

FINAL WWL 2019 COUNTRY DOSSIER

BRUNEI

LEVEL 3/EMBARGO

(Reporting period: 1 November 2017 – 31 October 2018)

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Introduction

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Introduction

World Watch List Brunei	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2019	63	36
WWL 2018	64	26
WWL 2017	64	25
WWL 2016	61	25
WWL 2015	58	27

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country was among the fifty highest scoring countries (Top 50) in the WWL 2015-2019 reporting periods.

Please note: The highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”.

WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Brunei

Link for general background information

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-12990058>

Recent country history

Brunei was a British protectorate from 1888 to 1984 and is now the only politically independent sultanate in the world. The ruling sultan is the 29th, the royal line reaching back as far as 1363. On 1 January 1984, the day of independence, the ruling sultan officially proclaimed Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB) as Brunei's national philosophy. MIB is a blend of Malay and Islamic cultural values guarded by the monarchy system. It opposes the concept of secularism. May 2014 saw the introduction of Sharia Penal Code (SPC); however, implementation was not announced until [2018](#) (with the introduction of its procedural code).

The religious landscape

The ruling sultan is head of religion: What he wants, becomes law and if he decides that Islam will continue on a more conservative path, everyone including the churches have to accept that. Christians are free to worship, but they have been warned not to do so "excessively and openly".

There are no militant groups active in Brunei and unlike in neighboring South East Asian states, Bruneian Muslims seem not to have joined the Islamic State group to fight in countries like Syria and Iraq. However, Islam is becoming increasingly conservative, limiting the space for non-Muslim Bruneian citizens. Therefore, the lack of militant groups does not mean Christians are not under pressure.

The political landscape

The sultan is ruling as absolute monarch, being chief of state, but also concurrently prime minister, finance minister, minister of the interior as well as of defence and head of religion. Hence, all power is concentrated in his hands. Brunei people deeply respect the sultan.

The sultan introduced obligatory Islamic religious studies for all schools. But more importantly, he announced the [successive introduction](#) of Sharia in criminal law, the so called "Hudud" law, in October 2013. In 2014, Brunei enacted the new Sharia Penal Code, which is to apply also for non-Muslims, and which includes offences carrying the death penalty. The 2nd phase was supposed to be implemented in 2015 but was delayed. In March 2018, the implementation of the second phase of [Sharia penal law](#) was finally announced but it is still unclear how this is to be carried out and implemented by the authorities.

The socio-economic landscape

Brunei saw a growth in GDP of 2.5% in the first quarter of 2018. Nonetheless, the country needs to diversify its economy in order to give more of its citizens a good future perspective, especially the younger generation. Although the development plan "Vision Brunei 2035" aiming to expand various economic sectors has been published, there is little to show for it so far. Rather than focus on efforts to strengthen sectors outside the oil and gas industry, Brunei has chosen to produce even more oil. With an estimated 70-80% of the country's citizens employed by the government or government-linked institutions (as reported by FT Confidential Research), there is limited hope for an internally-

driven economic expansion. This is the main reason for the younger generation to increasingly look for employment opportunities abroad.

Restrictions are gradually being imposed on the whole population. For instance, during Ramadan all restaurants (including non-Muslim establishments) must close. Also, all restaurants (including inside hotels) must close every Friday from 12 noon to 2pm during Friday prayers. Additionally, every day at 5pm the whole country comes to a standstill. Muslims and non-Muslims alike must stop whatever they are doing to allow time for the Islamic prayer ritual.

Concluding remarks

Out of fear that Muslims could be led astray, Christmas celebrations were banned from 2015 onwards in the whole of Brunei, with the exception of church buildings. The ban includes the use of religious symbols such as crosses, lighting candles, putting up Christmas trees, singing religious songs in public and sending Christmas greetings. Punishment for violation is a five-year prison sentence. The growing limitations make it clear to churches that especially the young generation needs to grow up with a strong Christian faith. A particular challenge for churches is that young people are increasingly leaving the country to find opportunities abroad.

External Links - WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Brunei

- Recent country history: 2018
<https://borneobulletin.com.bn/next-phase-of-syariah-penal-code-underway/>
- The political landscape: successive introduction
<http://www.asianewsnet.net/news-58906.html>
- The political landscape: Sharia penal law
<https://borneobulletin.com.bn/next-phase-of-syariah-penal-code-underway/>

WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

How many Christians?

Pop 2018	Christians	Chr%
434,000	57,400	13.2

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

How did Christians get there?

Random missionary activities by Portuguese traders in the 16th century largely failed and it was as late as 1846 that the "Borneo Church Mission" was founded and an Anglican church congregation established. The Roman Catholic Church has been present in the country for more than a century; independent Protestant churches came later.

What church networks exist today?

Church networks: Brunei	Christians	%
Orthodox	0	0.0
Catholic	26,300	45.8
Protestant	12,700	22.1
Independent	17,100	29.8
Unaffiliated	1,400	2.4
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
Total	57,500	100.2
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	7,800	13.6
Renewalist movement	9,500	16.6

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: Believers 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.

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

Three Roman Catholic and two Anglican churches are officially recognized. Several unrecognized Protestant congregations exist. The process of registration is very difficult and even for existing churches it is next to impossible to get permission for building extensions, let alone to plant new congregations. Other denominations include the Borneo Evangelical Church, the Methodist Church and the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

Religious context

Religious Context: Brunei	Numbers	%
Christians	57,400	13.2
Muslim	247,000	56.9
Hindu	3,800	0.9
Buddhist	43,200	10.0
Ethnoreligionist	43,900	10.1
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	200	0.0
Atheist	140	0.0
Agnostic	5,200	1.2
Other	33,310	7.7

OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

According to the World Christian Database 2018, Muslims (mostly Sunni) make up 56.9% of the population. The population is ethnically homogenous but, like neighboring Malaysia, it also has a sizeable Chinese and a smaller Indian community.

Notes on the current situation

Sultan Hassanal holds ultimate executive authority as he is also the country's prime minister, minister of finance, and minister of defense. There are no popular elections and the Legislative Council functions in a purely consultative capacity. He is held in high esteem by his citizens, as could be seen in the celebrations of his 50th crown anniversary in 2017. However, the social contract on which the country is based (i.e. the sultan will care for the provision of welfare and jobs and Brunei's citizens will not make any demands for change) is becoming increasingly challenged.

Due to a mix of growing hostility towards Christians and economic reasons, more and more of the Christian youth are contemplating a future abroad.

WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

With a score of 63 points, Brunei ranked 36th in WWL 2019.

What type of persecution dominates?

Islamic oppression: Brunei is an Islamic nation and Sharia law was fully implemented even before the country's independence in 1984. The government is Islamizing the partly Christian, partly animist tribal people through supporting Islamic missionary work.

Dictatorial paranoia: All important political positions are held by the ruling sultan. His Islamic conservatism leaves Christians insecure about their future and as second-class citizens.

Who is driving persecution?

Policies that favor Muslims over other religions are legally executed and enforced by all government officers in all sectors of the country. Muslim and ethnic group leaders are able to put pressure on the Christian minority by exercising their significant influence on the sultan, who is considered the protector and defender of the Malay race and Islam. Family members and neighbors can easily bring converts and churches into trouble by simply reporting them to the official security department. The authorities monitor and place restrictions on all churches (including registered ones). The long awaited implementation of the second phase of the Sharia Penal Law in March 2018 adds insecurity for Christians, however, as of now, it is unclear how Christians will be affected.

What it results in

Converts from Islam suffer persecution as conversion is considered illegal and everything will be done to bring them back to their original faith. Non-traditional Christian communities cannot be registered as churches, but have to be registered as companies, societies, or family centers. As such, they are treated as secular organizations and are required to submit their financial and operational reports to the government every year. The whole of society (Christians included) is affected by the continuing introduction of Sharia laws as well as by the tightening economic situation, which prevents the authorities from being so generous with payouts to quell dissatisfaction.

Violence

The following table is based on reported cases. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures.

Brunei	Reporting period	Christians killed	Christians attacked	Christians arrested	Churches attacked	Christian-owned houses and shops attacked
WWL 2019	01 Nov 2017 - 31 Oct 2018	0	2	0	0	0
WWL 2018	01 Nov 2016 - 31 Oct 2017	0	0	0	0	0

Christians killed refers to the number of Christians killed for faith-related reasons (including state-sanctioned executions). Christians attacked refers to the number of Christians abducted, raped or otherwise sexually harassed, forced into marriage

to non-Christians or otherwise physically or mentally abused (including beatings and death-threats) for faith-related reasons. Christians arrested refers to the number of Christians detained without trial or sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment or similar things for faith-related reasons. Churches attacked refers to the number of churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons. Christian-owned houses and shops attacked refers to the number of houses of Christians or other property (including shops and businesses of Christians) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons.

Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period

- As conversion from Islam is strictly opposed by Bruneian laws, converts to Christianity will be separated from their spouse and children, and their spouse will be forced to divorce their partner. If converts are identified as such by the security department, they are threatened to make them recant their faith.
- Some Christians and members of other minority groups are not allowed official citizenship. This leads to a large group of stateless residents who are disadvantaged in many respects.
- Especially young people are leaving the country as they lack perspectives for the future. This affects churches as well and potential next generation leadership is becoming scarce.
- The persecution of Christians in Brunei hardly involves any violence.

WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 63 points, Brunei ranked 36th in WWL 2019. The decrease in one point compared to the WWL 2018 score reflects a stable, but still difficult situation for Christians in the country. The average pressure is very high but the score for violence is very low. Controlling, watching and spying upon Christians is deemed more important by the authorities than exerting force.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines: Brunei	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Very strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	EA	Not at all
Denominational protectionism	DPR	Not at all
Communist and post - Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Very strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Not at all

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

Islamic oppression (Very strong):

Brunei is an Islamic nation, based on an ideology called “Malay Islamic Monarchy” or MIB (Melayu Islam Beraja). This form of government is claimed to be the fairest for all people in the country, whether they are Muslims or not. The sultan has favored Brunei government democratization (although Brunei is still far from becoming a real democracy) and declared himself prime minister and president. Brunei wants to be a center of Islamic excellence: Sharia law was fully implemented in civil and religious affairs for all Muslims even before the country’s independence in 1984 and the government follows a plan of Islamization among the partly Christian, partly animist tribal people in supporting the so-called *dawah* movement (Islamic evangelism). As the US State Department’s Country Report for 2017 states: “The government offered incentives to prospective converts to Islam and the Shāfi’i school, especially those from indigenous communities in rural areas, including help with housing, welfare assistance, or help to perform the Hajj. During the year, Hajj participants received designer luggage from the government. The government gave presentations on the benefits of converting to Islam that received extensive press coverage in state-influenced media.” By decree, the import of Bibles and the public celebration of Christmas are banned. Christian pastors and workers are facing a multitude of limitations due to Islamization and the prevailing MIB ideology and both native and foreign Christians have been targets of aggressive Islamization. According to Islamic Dawah Centre statistics, 409 people embraced Islam nationwide in 2017, while 200 embraced Islam in the first five months of 2018. Statistics concerning conversions to Islam (as well as individual cases) are widely reported in the media.

Dictatorial paranoia (Very strong):

The sultans have held absolute power in the country for over 600 years. All important positions are held by the ruling sultan; he acts as prime minister, finance minister, minister of the interior, minister of foreign affairs and trade, defense minister and head of religion. People deeply revere and respect him and any criticism is unthinkable. Since citizens value him so highly, the sultan is not blamed for the current tough economic situation. His rule has not implied any danger to Christians so far, but his Islamic conservatism was shown in 2016 when he criticized authorities for their failure to implement the second phase of Sharia law (i.e. the criminal rules) which was delayed until March 2018 (see below). Therefore, conservative Islam serves both as state ideology backed by the ruler and as a means to control the population, leaving Christians as second-class citizens at best and insecure about their future.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of Persecution: Brunei	IO	RN	EA	DPR	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG	-	-	-	-	-	VERY STRONG	-
Government officials	Strong	-	-	-	-	-	Strong	-
Ethnic group leaders	Medium	-	-	-	-	-	Medium	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong	-	-	-	-	-	Strong	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Weak	-	-	-	-	-	Weak	-
One's own (extended) family	Very strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Political parties	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Organized crime cartels or networks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

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

Drivers of Islamic oppression:

Since all MIB policies (which favor Muslims over other religions) are legally executed and enforced by government authorities in all sectors of the country, government officials are the main drivers of persecution. Religious (i.e. Islamic) and Malay leaders exercise great influence on the sultan, who is considered the protector and defender of the Malay race and Islam, and thereby put pressure on the Christian minority. Family members and neighbors can easily bring converts to Christianity and churches into trouble by simply reporting them to the security department KDN, which is frequently happening.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia:

All religious and ethnic group leaders, government authorities and the vast majority of citizens would never think of not supporting the sultan. Due to the increasing economic challenges and the cut-back in beneficial policies, paranoia in the leadership is slowly growing nevertheless.

Context

On 1 May 2014 Sultan Hassanal introduced the first of three phases in the adoption of a penal code based on Islamic law, or *Sharia*. The first set of regulations allows fines and prison sentences for “crimes” such as pregnancies outside of wedlock, propagating religions other than Islam, and not attending mandatory Friday prayers. The second phase, set to introduce harsher punishments such as floggings and amputations for property offenses, was supposed to be introduced in May 2015 but was postponed, causing Sultan Hassanal to call this delay “unacceptable” at a meeting with the Brunei Islamic Religious Council. The implementation of the second phase of [Sharia penal law](#) was finally announced in March 2018, but what this exactly means, especially for non-Muslims, remains to be seen. It seems that the threat of implementation is already strong enough to create fear among non-Muslim citizens and keep them under control.

In 1929, when huge reserves of oil and natural gas were discovered in Brunei, the ruling sultan used that enormous income to make his tiny sultanate one of the world’s most economically prosperous and socially secure societies. Its citizens are given free medical service, free education, housing benefits, low interest housing and are exempt from personal income tax. Nearly 96% of Brunei’s exports are oil, gas and related products. At its current pace of extraction, Brunei has enough oil left for only another 22 years, depending on the level of oil prices. Even if reserves last longer, the costs for exploration are increasing. Brunei is currently the only country in SEA facing economic decline. In an effort towards diversification, in 2008 the sultan unveiled Vision Brunei 2035, which aims to reduce its reliance on oil and gas and increase private-sector employment. The sultanate has started making attempts to diversify its economy with a string of major international trade agreements, but so far with mixed results at best. Brunei also appears well-cushioned by substantial fiscal and current account surpluses. Vision Brunei 2035 plans to transform the nation into an “Islamic Singapore”, where the accomplishments of Brunei’s well-educated and highly skilled citizens will receive international recognition. However, since parts of Sharia law will also apply to non-Muslims (who account for roughly 33% of Brunei's population), it is feared that many better-educated Bruneians will opt to migrate. And anyway, since places like Dubai already exist, there would seem to be hardly need for another “Islamic Singapore”.

Christian communities and how they are affected

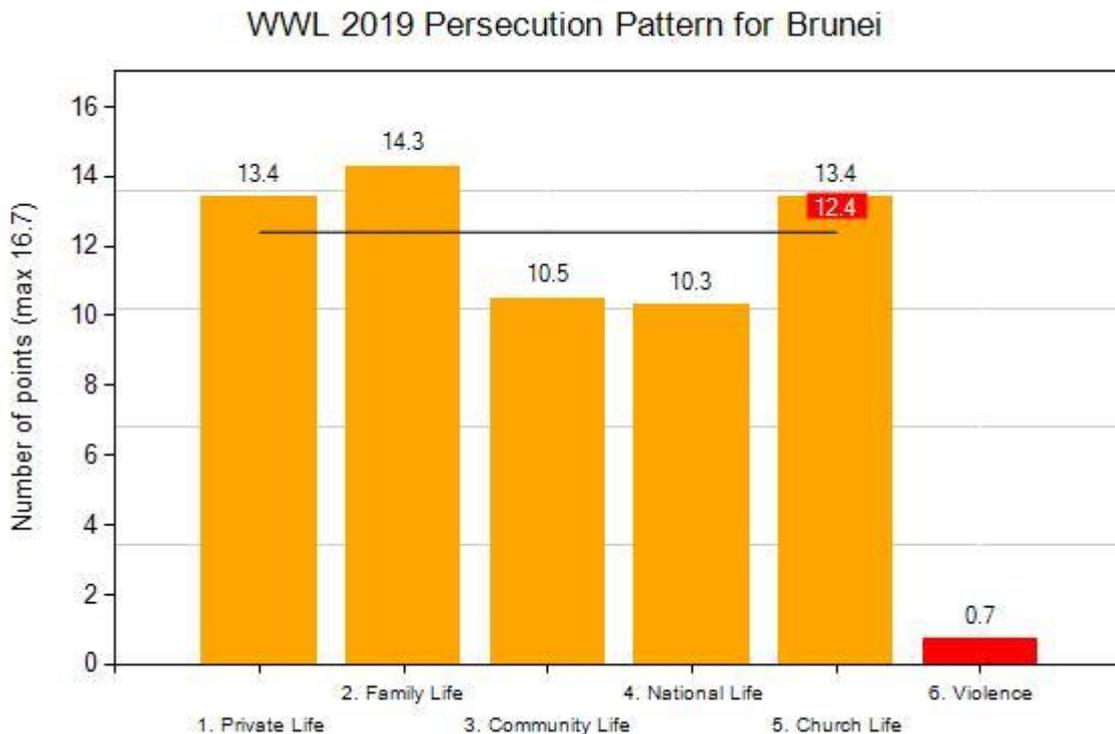
Communities of expatriate Christians: Expatriate Christians are not forced into isolation. This category is therefore not scored in WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities: These communities, such as the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church, are increasingly facing hostility and have to exercise more and more caution as they are strictly monitored, though they are still less affected by persecution than the newer Protestant groups and convert communities.

Converts to Christianity: Converts from a Muslim background suffer strong pressure from family and friends as conversion is considered illegal.

Non-traditional Christian communities: Evangelical and Pentecostal churches know that they and their meetings (both in their private and church life) are being closely watched by the authorities and surrounding community and live their Christian life accordingly.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence



The WWL 2019 Persecution pattern for Brunei shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Brunei remains at a very high level but decreased from 12.6 in WWL 2018 to 12.4 in WWL 2019.
- Pressure is extreme and strongest in the *Family sphere of life*, and very high in the *Church* and *Private spheres of life*. Pressure on converts is especially acute in the *Private* and *Family spheres*, while all Christians experience pressure in the *National* and *Church spheres*. This pressure is fueled by the implementation of Sharia law and threat of implementing the Penal law phase, getting more acute as the legal prerequisites for implementation are now given.
- The score for violence against Christians further decreased from 0.9 in WWL 2018 to 0.7 in WWL 2019; the persecution of Christians never has been very violent in Brunei.

Private sphere:

Bruneian laws do not allow Malay Muslims to leave Islam. Strict punishments are imposed on those who do so. Section 112(1) of the Sharia Penal Code of Brunei stipulates that a Muslim who turns away from Islam is punishable with death, or with imprisonment for a term not exceeding thirty years and corporal punishment, depending on the type of evidence. If a Sharia court is satisfied that the accused has repented, the court must order an acquittal. Any private statement about Christianity can be construed as proselytizing for the Christian faith, so even wearing a cross is done with much more caution than in previous years. Reportedly, it is even quite common for Chevrolet cars' logos (which resemble a cross) to be painted black. It is very risky for a convert from Islam to own any Christian

materials as it could expose their Christian identity. In these circumstances meeting with other Christians is particularly difficult for Christians with a Muslim background, (but also difficult for other Christians as they are monitored), since it is dangerous for the converts themselves and could endanger all attending the meeting. Spreading Christian "propaganda" to followers of other faiths or to members of the tribal groups, who are often adherents of ethnic religions, is prohibited and carries a penalty of up to five years in prison, a fine of up to 20,000 Brunei dollars, or both. Christians, especially church leaders, are under permanent surveillance by the authorities. It is also important to note that there is a law in Brunei that prohibits the unauthorized gathering of more than 5 people.

Family sphere:

Convert parents find themselves in a dilemma as they do not dare to raise their children according to their faith as their children could accidentally expose the family's Christian faith. No school, whether private or public, is allowed to teach Christian subjects and all students in primary and secondary schools are required by law to study Islam (or, more accurately, the national MIB philosophy). One pastor commented that some Christian students can recite the MIB principles better than the 10 commandments. The Sultan addressed the matter of education in his Titah in July 2018, saying that Islamic history should be made a compulsory subject in all schools and learning centers. He has further said that the "education system must not leave out religion and religion must be its axis. Understand our religion well so as to grow love towards it. The way to understand it is of course by studying, especially studying its history". This applies to all schoolchildren, not just Muslims. If Christians with a Muslim background are discovered, they will be isolated and put under pressure to recant their faith. If married, a convert will be separated from his or her spouse, who in turn will be forced to divorce.

Community sphere:

Christians with a Muslim background are always under strong pressure from their family, friends and neighbors to give up their Christian faith. Especially the Malay speaking churches are under serious threat and are always monitored, resulting in a high level of fear among the church leaders. Everyone is aware of the monitoring and surveillance that is being done. Sometimes even in the churches there will be informers (sometimes other Christians) sent by the authorities. The authorities extract information from local citizens about church activities. Furthermore, Christians are discriminated against in their business lives. With Sharia law in place, the government is gradually implementing more rules and restrictions. Since 2014, public Christmas celebrations are banned. There are also strict regulations and penalties during Ramadan concerning the observance of Muslim prayer times both for Muslims and non-Muslims. The ministry of education requires courses on Islam and MIB in all schools, with non-Muslims exempted from some religious requirements. The government reported that many non-Muslim children elected to take courses on Islam. Reportedly, those applying for government-funded scholarships believed having such courses could be advantageous (according to the US State Department's 2018 IRF report). Due to economic restraints, the number of university scholarships has gone down. With numbers decreasing, many Christians feel they have even less chance of getting a place at university in Brunei.

Around 50% of conversions to Islam happen among expatriates and are celebrated in newspapers nationwide; converts are given many incentives including sums of money. However, in many cases, pressure is exerted as well, e.g. Catholic Filipinos convert to Islam in exchange for work permits; Indian blue collar workers are asked to embrace Islam in exchange for work permits and other fringe benefits. Due to the difficult economic situation, there are now more restrictions for non-Bruneian company

owners. In the WWL 2019 reporting period, 80 foreign nationals holding immigration passes had their passes cancelled, while 54 more people are under investigation.

National sphere:

As mentioned above, Sharia Penal Code (SPC) was introduced in May 2014. This legal code not only regulates crimes like murder and theft but also affects the public display of Christian symbols. Implementation was finally announced in March 2018. However, as the US State Department's Country Report for 2017 notes: "The second phase of the SPC, which would include amputating the hands of thieves, is not scheduled to come into effect until one year after the publication of a Sharia Courts Criminal Procedure Code (CPC). To date, the government has not published the CPC. Phase three of the SPC, which includes punishments – stoning to death for rape, adultery, or sodomy, and execution for apostasy, contempt of the Prophet Muhammad, or insult of the Quran – is scheduled to be implemented two years after the publication of the CPC." As long as the CPC is not published, Sharia Penal Law is still pending. A draft of the CPC was published in March 2018.

Registering a conversion to Christianity is out of the question. Christians are often subjected to discriminatory treatment when dealing with the authorities. In many cases, when permanent residents with a Chinese, Christian or Buddhist background apply for citizenship, they face rejection or delay, but no official reason is given by the officials. The country's Islamization activities, especially among Christians, are strongly publicized and the conversion of Christians to Islam is highly praised in the media. Every Thursday from 8:00-9:30am, all government offices have time reserved for Islamic prayer and reading the Quran and everyone is required to participate. Underground churches, of course, never display religious symbols, but even Christians from recognized churches are careful not to put up anything in public, since this may be regarded as propagating the Christian faith with the aim of converting Muslims, which violates the new Sharia laws. Thus, Christians are also afraid of wearing anything that publicly expresses their faith, like a cross on a necklace.

Church sphere:

All church activities are monitored, with registered churches being particularly affected by government informers. These informers are sometimes Christians themselves, who are offered bribes. Those churches which were registered in the colonial era still have legal status today. However, the government does not allow any further churches to be registered. Even registered churches face problems: In the capital city, Bandar Seri Begawan, the government implements zoning restrictions on Sundays and all roads leading to the Catholic and Anglican churches are closed for "recreational" purposes from 6 am to 1 pm. Only those with valid permits are allowed to enter the area near the two main churches. There is a *fatwa* that bans non-Muslim worship buildings from being renovated or built, tacitly endorsed by the sultan. Consequently, church buildings deteriorate further and further, but some churches have renovated their buildings without permission. Despite these challenges, churches stand firm in their Christian faith, although one challenge is that many young Christians are leaving the country causing worry about filling future church leadership roles.

Convert fellowships and non-traditional churches cannot register and their meetings have sometimes been disturbed by the police. The distribution of Bibles and other Christian materials is punishable under Sharia law; anyone sending or delivering publications relating to religion other than Islam to Muslims (or persons having no religion) that was not requested by the person is liable to be sentenced to up to 6 months imprisonment and/or receive a fine of up to \$2,000 BND. Churches are allowed to sell Christian materials to members of their congregations privately. Using mass media to present a faith other than Islam is forbidden: Anyone propagating a religion other than Islam is liable to be punished to up to 5 years imprisonment and receive a fine of up to \$20,000 BND.

No Christian activities are allowed in public. In December 2014, the government warned all Christian communities not to hold public Christmas celebrations and this ban is still in force. Because Sunday services are monitored closely by government officials, pastors (especially Bahasa Malay pastors) are very careful not to offend the government or the royal family in their weekly sermon. Published materials are also subject to scrutiny and importing Christian materials is not allowed. The movements and activities of church leaders in particular are monitored and it is difficult to train church members or to provide theological studies.

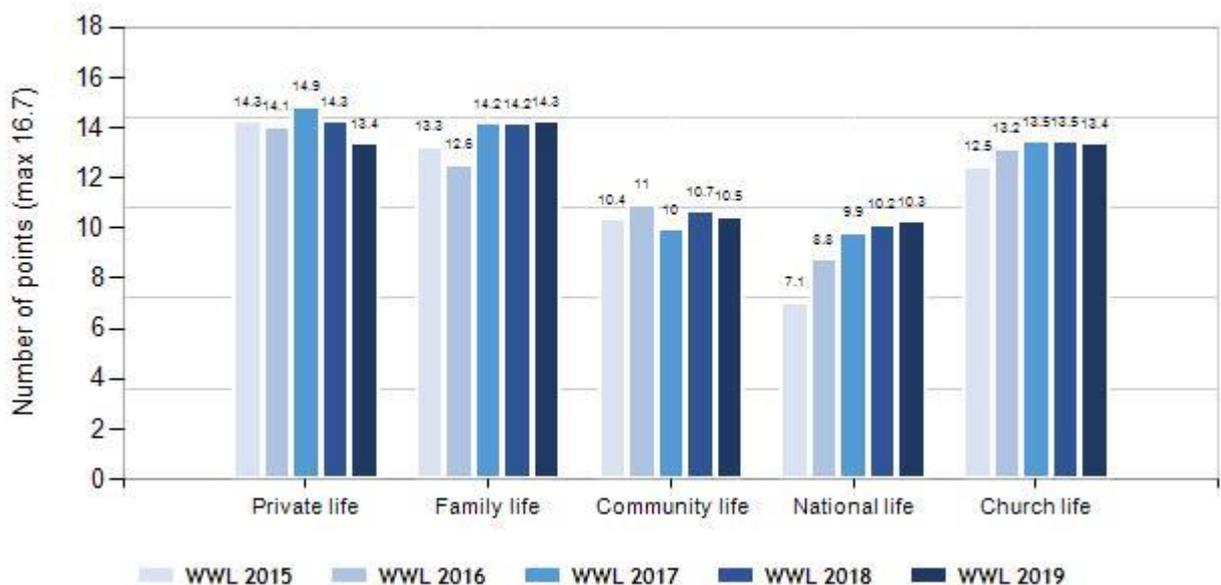
Violence:

The score for violence is at a very low level, reflecting the fact that persecution has never been very violent in Brunei. However, it is enough to cause some Christians to leave the country and for converts to go into hiding. Also, Christian women are occasionally forced into marriages. For a summary of the statistics on violence and examples, please see the Short and Simple Persecution Profile section above.

5 Year trends

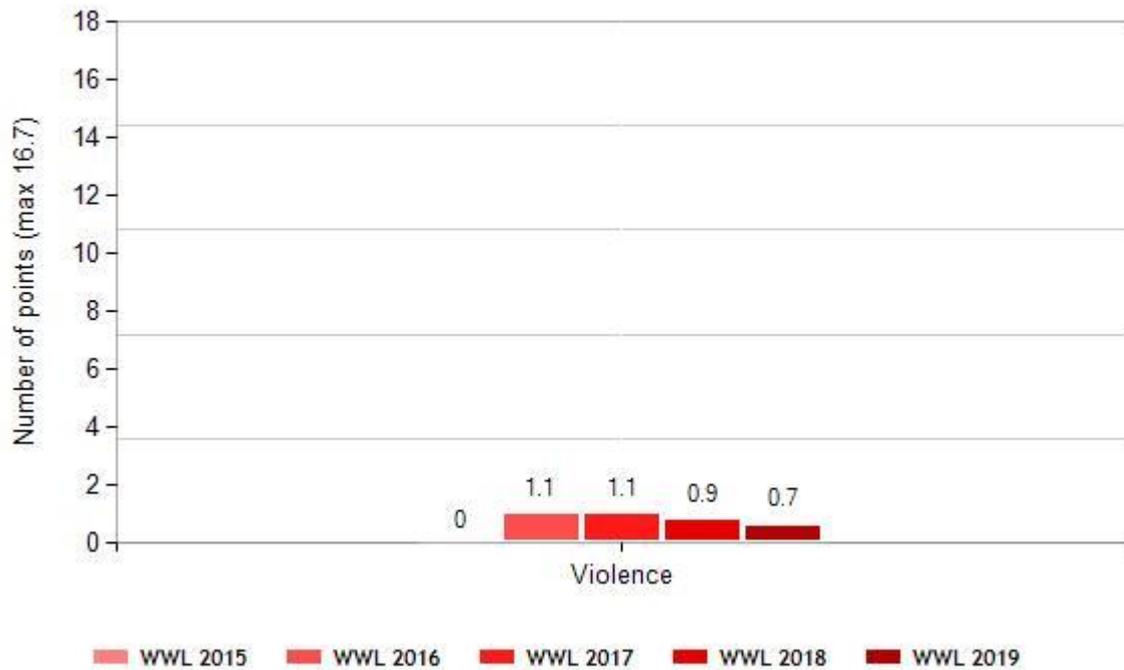
The three charts below depict the levels of pressure and violence targeting Christians over the last five reporting periods. Chart 1 shows that the WWL 2017 reporting period saw increases in pressure in the *Private* and *Family life spheres* and also in the *National* and *Church life spheres*. These rises (which have since stabilized in *Family* and *Church life*) reflect the period of preparation for the implementation of the second phase of Sharia Law in Brunei. The score for average pressure as shown in Chart 2 has always been at a very high level and seems to have levelled off (at the 12.4-12.6 mark) for the last three reporting periods. Chart 3 shows that the violence score decreased in the last two reporting periods. This can partly be explained by the difficulty of obtaining reports (especially concerning the treatment of converts), but in general reflects the fact that persecution never has been particularly violent in Brunei.

WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Profile for Brunei (Spheres of life)



WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Pattern history: Brunei	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2019	12.4
2018	12.6
2017	12.5
2016	11.9
2015	11.5

WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Profile for Brunei (Violence)



Gender specific persecution

Persecution in Brunei does not distinguish according to gender. Due to the ever stricter implementation of Islamic laws, however, women are forced to wear a hijab and are punished by the religious authorities when they refuse to wear one. This does not apply to known Christian families, but to converts. Women and girls are usually disowned by the family when they convert. The family often isolates them and Imams are called to make them recant.

Persecution of other religious minorities

Muslim groups seen as deviant - such as Shiite and Ahmadis - are banned and persecuted. Atheism is also not allowed. The activities of Hindus have been restricted. The only Hindu temple in the country is located in the British military barracks of the Gurkha regiment. Sikh and Buddhist communities also visit the temple to pray. Chinese residents have been banned from celebrating their new year with the dragon dance.

Future outlook

The political outlook: The government of Brunei needs to make some difficult choices. The comfortable days with the ruling sultan caring for all his subjects will soon be over, even if the oil price recovers. Until now, his government provides free medical services and subsidizes goods such as rice

and housing. There are no school fees for state schools, and citizens of Brunei do not have to pay income tax. But since the oil and gas reserves may only last for just one more generation or less, the government needs to start thinking about alternatives. Until now, it has [not been particularly successful](#) as it seems that the world does not need an "Islamic Singapore" (or already has one in United Arab Emirates' Dubai or Qatar's Doha). The comparably high oil price in the WWL 2019 reporting period has helped Brunei bridge the strongest economic pressure.

The outlook for Christians - through the lens of:

- *Islamic oppression and Dictatorial paranoia:* The growing economic pressure may lead to increased insecurity and even unrest in the country, especially as the government is not employing more staff. By pushing for the introduction of Sharia law (and by issuing a ban on public Christian celebrations), the sultan is evidently relying on a conservative brand of Islam - certainly out of conviction - but also as a means of keeping his people in check. The influence of *Islamic oppression and Dictatorial paranoia* thus looks set to increase in the future.

Conclusion: The fact that the ruling sultan decided to [close down](#) the popular English-language Brunei Times in November 2016 shows that he is trying (and succeeding) to control media and public reporting more tightly. These efforts may become stronger as the sultan begins to rely more heavily on Chinese investment in improving infrastructure and diversifying the economy. Of course, this comes at a price. Brunei has become the first ASEAN member in 2018 to [relinquish its claims](#) in the South China Sea, so as not to block Chinese investment. In the future, Christians will also face a changing church situation: Young Christians are leaving the country in large numbers, and there is increasing insecurity concerning the implementation of Sharia Penal Code and the development of *Islamic oppression and Dictatorial paranoia*.

External Links - WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

- Context: Sharia penal law
<https://borneobulletin.com.bn/next-phase-of-syariah-penal-code-underway/>
- Future outlook: not been particularly successful
<http://www.atimes.com/article/wells-run-dry-brunei/>
- Future outlook: close down
<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-brunei-media-idUSKBN1320YF>
- Future outlook: relinquish its claims
<https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/brunei-abandons-south-china-sea-claim-for-chinese-finance/>

Additional Reports and Articles

WWR in-depth reports

A selection of in-depth reports is available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/> (password: freedom).

Open Doors article(s) from the region

A selection of articles is available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/articles/> (password freedom).

World Watch Monitor news articles

Use the country search function at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/>

Recent country developments

Use the country search function at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/> (password: freedom).