

FINAL WWL 2019 COUNTRY DOSSIER

EGYPT

LEVEL 3/EMBARGO

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

Contents

Introduction.....	3
Copyright Notice	3
Introduction.....	3
WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Egypt.....	4
Link for general background information	4
Recent country history	4
The religious landscape	4
The political landscape.....	4
The socio-economic landscape	5
Concluding remarks.....	5
External Links - WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Egypt	6
WWL 2019: Church History and Facts.....	7
How many Christians?.....	7
How did Christians get there?.....	7
What church networks exist today?	7
Religious context	7
Notes on the current situation.....	8
External Links - WWL 2019: Church History and Facts	8
WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile	9
Introduction.....	9
What type of persecution dominates?	9
Who is driving persecution?.....	9
What it results in	9
Violence	9
Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period	10
External Links - WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile	10
WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics	12

Introduction.....	12
Position on World Watch List (WWL).....	12
Persecution engines	12
Drivers of persecution	13
Context	14
Christian communities and how they are affected.....	14
Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence	15
5 Year trends	17
Gender specific persecution.....	18
Persecution of other religious minorities	19
Future outlook.....	19
External Links - WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics	20
Additional Reports and Articles	21
WWR in-depth reports	21
Open Doors article(s) from the region	21
World Watch Monitor news articles.....	21
Recent country developments.....	21

Introduction

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Introduction

World Watch List Egypt	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2019	76	16
WWL 2018	70	17
WWL 2017	65	21
WWL 2016	64	22
WWL 2015	61	23

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 Egypt

Link for general background information

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13313370>

Recent country history

After serving as president for three decades (from 1981 to 2011), Hosni Mubarak was forced to step down after almost three weeks of intense protests on Cairo's Tahrir Square, thus becoming one of the dictators of the Middle East swept away during the Arab Spring. The demonstrators put forward demands for more political freedom and expressed the discontent of the population with the country's social and economic situation. In June 2012, after a brief transition during which the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces ruled the country, Mohamed Morsi, a politician who used to be senior member of the Muslim Brotherhood, won the presidential election (gaining 52% of the votes). Once in power, he assumed dictatorial executive powers that [alienated](#) many Egyptians. Popular demonstrations were organized by a group called the *Tamarrod* which enjoyed the [support](#) of the police, the army, businessmen and also prominent Islamic and Christian Coptic religious figures. Ultimately, the army [intervened](#) and ousted President Morsi alleging that he had failed to respond satisfactorily to the demands of the Egyptian people. The army adopted its own transition road map which culminated in the adoption of a new constitution and the holding of new parliamentary and presidential elections.

At the end of the process, Field-Marshal Abdul Fattah al-Sisi emerged as the new Egyptian strong man. Al-Sisi was the minister of defense during Morsi's rule and he was the principal figure behind the ousting of Morsi. He was hailed by some as a hero who saved Egypt from the clutches of the Muslim Brotherhood, while others contend that his rule is a sure sign of Egypt's return to the old days of autocracy backed by the army. Once the new constitution was adopted, al-Sisi ran for president as a civilian and - given the personality cult that has been built around him prior to the election - it was not surprising that he [won the election](#) with an overwhelming majority. Since al-Sisi's ascent to power there has been a large scale crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood. In March 2018, al-Sisi was [re-elected](#) with 97% of the votes. This huge win is a clear indication of how effectively all opposition has been ousted during his first term.

The religious landscape

Islam is the most dominant religion in Egypt. About 90% of the Egyptian population is Muslim and virtually all Egyptian Muslims are Sunni Muslims. Although Christianity has deep roots in Egypt going back centuries before the advent of Islam in North Africa, Christians are often marginalized and treated as second class citizens in modern Egypt. Especially with the rise of more radical interpretations of Islam, the pressure on Christians has been increasing over the past few decades. President al-Sisi has called upon scholars at Al-Azhar University (considered to be the oldest and the most prestigious center of advanced Islamic studies among Sunni Muslims) to fight radicalism and introduce reforms in Islamic teaching. In rural and impoverished areas in particular, radical imams and less tolerant brands of Islam are growing in prominence. The government is making efforts to reverse this trend, but has not been very successful so far. In the WWL 2019 reporting period the environment remained hostile for Christians in Egypt and many Copts have been the victims of violence or had to face discrimination.

The political landscape

Since al-Sisi's rise to power, many of the [Muslim Brotherhood's senior leaders](#) and members, including Morsi, have been detained, prosecuted and sentenced to death or life imprisonment. These measures

have deeply polarized Egyptian society since the Muslim Brotherhood is popular among a large segment of Egyptian society. While President al-Sisi is trying to normalize the political situation in Egypt and to recover the Egyptian economy with financial aid from the Sheikdoms of the Arabian Gulf, at the same time he has to face the challenges of stabilizing the security situation and leading a [war against radical Islamic groups](#) active in the north Sinai desert.

All in all, it seems that Egypt is in a way back to square one living in the days of Hosni Mubarak. One cannot help but feel a sense of *déjà vu* when noting that another military strongman is once again cracking down on the Muslim Brotherhood and facing an armed insurgency by Islamic militants. President al-Sisi's regime wants to project itself as a guarantor of stability, order and security for Christians. The administration seems determined to tackle the increasing Islamization of the state that accelerated under the leadership of President Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood. At the same time, there is a risk that segments of the Muslim Brotherhood and their supporters, who feel aggrieved by their loss of power and the persecution they are facing, might become more radicalized and join underground militant Islamic groups in great numbers. Such developments could lead to a further polarization of society in Egypt and could pose a serious risk to the nation's stability and the security of Christian Egyptians in the long run.

President al-Sisi's strong-armed tactics have not been limited to Islamist political groups. He has also cracked down on various dissident and opposition groups. He has also sacked or detained senior ranking officers in the army and security establishment when they exhibited political ambitions. As a result, in the presidential election held in March 2018, President al-Sisi won with an overwhelming majority of 96.9% of valid votes [cast](#).

The socio-economic landscape

The revolution against Mubarak's regime began out of discontent with the social-economic situation of the country, promoted mostly by the urban youth. Around 30% of the population [lives under the poverty line](#) of \$2 a day and Egypt is also one of nine countries with the highest illiteracy rates in the world, with adult illiteracy at about 26%, [according to BTI](#). President al-Sisi's administration has embarked upon an ambitious plan to revitalize the Egyptian economy and create much needed economic growth and jobs. Initially the government's plan found many international backers, especially from the oil-rich Gulf States, but the political and security crises in Egypt and the surrounding region seem to have frustrated these efforts.

Concluding remarks

Egypt is an extremely important country in the region due to its strategic location, its territorial and population size and because of its historical and diplomatic influence. The church in Egypt is also of critical importance since the Christian presence in Egypt is the largest surviving Christian population in the region. Throughout the 20th century and beyond, it seems that competing visions of the Egyptian state have been vying for dominance in the country. One vision (advanced by the army and political establishment) puts more emphasize on nationalism as opposed to religion, while on the other hand Islamists (including the Muslim Brotherhood) want to make religion the foundation and central element of Egyptian identity. Both visions have offered Egyptian Christians little by way of rights and security and as the competition between these two camps unfolds, Egyptian Christians are often caught in the political crossfire and forced to make difficult choices. The high level of illiteracy, economic stagnation and demographic pressure also means that - regardless of the political dispensation in the country - Egyptian society continues to be susceptible to the influence of the most radical and intolerant versions of Islam that are particularly appealing to the youth and the poor.

External Links - WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Egypt

- Recent country history: alienated
<https://pomeps.org/2013/07/23/egypts-political-reset/>
- Recent country history: support
<https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/marching-in-circles-egypt-s-dangerous-second-transition.pdf>
- Recent country history: intervened
http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/egypts-morsi-defiant-under-pressure-as-deadline-looms/2013/07/03/28fda81c-e39d-11e2-80eb-3145e2994a55_story.html
- Recent country history: won the election
<https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/marching-in-circles-egypt-s-dangerous-second-transition.pdf>
- Recent country history: re-elected
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/02/sisi-poised-to-declare-landslide-victory-in-egypt-election>
- The political landscape: Muslim Brotherhood's senior leaders
<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/08/01/us-egypt-protests-islamists-idUSBRE97006520130801?feedType=RSS&feedName=topNews>
- The political landscape: war against radical Islamic groups
<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/04/egyptian-army-military-campaign-sinai-affects-women-children.html>
- The political landscape: cast
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/02/sisi-poised-to-declare-landslide-victory-in-egypt-election>
- The socio-economic landscape: lives under the poverty line
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2046.html>
- The socio-economic landscape: according to BTI
<https://www.bti-project.org/en/reports/country-reports/detail/itc/EGY/>

WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

How many Christians?

Pop 2018	Christians	Chr%
99,376,000	9937600	10.0

Source: Open Doors estimate for number of Christians (and %age) 2018.

How did Christians get there?

Christianity has very close connections to Egypt going back to the birth of Jesus Christ (Matthew 2:14-15). Traditionally, it is believed that it was the Apostle Mark who established the [first church](#) in Alexandria. Egypt was also among the first places that [Christian monasticism](#) emerged as an important part of church life. Despite being cut off from other Christian countries for centuries, Coptic Christians remained resilient and autonomous: "Ever since it broke with the Eastern Church in the 5th century (due to disagreements on the nature of the Trinity), the Coptic Orthodox Church has maintained its autonomy, and its beliefs and ritual have remained basically [unchanged](#)." However, the Arab invasion in the 7th century disrupted the growth of Christianity in Egypt.

As related in the Encyclopedia of Protestantism by Melton J.G. (page 2013), the Roman Catholic Church entered Egypt in the 17th century through the missionary activity of the Capuchins and Jesuits. In 1847 the Anglicans began working in the country, followed by the US-based Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church in 1854. Many other independent church groups and missionaries followed, the most notable being the Free Methodist Church in 1899. The wars in 1956 and 1967 interrupted the work of Protestants, many of whom were forced to leave the country as the government became increasingly hostile towards perceived agents of the West.

What church networks exist today?

In addition to the majority Coptic Orthodox Church (one of the oldest churches in the world), there are many other denominations active in the country. [According to the US State Department](#), some of the notable Egyptian churches include: Armenian Apostolic, Catholic (Armenian, Chaldean, Greek, Melkite, Roman, and Syrian), Maronite, Orthodox (Greek and Syrian), Anglican/Episcopalian, Presbyterians, Baptists, Brethren, Open Brethren, Seventh-day Adventists, Revival of Holiness (Nahdat al-Qadaasa), Faith (Al-Eyman), Church of God, Christian Model Church (Al-Mithaal Al-Masihi), Apostolic, Grace (An-Ni'ma), Pentecostal, Apostolic Grace, Church of Christ, Gospel Missionary (Al-Kiraaza bil Ingil), and the Message Church of Holland (Ar-Risaala)). There is also a small community of converts with a Muslim background.

Religious context

Religious Context: Egypt	Numbers	%
Christians	SEE OD ESTIMATE ABOVE	SEE OD ESTIMATE
Muslim	90,840,000	91.4
Hindu	1,500	0.0
Buddhist	890	0.0
Ethnoreligionist	0	0.0
Jewish	100	0.0
Bahai	2,200	0.0
Atheist	90,000	0.1
Agnostic	547,000	0.6

Other	1,900	0.0
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OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.

Source: Numbers and %ages shown are based on WCD estimate: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

Notes on the current situation

Geographically, Christians reside throughout the country, with higher concentrations in Upper Egypt and in the suburbs of Cairo and Alexandria. The Church is under constant pressure and Christians enjoy very limited rights and freedom. Christians in the country face multiple challenges including:

- Violent attacks by Islamic militants targeting Christians and churches
- Discrimination by the surrounding (Islamic) society
- Land theft and dispossession
- Repressive and discriminatory laws imposed by the state
- Arbitrary arrests and detention by the police after Christians have protected their churches against mob violence or after they have been falsely accused of blasphemy.

External Links - WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

- How did Christians get there?: first church
<http://www.coptic.net/EncyclopediaCoptica/>
- How did Christians get there?: Christian monasticism
<http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?ParagraphID=dgk>
- How did Christians get there?: unchanged
<http://www.britannica.com/place/Egypt/Languages#toc43467>
- What church networks exist today?: According to the US State Department
<https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/281224.pdf>

WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

With a score of 76 points, Egypt rose 6 points reaching rank 16 in WWL 2019.

What type of persecution dominates?

Islamic oppression: Islamic culture in Egyptian society causes discrimination and creates an environment in which the state is reluctant to respect and enforce the fundamental rights of Christians. In the family sphere, converts to Christianity face great pressure to renounce their faith. There have been several violent attacks perpetrated by militant Islamic groups targeting Christians.

Ethnic antagonism: Although only some argue that there is an ethnic difference between (Christian) Copts and (Islamic) Arabs, as in many other Arab countries tribal thinking can easily lead to (verbal) violence between groups. In Egypt there have been cases of Muslim mob violence, for example, when Christians seek official recognition for a church building in a local community. Islamic oppression and Ethnic antagonism go hand-in-hand in such cases, leading to an environment in which the Christian minority has to constantly act with care.

Dictatorial paranoia: Basic human rights and democratic pluralism are a low priority for the government, which means that religious freedom for Christians is not fully guaranteed. Speaking up against human rights violations committed by the government would probably lead to a backlash and a further deterioration of the position of Christians within society.

Who is driving persecution?

Christians have been treated as second class citizens since the advent of Islam in the region. Radical imams incite hostility towards Christians. The Islamic State group in particular has vowed to wage war against Christians in Egypt and has staged several violent attacks against Christians in various parts of the country in recent years. Evangelistic events planned by Evangelical Christians face not only opposition from the Muslim side, but in rural areas also from local Orthodox churches. In general, converts from Islam to Christianity will be pressured by their (extended) family to renounce their faith.

What it results in

Christians with a Muslim background have great difficulties in living out their faith since they face enormous pressure from their families to return to Islam. The State also makes it nearly impossible for them to get any official recognition of their conversion. Christians of all backgrounds face difficulty in building churches or finding a place for communal worship. The difficulties come both from state restrictions as well as from communal hostility and mob violence. Christians also face discrimination and abuse, especially Christian women, in their places of work and when they go about their daily life in public spaces.

Violence

Compared to the WWL 2018 reporting period, the number of killings decreased significantly due to less (bomb) attacks on Christians. Nevertheless, at least 17 killings have been reported. Egypt's violence score remained extremely high, reflecting the vulnerable position of Christians in Egypt.

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

Egypt	Reporting period	Christians killed	Christians attacked	Christians arrested	Churches attacked	Christian-owned houses and shops attacked
WWL 2019	01 Nov 2017 - 31 Oct 2018	17	54	17	25	20
WWL 2018	01 Nov 2016 - 31 Oct 2017	128	209	1	7	21

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

- In December 2017, a gunman opened fire in Cairo at a church and a nearby shop owned by Christians. Eleven people died as a result of the [attack](#).
- In July 2018, a mob attacked Christians in a village in Minya, when Muslim residents of the village were angered by a Facebook post they deemed to be blasphemous. The attack turned in to a riot which had to be dispersed with the arrest of 90 people who were trying to attack the homes of Coptic [Christians](#).
- It has been reported that many Christian girls and women [become the victim](#) of sexual harassment, abduction and rape. At least seven cases of abduction were [documented](#) in April 2018 alone.
- Thousands of churches are still waiting to be formally recognized. Requests for official recognition are often answered with [mob violence](#).

External Links - WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: attack
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-security/gunman-kills-11-in-attacks-on-coptic-church-christian-owned-shop-in-egypt-idUSKBN1EN0SX>
- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: Christians
<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/07/egypt-copt-in-court-for-blasphemous-facebook-post-that-led-to-riot/>
- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: become the victim
https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Egypt-silent-epidemic-of-kidnapped-Christian-girls-573614?utm_source=adf+international+alliance+alert+subscribers&utm_term=0_d877f2b466-1d4c411aae-92571149&mc_cid=1d4c411aae&mc_eid=3a1ff44b63
- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: documented
<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/05/egypt-disappearing-coptic-women-and-girls>

- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: mob violence
<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/08/egypt-muslim-mobs-force-closure-of-8-coptic-churches-seeking-official-recognition>

WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 76 points, Egypt rose 6 points reaching rank 16 in WWL 2019. The rise in score was due both to a broader understanding of the situation through new reporting methods and also due to the fact that more violent incidents were registered than in WWL 2018, although the overall number of killings dropped.

Persecution engines

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

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 (Strong):

In Egypt, *Islamic oppression* operates in different ways. Islamic culture sustains a view in Egyptian society whereby Christians are regarded as second-class citizens. This view causes the discrimination of Christians in the political realm and their dealing with the state. It also creates an environment in which the state is reluctant to respect and enforce the fundamental rights of Christians. In the family sphere, converts to Christianity face great pressure to renounce their faith. Christians also face pressure from *Islamic oppression* in their daily lives in their local neighborhood or at work. There have also been several violent attacks perpetrated by militant Islamic groups targeting Christians. Although the activity of such militant groups used to be largely concentrated in Sinai, during the WWL 2019 reporting period the number of attacks perpetrated by such groups in various parts of the country has increased.

Dictatorial paranoia (Strong):

The tradition of authoritarian rule is perhaps the only permanent feature in Egypt's political system, which experienced three regime changes in just three years (2011-2014). All of Egypt's rulers have had an authoritarian government style. In 2011, Mubarak's long dictatorship was ended through massive social protests, which eventually led to the controversial election of the Muslim Brotherhood. The government led by Mohamed Morsi did not behave democratically and was ousted by a national uprising supported by the army in 2013. Currently, Egypt is ruled by a civilian government led by former army chief Abdul Fatah al-Sisi, after a presidential election in May 2014 and reelection in March 2018. This government seems to regard basic human rights and democratic pluralism as a low priority in view

of the huge current economic, political, social and security challenges. In this context, therefore, religious freedom for Christians is not fully guaranteed.

Ethnic antagonism (Strong):

Although only some reason that there is an ethnic difference between (Christian) Copts and (Islamic) Arabs, Christians and Muslims seem to be two different groups. Like in many other Arab countries, tribal thinking strongly influences this group thinking which can easily led to (verbal) violence against the other group. In Egypt for instance, many cases of mob violence happen when Christians try to have a certain benefit, like the official recognition of their church building for example. Islamic oppression and ethnic antagonism seem to mix in such cases; leading to an environment in which the christian minority has to operate carefully.

Drivers of persecution

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

Ordinary people whose views are shaped by intolerant and radical imams are significant drivers of persecution and contribute the lion's share of the pressure that Christians face in their daily lives in their local neighborhoods and at work. Societal hostility and prejudice against Christians are more pronounced in the poorer and rural parts of the country. Radical Islamic preachers who propagate hatred also play a crucial role in sustaining the environment of intolerance and fueling hostility against Christians. Militant Islamic groups (such as the Islamic State group) are also significant drivers of

persecution and are responsible for many of the most violent and gruesome acts of violent persecution. Government officials also act as drivers of persecution through their failure to vindicate the rights of Christians and also through their discriminatory acts which violate the fundamental rights of Christians.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia:

Government officials, including judicial officers, local administrative officials as well those belonging to various branches of the security apparatus in Egypt are the principal drivers here. The administration of President Abdul Fatah al-Sisi is attempting to shore up its support with the majority of the population and hold on to power. Thus, despite its promises to the contrary, the government has actually maintained existing restrictions on the freedom of religion of Egyptian Christians. Church leaders in Egypt are also constantly monitored and under surveillance by the state.

Drivers of Ethnic antagonism:

Violence and pressure from the family on converts from Islam to Christianity has to be seen as a mixture of Islamic oppression and tribal thinking. Converting to Christianity is often not only seen as betrayal of Islam, but also as betrayal of their own family. This tendency is strengthened by radical and intolerant imams when they call upon local Muslims to protect their faith (group) against the other group, the Christians.

Context

In contemporary Egypt, the revolution against President Mubarak in 2011 and the ouster of his successor, President Morsi in 2013 are considered to be defining moments for the nation. Since al-Sisi's rise to power, many of the Muslim Brotherhood's senior leaders, including Morsi, have been detained, prosecuted and sentenced to death or life imprisonment. None of the death sentences were executed so far. These measures have deeply polarized Egyptian society since the Muslim Brotherhood is popular among a large segment of Egyptian society. President al-Sisi's administration has embarked upon an ambitious plan to revitalize the Egyptian economy and create much needed economic growth and jobs.

Around 90% of the population is estimated to be Muslim and virtually all Egyptian Muslims are Sunni Muslims. Although Christianity has deep roots in Egypt going back centuries before the advent of Islam in North Africa, Christians are often marginalized and treated as second class citizens in modern Egypt. President al-Sisi has called upon scholars at Al-Azhar University (considered to be the oldest and the most prestigious center of advanced Islamic studies among Sunni Muslims) to fight radicalism and introduce reforms in Islamic teaching. In rural and impoverished areas in particular, radical imams and less tolerant brands of Islam are growing in prominence. The government is making efforts to reverse this trend, but has not been very successful so far. The environment remains hostile for Christians in Egypt.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

Expatriate Christians in Egypt are not forced into isolation. This category is therefore not included in the WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities:

The largest church in this category is the ethnic Coptic community, most of whom are Orthodox. There are also established Protestant denominations throughout the country. The large Coptic minority, while facing important difficulties (including discrimination in education, health and government legislation that hinders essential aspects of church life), has been tolerated by the state and the Muslim majority in the country because of its historical presence and its significant size of several million. In recent years, this has changed, however, causing historical Christian communities to be targeted both by their neighbors and by radical Islamic groups.

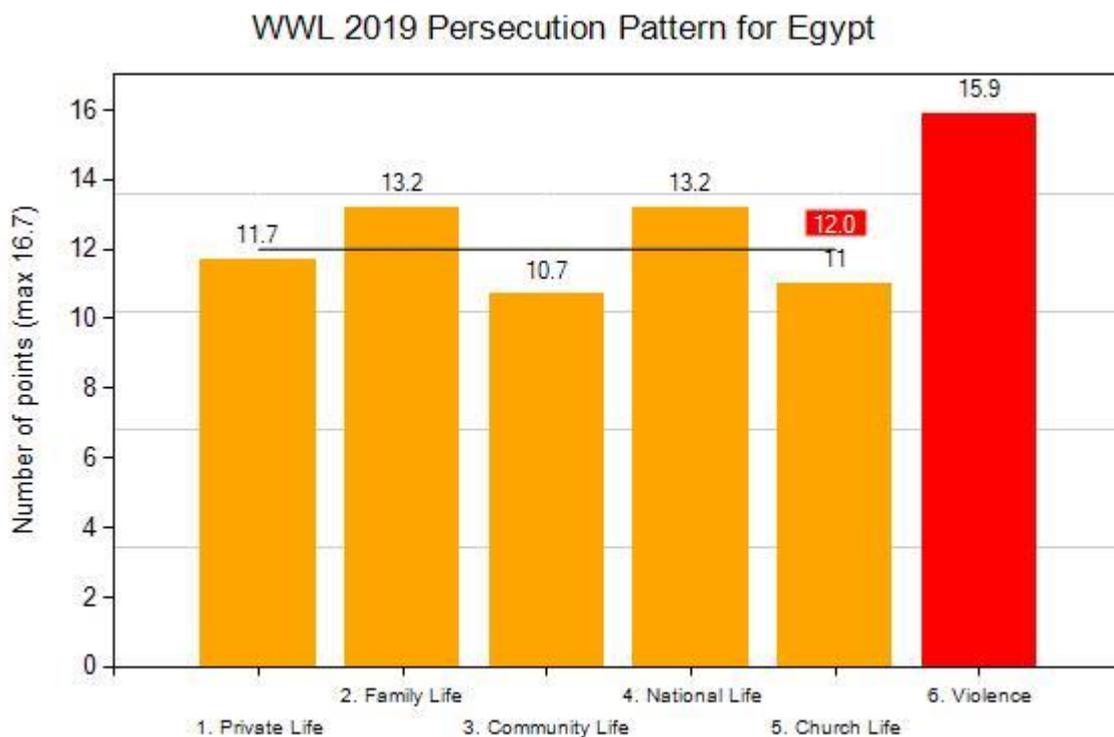
Converts to Christianity:

There is a small but growing number of Christian converts who bear the brunt of persecution, most often from family members. The latter punish converts for abandoning the Islamic faith, often by means of beatings or house expulsion.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

There are several Evangelical and Pentecostal groups in the country, some of them being 2nd, 3rd or even further generations of converts from a Muslim background. Others come from an Orthodox background. They face pressure from both the Islamic society and to a lesser extent from the Coptic Orthodox church.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence



The WWL 2019 Persecution pattern for Egypt shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (12.0), rising from 11.5 in WWL 2018. The reason for this increase has mainly to do with a broader understanding of the situation being made available through new reporting methods.

- All *spheres of life* show very high levels of pressure, which is highest in the *Family* and *National spheres of life*. The very high score of 13.2 for *Family life* reflects in particular the difficulties converts from Islam to Christianity face concerning Christian weddings, baptisms and funerals. The very high score for *National life* reflects the levels of discrimination Christians face - especially those with a Muslim background - when engaging with the authorities. The threat of being accused of blasphemy, followed by mob violence, is always looming, while the police and other authorities will often side with the accusers and attackers in order to retain public order.
- The score for violence rose from 12.4 in WWL 2018 to 15.9 in WWL 2019. More violent incidents were registered than in WWL 2018, although the overall number of killings dropped.

Private sphere:

Converts face severe limitations within their homes. Any act of private worship as a Christian is risky and there is a lot of pressure on them to take part in the daily Islamic prayer or in the Ramadan fast and other Islamic faith obligations. Unlike Christians with a Muslim background, Coptic Christians face little or no pressure in this sphere.

Family sphere:

Especially in rural areas, converts from Islam face an enormous amount of pressure from their immediate and extended family to renounce their Christian faith. Within the large Coptic community, pressure in this sphere is much lower, but the pressure on "cross-denominational converts" can even include physical assault and death-threats.

Community sphere:

Egyptian Christians are often victims of social exclusion. Country researchers report that Christians face constant discrimination in areas such as justice, education, basic social services and are generally more vulnerable to poverty. In addition, Christians are denied justice when they are forced to submit disputes to "customary-law sessions", especially in cases between Muslims and Christians. This alternative form of justice almost always leads to unfair decisions to which Christians communities are particularly vulnerable.

National sphere:

Religious freedom is not upheld by the state and the Egyptian legal system is biased against non-Muslims. The legal system treats Christians, especially converts as second class citizens and limits their individual and collective ability to exercise their freedom of religion and live in accordance with their faith. Egypt's participation in the 2018 World Cup has highlighted the discrimination that Christians face in various walks of life. There has not been a single Christian player in Egypt's national team in a decade and Christians are discriminated and denied opportunities to play in the top professional football clubs in the country.

Church sphere:

The autonomy of the Coptic Orthodox Church is generally respected, although Christians do face administrative obstacles, such as difficulties in obtaining permits to renovate or build church buildings. These hurdles have become even more intractable since a law passed in 2016 gives arbitrary powers

to provincial officials with regard to permits needed to construct churches. In addition, thousands of churches are still awaiting official recognition.

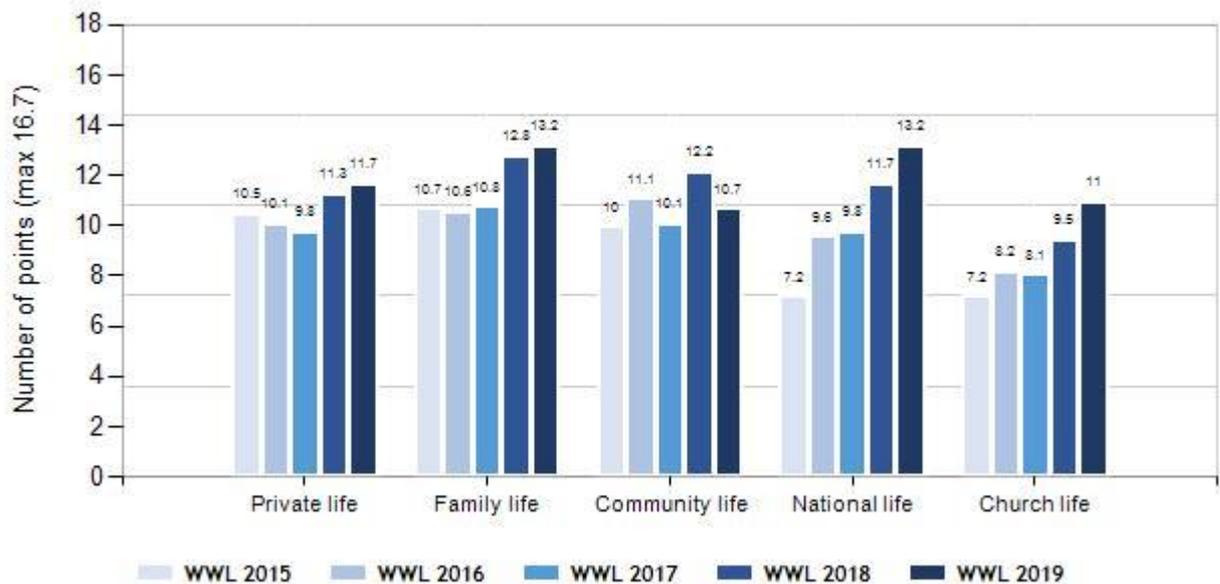
Violence:

Despite the fact that the number of Christians killed decreased sharply from 128 in WWL 2018 to 17 in WWL 2019, the score for violence has risen. This is because there were more reports of church buildings, houses and businesses of Christians being attacked and a higher number of abductions was reported (and in relation to this the number of rapes and forced marriages also increased). Violent attacks by Islamic militants and mobs in villages continue to be common in Egypt. For a summary of the statistics on violence targeting Christians and further examples, please see the Short and Simple Persecution Profile section above.

5 Year trends

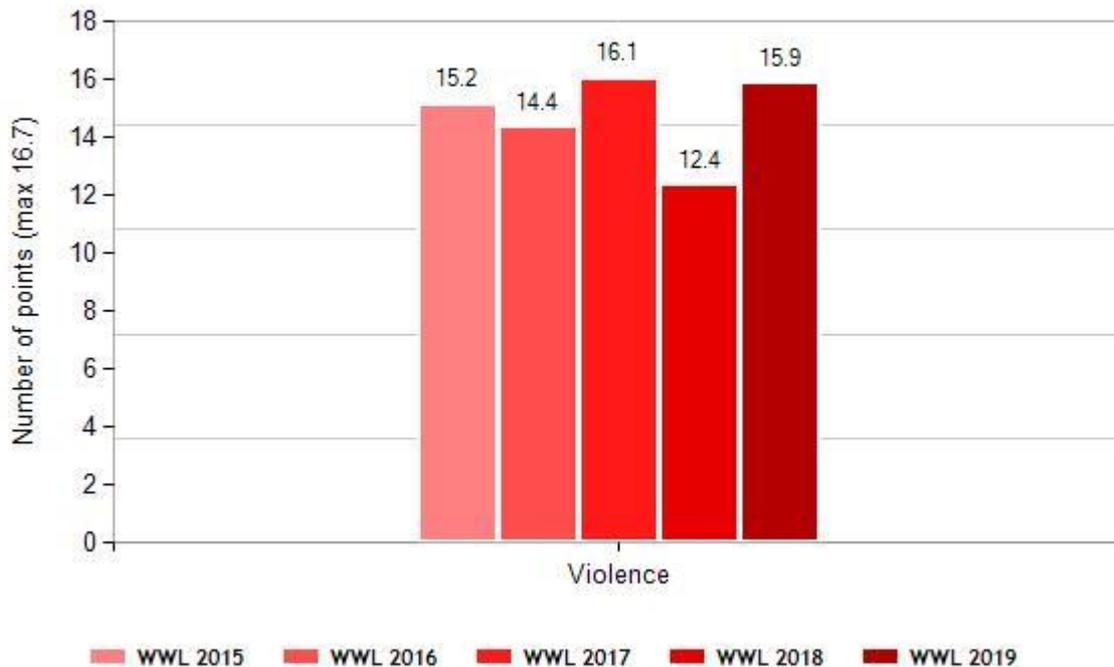
The levels of pressure on Christians in the individual *spheres of life* (chart 1) show a more or less steady rise over the last five reporting periods, except in *Community sphere*. The steady increase in pressure in the *National sphere* reflects the fact that the situation for Christians has not improved under the rule of President al-Sisi. Christians are discriminated against in public life and speaking out against such violations can have serious consequences. Whereas the average pressure (chart 2) on Christians in Egypt has steadily grown over the last five reporting periods, the scores for violence (chart 3) have remained more or less stable at an extreme level.

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



WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Pattern history: Egypt	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2019	12.0
2018	11.5
2017	9.7
2016	9.9
2015	9.1

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



Gender specific persecution

Female:

Women in Egypt are often subjected to harassment, forced marriage or marriage by abduction and sexual assault. Although such abuses are common practice affecting all women in Egypt to varying degrees (also depending on the geographical region), there have been reports that Christian women are particularly targeted for marriage by [abduction](#), mainly in rural areas, villages and southern towns. Many of the Christian girls who are lured into marriage are under-age and come from vulnerable families. Traditional practices do not help in this regard: Early marriage is part of the norm in more rural and traditional societies. Many husbands are absent for long periods due to working abroad and this causes some women to get into affairs with other men. It has been reported that sometimes Muslim neighbors will take advantage of these lonely Christian women and start up a relationship in order to convert them to Islam. The psychological impact of abductions on Christians families is high, especially in rural areas: Females can never leave the house by themselves and need constant company by male relatives to protect them.

Female converts from Islam to Christianity in particular are impacted by conversion laws, overall personal status laws and traditional customs. They very likely will be divorced by their Muslim husbands, leaving them without any financial support. The custody of their children may be taken from them, as well as inheritance rights. They are also at risk from the side of their own family, because women are expected not to shame the family honor. It is especially difficult for women to escape these dangerous situations, since it is not usual for women to travel or live alone.

On the work floor, Christian women can face double discrimination, because they are both Christian and female. The fact that they are known to be Christians can cause them to miss out on promotion and career benefits.

Male:

Particularly in rural areas, it is hard for Christian young men to find a job. Sometimes, Muslim shop owners openly call upon their Muslim costumers not to buy from Christians. Some Muslims may believe that it is impure to eat food made by a Christian. Unemployment is a great pressure on men over all the country, but especially in upper Egypt. Combined with the general economic situation, it is affecting the stability of the family and causing higher rates of domestic violence and divorce. Once a man feels defeated by the attacks on his faith and his disability to defend his Christian beliefs, men are usually broken and lose self confidence and value. A strong sense of shame comes alongside with this brokenness. This affects their view of their role in the family and creates a lot of frustration and feeling of loss.

Persecution of other religious minorities

Other religious groups facing persecution in Egypt include Shia and Sufi Muslims, Bahai, Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses. Shia Muslims are particularly targeted by Sunni militants, making it dangerous for them to worship and practice their faith openly. Mormons, Bahai and Jehovah's Witnesses are denied recognition by the authorities, hence making it difficult for them to have places of worship. The missionary zeal and corresponding activities of such groups are considered illegal and thus adherents face hostility both from state officials and society, including Christian Egyptians.

Example: On 24 November 2017, Sunni militants attacked a crowded Sufi mosque in the Sinai Peninsula, killing over 300. (Source: [New York Times](#), 24 November 2017)

Future outlook

The political outlook:

It is likely that incumbent President al-Sisi will try to amend the Constitution in order to serve for more than two terms. Supporters of the President are reportedly signing a petition requesting him to change the Constitution, although it is likely that the petition is a set-up in order to give al-Sisi democratic legitimacy to proceed with this amendment. Al-Sisi will probably continue with his crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups. Egypt seems to be back in the old days under President Hosni Mubarak, in which an autocratic leader decides which direction the country should take.

The outlook for Christians - as viewed through the lens of:

- **Islamic oppression:** If attacks by radical Islamic groups continue, the pressure on Christians in Egypt will increase and the ability of the Egyptian Church to cope with this burden will be tested to its limit.
- **Ethnic antagonism:** It is unlikely that the majority of society will ever recognize Christians as equal citizens with equal rights. Generally, Egyptians are expected to be Sunni Muslims and any deviation is seen as betrayal. Converts from Islam to Christianity will continue to be very vulnerable.
- **Dictatorial paranoia:** Although most Christians are happy that Muslim Brotherhood President Mohamed Morsi was ousted, it is unlikely that incumbent President al-Sisi is really willing to be able to improve their situation and security significantly.

Conclusion:

Despite the state of emergency declared by the government to tackle the violent attacks that have targeted Christians, the sense of vulnerability and insecurity that has become pervasive among

Christians in Egypt is likely to persist in the foreseeable future. The extent to which such attacks will continue or increase will determine the trajectory of the persecution dynamics in Egypt. The non-violent forms of persecution that are prevalent in various spheres of life are likely to continue without much change. for the better.

External Links - WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

- Gender specific persecution: abduction
<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/09/egypt-ex-kidnapper-admits-get-paid-every-copt-christian-girl-bring/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: New York Times
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/24/world/middleeast/mosque-attack-egypt.html>
- Future outlook: petition
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/01/petition-signals-egyptian-presidents-abdel-fatah-al-sisi-intention-to-seek-third-term>

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/countries/egypt/>

Recent country developments

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