when publicly expressing their faith through writing, including on blogs and social media platforms like Facebook. These risks are heightened for converts, who often face societal pressure to adhere to Islamic values and practices. If they do reveal their faith, they could be expelled from both family and community, or they could be attacked.

Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (2.75 points)

In Kenya's Northeast and coastal areas, openly displaying Christian images or symbols can be risky, particularly for converts who face intense societal expectations to adhere to Islamic norms. These individuals risk severe repercussions, ranging from social ostracism and expulsion from their communities to physical attacks. Moreover, there is the threat of abduction by extremist groups like Al-Shabaab, known for targeting identifiable Christians.

Block 1.6: It has been risky for Christians to access Christian radio or TV, or Christian material on the Internet. (2.75 points)

Accessing Christian media, such as radio, TV programs, and online content, can be very difficult in Northeast and coastal regions of Kenya; especially converts to Christianity face grave repercussions if found doing so. Specifically, they risk social ostracism, harassment, and potential violence from community members or extremist groups.

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (2.75 points)

For Christians, especially converts, discussing their Christian faith with individuals beyond their immediate family poses significant risks for Christians in Kenya's Northeast and coastal regions. When Christians share their beliefs with extended family or others, they risk social ostracism or violent reactions from community members and extremist groups.

Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (2.75 points)

In Kenya's Northeast and coastal regions, meeting with other Christians carries substantial risk, especially for converts. These gatherings can attract negative attention from families and communities. Christians in these areas face the challenge of practicing their faith under societal pressure. Organizing or attending Christian meetings can lead to social ostracism or even violent responses from community members.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.00 points)

In the Northeast and coastal regions of Kenya, children of Christian parents frequently encounter numerous challenges due to their family's faith. They often face pressure to conform to local dress codes, a longstanding issue in these areas. These children experience problems at school and in other public spaces directly linked to their parents' Christian beliefs. Incidents of bullying, social ostracism, and various forms of discrimination are common experiences for these children.

Block 2.6: Christian couples have been hindered in adopting children or serving as foster parents because of their faith. (2.75 points)

In Kenya's Northeast and coastal regions, Christian couples face significant challenges in adopting children or serving as foster parents due to Islamic societal pressure and community biases against their faith.

Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (2.75 points)

In Kenya's Northeast and coastal regions, parents attempting to raise their children according to Christian beliefs face significant challenges. If parents actively teach their children about Christianity, they risk exposing them to problems such as social ostracization, bullying, or worse, potentially endangering their wellbeing and security in these regions.

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (2.75 points)

Children of Christian parents (especially in Kenya's Northeast and coastal regions) often face pressure to participate in educational programs that promote Islam.

Block 2.12: Christian spouses of non-Christians have been excluded from the right or opportunity to claim custody of the children in divorce cases. (2.75 points)

In certain areas of Kenya, particularly in the Northeast and coastal regions, Christian spouses married to non-Christians encounter significant discrimination in custody battles during divorce proceedings. This bias, rooted in religious identity, often results in Christians being unjustly denied custody of their children.

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.). (3.25 points)

Christians (in particular in the Northeast and coastal areas) regularly experience harassment, threats, and obstructions in their daily routines because of their faith. Especially women and girls are often targeted for not adhering to the Islamic dress codes. Pastoralist communities like Maasai, Samburu, and Pokot normally prefer the polygamous lifestyle and if a Christian man marries a Christian woman from another community, the elders may well insist that he marries a second wife from his own community. If he refuses, he faces being disowned.

Block 3.3: Christians have been under threat of abduction and/or forced marriage. (3.25 points)

In the Northeast and coastal regions, Christians face the ominous threat of abduction and forced marriage, particularly when their faith is known or suspicions about conversion from Islam arise. Over the last decade, abductions of Christians in Northeast Kenya have been well-documented occurrences.

Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.25 points)

In the Northeast and coastal regions, Christians face coercive pressure from their communities to renounce their faith, particularly when visibly identified, amid suspicions about conversion. Calculated restrictions on sharing resources and participating in communal life serve as coercive measures.

Block 3.5: Christians have been put under pressure to take part in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events. (3.00 points)

In certain regions, to ensure their safety and maintain a low profile, some Christians, particularly converts, sometimes attend majority religion events as a survival strategy.

Block 3.11: Christians have been hindered in the operation of their businesses for faith-related reasons (e.g. access to loans, subsidies, government contracts, client boycotts). (3.00 points)

In the Northeast and coastal regions, Christians face substantial hindrances in operating their businesses. When an individual's Christian identity is known, especially amid suspicions of conversion, they are likely to face systematic deprivation of essential support mechanisms, including access to loans, subsidies, and government contracts. Christians in Northeast Kenya face pressure regarding business practices, including what to sell or avoid, and when to open or close their shops, aligning with Islamic customs in the region.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.4: Christians have been hindered in travelling for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)

In the past, Christians traveling in Northeast and coastal Kenya have faced severe dangers. There have been incidents where Christians were identified, separated, and killed during their journeys. This history has instilled a pervasive environment of fear among the Christian community. This has hampered their movements.

Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (3.00 points)

In the Northeast and coastal areas of Kenya, civil society organizations with Christian affiliations often encounter significant obstacles. As a result, Christian civil society groups face challenges in engaging with the community and carrying out their missions, often hindered by a lack of support or recognition from local authorities.

Block 4.12: Christians, churches or Christian organizations have been hindered in publicly displaying religious symbols. (3.00 points)

In the Northeast and coastal regions of Kenya, churches displaying Christian images can attract attacks from both local mobs and radical groups, including al-Shabaab.

Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (2.75 points)

In the Northeast and coastal areas of Kenya, local authorities often view the pressures and attacks faced by Christians as minor issues, reflecting a deliberate stance. The recurring pattern of inaction and tolerance towards offenses against Christians indicates a deeper systemic issue, where the severity of these incidents is consistently downplayed, contributing to a cycle of impunity and repeated violations against the Christian community. Corruption also plays a role.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

In the Northeast and Coastal regions, obtaining registration or legal status for churches faces significant challenges, creating an environment where Christians are under constant surveillance, targeted, and threatened by extremist groups like al-Shabaab. The influence of organized corruption at the national level further complicates the legal status of churches, adding a layer of complexity that hinders the legitimate functioning of religious institutions.

Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (3.25 points)

In certain regions, churches and Christian-run institutions undergo extensive monitoring and disruption at the local level. The broader prevalence of corruption further complicates the religious landscape, posing intricate challenges that impede the free and open practice of faith.

Block 5.7: Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts. (3.25 points)

In the Northeast and Coastal regions, churches face significant hurdles in openly integrating converts, grappling with surveillance, targeted actions, and potential threats from extremist groups. The surveillance can dangerously expose converts, putting their lives at risk.

Block 5.14: Openly selling or distributing Bibles (or other Christian materials) has been hindered. (3.25 points)

In the Northeast and coastal regions of Kenya, Christians who are found distributing Christian materials in public can face serious attacks. These materials can be confiscated by local mobs, and there is also a risk of abduction by extremist groups like al-Shabaab.

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 WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

| Kenya: 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	7
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	10 *	15
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	3	1
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)?	4	3
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)?	202	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?	10 *	40
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

| Kenya: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024	10.1
2023	10.1
2022	10.3
2021	9.9
2020	10.5

The average pressure on Christians in Kenya, a country with an almost 82% Christian population, has consistently ranged between 10.1 and 10.5 points, except for a drop to 9.9 points in WWL 2021. This high level of pressure is concerning, considering the significant Christian majority in the nation.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

Kenya: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024 Pressure scores in each sphere of life
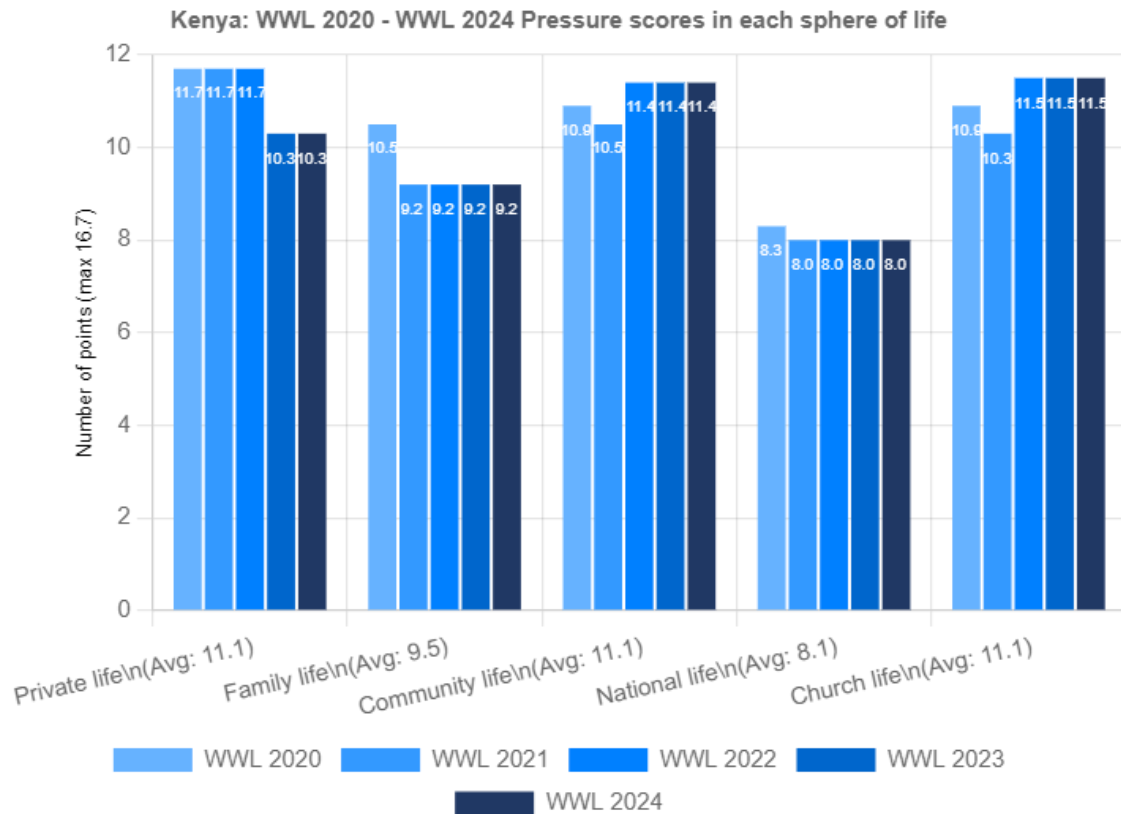
In recent WWL reporting periods, pressure has levelled off in all *spheres of life*. In the last two reporting periods, pressure has consistently been most high in the *Church* and *Community spheres of life*. Previous to that, the highest levels of pressure had be found in the *Private sphere of life*.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

Kenya: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024 Violence scores
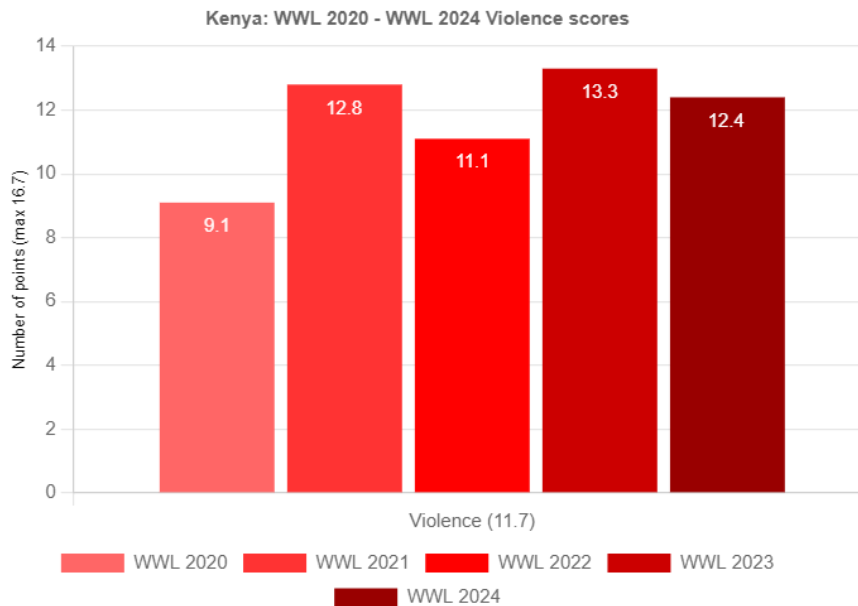
The violence scores over the last five reporting periods have varied according to the number of attacks perpetrated by al-Shabaab and their supporters. The average score is 11.7 points, which is extremely high. The highest score was recorded in WWL 2023.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Denied access to social community/networks; Denied custody of children; Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

In the Muslim-majority regions of Kenya, Christian women and girls face multiple forms of persecution. Although the Constitution fully establishes gender equality, cultural practices in some tribes (such as cleansing rites, widow inheritance, FGM, early marriage and polygamy) leave Christian women at greater risk of persecution if they oppose these practices. Widows can be disinherited and forced out of their homes if they object to traditional burial rituals. In addition, a lack of effective implementation of the Constitution has caused growing dissatisfaction among the Kenyan population.

In the Northern regions, Christian women and girls continue to face harassment and social rejection. Women and girls are forced to comply with an Islamic dress code. If they fail to do so they could be asked to leave their school, harassed and threatened. Reporting on the scale of this discrimination, a country expert explained that it is widespread in all state-run schools within Merti in Isiolo County. "In these schools," he remarked, "all girls regardless of their faith and belief must [don] the complete Muslim attire. Christian pupils are discriminated against, mistreated and harmed by Muslim pupils and if reported no action is taken." Married converts who refuse to wear certain cultural ornaments are also outlawed.

In traditional communities, women are considered as being on the same social standing as children. The strict regulations that follow this categorization, including not being allowed to run a business, save at the behest of a husband and on his behalf, place women at an economic disadvantage. For those women that do work, violence and harassment against women remains [highly prevalent,](#) particularly for those in the informal sector (HRW 2024, Kenya country chapter). These cultural inhibitions further exacerbate their vulnerability to persecution. According to a country expert: "Christian women are lured to marry Muslim men and bear Muslim children. The chances of conversion to Islam once a girl is married to a Muslim is almost absolute." In addition, reports suggest that female Christian housemaids are at a high risk of sexual harassment and rape, especially Ugandan and Tanzanian girls. "If these house-helps get pregnant, they are forced to abort and are dismissed without pay. Some are even murdered", a source disclosed. In the first month of 2024, [at least 10 women have been murder](#)ed following a pattern of physical or sexual violence, fueled by social norms that enforce male power over women (UN Women, 9 February 2024).

Female converts to Christianity from Islam face a great variety of forms of pressure. The first measures taken are to isolate them from Christian community and put them under house arrest. If married, they risk being denied custody of their children and divorced. If single, and especially if young, they face the likelihood of a forced marriage – usually to a much older Muslim man.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Economic harassment via business/job/work access; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Denied access to social community/networks; False charges; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Christian boys and men in the North-Eastern region face the greatest danger of physical assault, abduction and execution at the hands of radical elements within the Muslim community and al-Shabaab. According to a country expert, men are mostly targeted and killed in attacks by Islamic militants (Africa News, 26 December 2022). Whilst instances are rare, men are also more likely than women to be imprisoned for their faith with false or exaggerated charges. Men and boys also face the threat of isolation and societal condemnation when they go against cultural norms. Those who oppose negative cultural practices in some tribes (such as funeral rites, FGM, early marriages, and polygamy) suffer varying levels of persecution. Their families are not accepted in the community as they are considered 'cursed', 'weak', or 'not real men' (if they opt for hospital circumcision) or excluded from family matters if he converts to Christianity.

A country expert adds: "In African Traditional Religion, the men have to appease their fathers to get a good inheritance, especially those who are not firstborns. The pastoralist communities like Maasai, Samburu, and Pokot normally prefer the polygamous lifestyle for a man. They also prefer it when a man marries from his community. When a Christian man marries a Christian woman from another community, the elders will still insist that he gets a second wife from his own community. This places immense pressure on the man and in the cases where they do not conform to this request, they would normally be disowned and not allocated a good inheritance."

There are also reports that organized cartels mobilized by Muslim leaders use Muslim girls to entice Christians into conversion and lure Christian 'boda boda' riders into traps. Pastors and Christian leaders living in Islam-dominated regions and ATR hotspots face ethnic antagonism, ridicule and rejection because of their faith, including false accusations. According to a source: "Pastors, Christian leaders and their families working in North-Eastern Kenya and other Muslim dominated areas have been the special target of terror groups and in most cases, these leaders and their families are kidnapped by terror gangs who demand ransom for their release." Christian leaders who speak against illicit activities like drug trafficking and Khat farming have also reportedly been denied entry/passage through certain gang territories. Several pastors have been threatened and even summoned to either stop preaching or face dire consequences, forcing many to flee. Certain members of parliament in Migori County also reportedly sponsor

gangs to threaten and intimidate Christian leaders in the region.

While Christian female converts from a Muslim background are at a high risk of divorce and losing custody of their children, male converts are particularly disadvantaged in cases where the child is very young. Wives of converts are also married off by their family members, mainly out of spite for the convert. According to a country expert, it is "more shameful for a man if he converts because this signifies failure and attracts ridicule and profiling". Converts from a Muslim background may also be denied their inheritance rights, putting them in a weak financial position. As men are the main providers in Kenya, this also affects their extended family and all dependents.

Persecution of other religious minorities

In some parts of Kenya, Muslims - especially those with Somali background - face discrimination in Christian dominated areas. According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022):

- "Human rights groups and prominent Muslim organizations continued to state the government's antiterrorism activities disproportionately affected Muslims, especially ethnic Somalis and particularly in areas along the border with Somalia."
- "Human rights organizations reported complaints from predominantly Muslim communities, particularly in the Eastleigh neighborhood of Nairobi and coastal regions, regarding intimidation, arbitrary arrest, and extortion by police. Some complainants stated police accused them of being members of al-Shabaab."
- "According to religious and interfaith leaders, while Kenyans were generally tolerant of different faiths, they were less tolerant of nonbelievers. The AIK [Atheists in Kenya] society said its members experienced intolerance and indirect discrimination. They cited cases of companies firing employees who publicly identified as atheists. Members of AIK said many atheists were unable to disclose their lack of religious belief openly with their family, community, or employer."

Concerning other religious groups in the country, there are no reports suggesting incidents of persecution.

Future outlook

Kenya has experienced considerable political, structural and economic reforms over the past decade, leading to sustained growth, social advancement and political achievements. Despite these gains, Kenya still faces challenges such as poverty, inequality, and economic vulnerability to both internal and external shocks. Additionally, the country's security remains compromised due to the involvement of Kenyan forces in the conflict in Somalia. Al-Shabaab frequently targets Kenya in retaliation for this involvement.

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Islamic oppression (blended at times with Clan oppression)

Islamic oppression, often blended with *Clan oppression*, remains the primary source of persecution in Kenya. The constant threat from al-Shabaab has been a significant problem for both the country and its Christian population, with regular occurrences of killings, abduc-

tions, and church attacks, especially in coastal and northeastern regions. If al-Shabaab's influence is allowed to continue, the recruiting of Kenyan Muslims will also continue. Moreover, persecution from family and community members in Muslim-dominated areas, where religion and ethnicity are deeply intertwined, is likely to persist regardless of al-Shabaab's status.

Organized corruption and crime

Kenya ranked #126 out of 180 countries in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index 2023, is deeply entrenched in the political culture. This widespread corruption has been linked to aiding al-Shabaab's activities within the country. This corruption, particularly at the local authority level, poses ongoing challenges for churches.

Regional issues affecting Kenya

Regionally, relations between Ethiopia and Somalia have been strained after Ethiopia and Somaliland signed a Memorandum of Understanding in January 2024, whereby Somaliland would lease to Ethiopia 20 kilometers of coastline for 50 years in exchange for Ethiopia officially recognizing Somaliland's independence (ACLED, Situation Update, 15 January 2024). This ignited severe criticism from Somalia and its allies thus potentially escalating regional instability. Ethiopia's troop withdrawal from Somalia could embolden al-Shabaab, posing increased threats to Kenya, especially in its northeastern Christian communities. Furthermore, internal conflicts in Somalia among top officials could indirectly strengthen al-Shabaab. However, recent developments, such as the May 2022 elections in Somalia and the November 2022 peace agreement between the Ethiopian government and Tigray rebels, may alleviate some regional tensions. Nonetheless, the situation remains volatile, and Kenya's stability is at risk.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: highly prevalent, - https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/kenya
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: at least 10 women have been murdered - https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/feature-story/2024/02/femicide-cases-in-kenya-fuel-urgent-calls-for-action-to-end-violence-against-women
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: Islamic militants - https://www.africanews.com/2022/12/26/al-shabab-militants-kill-two-men-near-kenyas-east-coast/
- Future outlook: relations between Ethiopia and Somalia - https://acleddata.com/2024/01/26/somalia-situation-update-january-2024-the-complexities-of-the-somaliland-ethiopia-sea-access-deal/

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=Kenya
- https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/.