

FINAL WWL 2019 COUNTRY DOSSIER

ETHIOPIA

LEVEL 3/EMBARGO

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

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Introduction

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Introduction

World Watch List Ethiopia	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2019	65	28
WWL 2018	62	29
WWL 2017	64	22
WWL 2016	67	18
WWL 2015	61	22

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 Ethiopia

Link for general background information

See BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13349398>

Recent country history

For many centuries Ethiopia was part of the Aksumite Empire, which included present-day Yemen, Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia but this came to an end around 940 AD. Thereafter different dynasties ruled the country. In 1974 the army deposed the king - the last king of the Solomonic dynasty - and took control of the state. The military junta led by Colonel Mengistu Hailemariam followed socialist ideology. Following the ousting of the military by rebel forces in 1991, the current ruling EPRDF party came to power and a constitution was finally drafted in 1995. The Eritrean–Ethiopian War took place from May 1998 to June 2000. The new Ethiopian Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed signed a peace deal with Eritrea in June 2018 formally ending that war. Both countries removed some of their armed forces from the front.

Current developments in Ethiopia have been changing thick and fast. In 2015, the ruling party claimed to have won 100% of the contested parliamentary seats, a claim that sent a shock among human rights groups and those who work on democracy and rule of law. Although the country is said to have been developing at a very good rate in terms of economic development, in November 2015 the country faced a series of violent protests. Human rights groups reported that hundreds of people had been killed by security forces and thousands put in jail. The demonstrations started peacefully in Oromia region and expanded to the Amhara region with demands for the respect of political, civil, social and economic rights. In response, the government imposed martial law in October 2016. Then came the big news in 2017: Prime Minister Haile Mariam Dessalegn resigned. After intensive behind-the-scene deliberations, Dr. Abiy Ahmed was elected the chairman of the ruling party and eventually became Prime Minister of Ethiopia. Since he assumed office in April 2018, the new prime minister has introduced massive reforms including the release of thousands of political prisoners and proposing the privatization of some of the companies owned by the state. Other very important diplomatic and economic reforms were also introduced.

The religious landscape

Historically, Ethiopia has always had deep Christian roots. The main Christian groups in Ethiopia are the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the various Protestant denominations. The latter entered the country from the 19th century onwards. While Islam also has a long history in Ethiopia, dating back to the *hijrah* (flight of Muslims to Axum in northern Ethiopia in 615 AD), it was the Roman Catholic Church (introduced in the 16th century) which shaped the identity of Ethiopia to a large extent. In fact, Ethiopia presents itself as a bulwark of Christianity in comparison to its Islamic neighbors. Within the context of the “global war against terror”, this narrative is often employed by Ethiopians. Nonetheless, Ethiopia has a very substantial Muslim minority. Sufism has a long tradition, and the more conservative Salafist streams have been present since the 1930s, expanding from the 1960s onwards. These Islamic streams were originally concentrated along Ethiopia’s eastern fringes, but have been growing in influence among the Ethiopian population in all areas and causing deep concern for the present government. The Muslim community, especially the leadership, has become very assertive. There have been claims that the marginalization policy that left the Muslim community devoid of any political or economic impact in the country under previous regimes is continuing under the current regime. The government, however, refutes such allegations. The new prime minister has released all Muslim leaders who were

arrested under the previous prime minister. The new prime minister also mediated between the two factions of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and as a result, the former Patriarch who was in exile has now returned to Ethiopia.

The political landscape

The 1995 Constitution established a federal form of government based on ethnicity. The ideology was supported by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), and other ethnic-based political parties. The TPLF is the main body ruling with the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). During the armed struggle in the 1970s and 80s they articulated a very specific role for ethnicity in Ethiopia, which they established after coming to power. In short, ethnicity may serve as a counter to religion. Indeed, the primary identity marker in Ethiopia seems to remain ethnicity over religion. However, for certain ethnic groups, religion plays an important role in their identity. For example, the Amhara and Tigray historically have close ties with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC), while the Ogaden are ethnic Somali Muslims. Nonetheless, it is important to note that political mobilization still takes place primarily on ethnic grounds. While religious-based conflicts do erupt, insecurity in Ethiopia mainly involves ethnic-based armed groups. These groups are motivated primarily through feeling marginalized by the Tigray-dominated society, rather than on the basis of religion. However, now that the TPLF has lost control of the federal government (after the series of protests starting in 2015 forced the prime minister to resign) many Ethiopians strongly believe that the new prime minister, Dr. Abiy Ahmed, is the man who can solve the problems the country has been facing.

The socio-economic landscape

Socio-economic issues in Ethiopia are closely connected to politics and religion. In the past, the distribution of wealth and inclusion in a democratic process used to be based (mainly) on religion and ethnicity.

In terms of economic development, Ethiopia's economy is believed to be one of the fastest developing economies in the world. According to the [World Bank](#), Ethiopia's GDP is projected to grow at 8.0 in 2018 and 7.9 in 2019. There are no specific economic challenges that affect Christians in particular. However, groups such as converts from Islam or from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (cross-denomination converts) might not be able to enjoy any economic benefits due to societal pressure.

Socially, past and present governments have attempted to mobilize their support by controlling religious groups and influencing religious life in the country. For example, after coming to power in 1991 the EPRDF party replaced the patriarch of the Orthodox Church - a position that is typically held for life. This implies that the role of the government in religion is stronger than the influence of religious groups on the government. Moreover, the interference of the Ethiopian government often generates resentment among the population since religious institutions are perceived as being co-opted. In addition, a formal political organization on a religious basis is technically outlawed in Ethiopia. Within this context, Protestant churches are considered to be largely (apolitical) agents of Western ideology and interests. Various informal politically organized religious groups do exist, especially within Ethiopia's diaspora, but the dominant narrative within Ethiopia's political system remains tied to ethnicity. Against this backdrop Muslim groups have become more active, which has led to the development of specific religious-based publications, such as YeMuslimoch Guday (Muslim Affairs) and Sewtul Islam.

The apolitical character of the Protestant movement, including converts from Islam or the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC), has brought these Christians into increasing conflict with the Ethiopian government and the two main religious bodies in the country. Experts believe that the current political

dynamics might improve relations between Orthodox and Protestant Christians. There are still others who believe that the main problem that emanates from the EOC is from ultra-conservative groups not from the leadership. It is unlikely that the change in the leadership of the Ethiopian government will change the view of those ultra-conservative groups.

Concluding remarks

Ethiopia is one of the oldest states in Africa. It is also one of the first countries to accept and adopt Christianity as its state religion. In the past few decades, various Christian denominations have emerged, causing the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to lose its exclusive position (and hence privilege in its relationship with government and society) as the sole Christian denomination in the country. The new administration under the leadership of Dr. Abiy Ahmed might help to defuse some problems that Protestant Christians face, especially at the hands of the EOC.

External Links - WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Ethiopia

- The socio-economic landscape: World Bank
<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/26800/9781464810244.pdf>

WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

How many Christians?

Pop 2018	Christians	Chr%
107,535,000	64,037,000	59.5

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

How did Christians get there?

Ethiopia is one of the oldest nations in Africa to accept Christianity. Christianity entered the country in the fourth century - during the Axumite period - when the royal family became Christians - and the Christian faith gradually came to dominate the land. Following the acceptance of Christianity by the ruling elite, the Ethiopian church created a strong relationship with the Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt. As a result, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church received its Patriarch from Alexandria, Egypt, right up until 1959. Orthodox Christianity remained the state religion until 1974. (Source: Melton J.G. & Baumann M., eds., *Religions of the world*, 2010, p.1004.)

The second form of Christianity to enter Ethiopia was the Roman Catholic Church. This was the result of the relationship between Ethiopia and the Portuguese during the 16th century. The Portuguese tried to change the Ethiopian state religion to Catholic. This attempt caused bloodshed as the peasants reacted angrily. As a result, Catholic missionaries were expelled from the country and were not allowed to return until the 19th century. Ethiopia followed a '[closed door policy](#)' for 150 years from 1632 onwards. Today a community of several hundred thousand Roman Catholics exists in Ethiopia and is led by the Archbishop of Addis Ababa.

The third type of Christianity to enter Ethiopia was Protestant. It managed to enter the country "through the efforts of a spectrum of Lutheran missionaries, beginning in 1866 with some from the Swedish Lutheran Mission". In the second decade of the 20th century, Swedish missionaries representing the Independent True Friends of the Bible arrived in the country. These united with the Swedish Lutheran Mission to coordinate work. Missionaries from different parts of the world continued to arrive: "German missionaries from the Hermannsburg Mission arrived in 1927. Missionaries from Norway, Denmark, Iceland, and the United States arrived through the 1940s and 1950s. Much of the Lutheran work was brought together in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. American Presbyterians arrived in 1920 and began work among the [Oromo] people. When the Italians arrived, the Presbyterian missionaries were expelled, and before leaving they organized their mission as the Bethel Evangelical Church. In the mid-1970s, it merged into the Mekane Jesus Church." (Source: *Religions of the world*, p.1006.)

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church tried to restrict the influence of the missionaries among the populace. However, attempts to remain the sole Christian Church in the country were also rendered futile by the arrival of the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM). SIM launched its [expansive work](#) in Ethiopia in 1927 under the direction of Dr Thomas A. Lambie.

The expulsion of Italy and the conclusion of World War II brought more Christian groups into the country. The Baptist General Conference of America entered the country in 1950 with its first organized mission in Ambo - West of Addis Ababa. (Source: Brackney W.H., *Historical Dictionary of the Baptists*, p.201.) "Pentecostalism came into the country in the post-war years, and two large indigenous churches have resulted, the Full Gospel Believers Church and Gods All Times Association. Both of these churches have been encouraged by assistance and personnel from Scandinavian Pentecostal bodies." (Source: *Religions of the world*, p.1006.)

What church networks exist today?

Church networks: Ethiopia	Christians	%
Orthodox	42,991,000	67.1
Catholic	1,010,000	1.6
Protestant	17,676,000	27.6
Independent	2,589,000	4.0
Unaffiliated	205,000	0.3
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-434,000	-0.7
Total	64,037,000	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	16,874,000	26.4
Renewalist movement	11,734,000	18.3

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)

Following the 1995 Constitution, which declared freedom of religion as well as the separation of state and religion, there have been considerable changes in the religious demography of the country. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC), though still the majority and still working hard to maintain its influence in national decision-making processes, has failed to stop the exponential growth of the Protestant churches in the country. The Protestant and Pentecostal churches are active in evangelism and include converts both from Islam and cross-denominational converts from the EOC. This has brought these Christians in increasing conflict with the two main religious bodies in the country and the Ethiopian government.

Religious context

Religious Context: Ethiopia	Numbers	%
Christians	64,037,000	59.5
Muslim	37,125,000	34.5
Hindu	7,500	0.0
Buddhist	1,700	0.0
Ethnoreligionist	6,224,000	5.8
Jewish	17,500	0.0
Bahai	26,200	0.0
Atheist	11,700	0.0
Agnostic	83,800	0.1
Other	0	0.0

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)

Notes on the current situation

Christians in Ethiopia face a variety of challenges:

- The government restricts the ownership of broadcasting stations and other related means of preaching the Gospel. It is hoped that the new prime minister will improve this situation.
- In Orthodox-dominated areas and Muslim dominated areas, converts face a backlash from family and community.
- Evangelicals and Pentecostals face serious opposition wherever they are active in proselytizing.

External Links - WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

- How did Christians get there?: closed door policy'
<http://www1.uni-hamburg.de/ethiostudies/PERSONAL/martinezaethiopica2006.pdf>
- How did Christians get there?: expansive work
<https://dacb.org/stories/ethiopia/lambie-thomas3/>

WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

With a score of 65, Ethiopia ranks 28 in WWL 2019. The country scored 62 points in WWL 2018.

What type of persecution dominates?

Islamic oppression: Radical Islam is growing at the local, regional and national levels. Particularly in rural areas where Muslims are a majority, Christians are harassed and often denied access to communal resources. Converts from Islam to Christianity are ostracized and often denied family rights.

Denominational protectionism: The Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) opposes the activities of evangelical Christians whom they regard as followers of a Western religion threatening Ethiopian culture.

Dictatorial paranoia: Over the last years, the Ethiopian government became more authoritarian and continued to restrict rights for civil society and religious institutions. However, the status of this Persecution engine might change considering the current political dynamics in the country.

Ethnic antagonism: Over the last years, the government stirred up resentment towards Christianity among some ethnic groups. Some tribes also demand that Christians participate in tribal clashes and retaliate if Christians fail to do so.

Who is driving persecution?

In Ethiopia the situation is often complex for Christians with different types of persecution overlapping at times: 1) Government regulations are restricting the freedom of religion. 2) In some parts of the country, conservative Muslims are posing challenges, especially for those converting to Christianity. In August 2018, more than ten Christians were killed and many churches were burnt. 3) Secularism is causing difficulties for Christians in the country. One country expert says: "The ban on the establishment of broadcasting services for religious purposes as well as the ban on religious activities within educational institutions restrict the freedom to worship, the freedom to teach and preach one's religion." 4) In areas dominated by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC), cross-denominational converts face persecution from family, community and government officials where they happen to be members of the EOC. Thus it is possible for the persecuted to act as persecutors in one and the same country.

What it results in

In Ethiopia, all Christian communities are affected by persecution, although some denominations are more affected than others. Non-traditional Christians facing the harshest persecution both from the government and the EOC. Converts to Christianity from a Muslim background (particularly in eastern and south-eastern parts of the country) and cross-denominational converts from an Orthodox background face harsh mistreatment from their families and communities. In some areas, Christians are denied access to community resources and/or are ostracized from society. In some places mobs attack churches.

Violence

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

Ethiopia	Reporting period	Christians killed	Christians attacked	Christians arrested	Churches attacked	Christian-owned houses and shops attacked
WWL 2019	01 Nov 2017 - 31 Oct 2018	31	12	4	20	26
WWL 2018	01 Nov 2016 - 31 Oct 2017	3	41	32	19	59

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

- Converts in areas dominated by Orthodox and Muslims face enormous pressure to recant their faith.
- On 4 August 2018, a two-day period of violence erupted in which Muslim mobs targeted the Christian minority in Ethiopia's Somali Region; [15 Orthodox priests](#) were among those killed. 10 Orthodox churches were set ablaze and 9 Evangelical churches were also vandalized or looted.

External Links - WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: 15 Orthodox priests
<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/08/ethiopian-pm-sends-condolences-to-orthodox-church-after-15-priests-killed/>

WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 65 points, Ethiopia went up by 3 points in WWL 2019 and ranks 28. (The country scored 62 points in WWL 2018.) The main reason behind the rise in the score is the increase in the violence score caused by the two-day period of violence that targeted Christians in the Ogaden region of the country in August 2018.

Persecution engines

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

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

Islamic oppression (Strong):

Islamic oppression poses a real threat to Christians, especially in areas dominated by Muslims. One country researcher reports that radical Islam "continues to be a problem in Ethiopia. As Islamic countries have been competing to get the upper hand in Africa, they continue to pour in considerable funds that is used in spreading Islam through the establishment of schools of religious learning as well as direct aid to the needy attaching conversion to Islam as a condition." With the rise of radicalism in the region and beyond, radical (or political) Islam is growing at the local, regional and national levels. In the process, various types of Christianity have become increasingly vulnerable to pressure in almost all *spheres of life*. Particularly in rural areas where they are in the majority Muslims harass Christians, and often deny them access to communal resources. Furthermore, Christians are victims of violence. Converts from Islam to Christianity will be ostracized and often denied family rights such as inheritance rights and child custody. It is also important to note that the growth in radical Islam in neighboring Somalia and Sudan is spilling over into Ethiopia. An expert said: "The engine's presence varies from one geographical area to another mainly depending on the number of Muslims in a particular region. The north-eastern part of the country of mainly Afar region, the eastern regions including Somali, Dire Adwa and Harer and certain parts of the Oromia region are mostly dominated by Muslims and the central-urban part of the country (including but not limited to) Addis Ababa are parts of the country where the level of such prosecution engine is more strong compared to other parts of the country. Because of conflicts that resulted because of actions of [radical] Islamic groups in certain parts of the country, Christians were killed, sustained bodily injury and forced to flee from their home among other injustices suffered. In the past few years there is a growing trend in the spread of [radical] Islamic views

in the country and the arrest of some leaders of the Muslim community by the government make things even worse."

Denominational protectionism (Strong):

This is another main persecution engine in the country and is mainly driven by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC). One country researcher reports: "The EOC considers itself as the only 'true' Christian denomination. It is particularly opposed to evangelical Christians viewing them as followers of a Western religion that poses a threat to Ethiopian nationalism and culture that has long been preserved by the EOC. It is common to hear sermons and songs that strongly criticize evangelical Christians. Priests and other teachers in the EOC openly condemn socializing with evangelicals sometimes going as far as putting a ban on their members from speaking to 'the heathens'. There is also growing antagonism on the part of some evangelical churches against the EOC going into a series of hateful to-and-fro between the two sides." The EOC has been seriously persecuting Christians who leave their ranks to join (mostly) Protestant churches, or who join the renewal movements within the EOC. This persecution manifests itself in many ways. For example, EOC members will sometimes attack them physically. The EOC members also use their connections in government to curtail the development of non-Orthodox churches. They also lobby the government to bring in laws that restrict the expansion of Protestant Christianity. For example, the law that governs the registration of churches exempts the Orthodox Church from this requirement. EOC also uses its powerful media to demonize Protestants and those who are supporters of the renewal movement. An expert adds: "Again this comes from followers of the majority Christian denomination in the country, the Orthodox Christian Church. However, it is worth noting that not all followers of the Orthodox Church are of this opinion. The victims of this form of prosecution are mainly followers of Christian denominations who are relatively new to the country and are mainly Protestant. This form of persecution is prevalent mostly in the northern and central parts of the country where the Orthodox Church has the majority of the population as its followers. It is also relevant to mention here that the persecution of the so-called new forms of Christianity gets extremer as one goes out of the city towards the rural areas of the country."

Dictatorial paranoia (medium):

Under the new leadership, there seems to be a genuine willingness to reform the country in a bid to move toward democracy. Thus, the rating for this Persecution engine went down from 'strong' to 'medium' in WWL analysis. However, over the past years, the Ethiopian government had become more authoritarian and restricted rights for civil society and religious institutions. The Ethiopian government had shown itself to be suspicious about religion in general and Christians in particular. First, religious groups seem able to organize and assemble people very efficiently and effectively. This causes concern about their perceived ability to organize activities that hypothetically could bring about a regime change. Secondly, the government suspected Protestants (especially non-traditional Protestants) of being foreign agents seeking to bring about a regime change, although there is no evidence to support this notion. Thirdly, the government believed that a significant number of EOC leaders were supporters of opposition groups. The government brought in laws limiting the areas of activity in which religious institutions can engage: The ban on setting up broadcasting services for religious purposes as well as the ban on religious instruction and other activities in schools restrict the Christians' freedom to worship, teach and preach. The Freedom House [2018 report](#) also rated the country "not free".

Ethnic antagonism (medium):

For the past quarter of a century, ethnic politics has dominated all areas of public life in the country. This political discourse has led to the search for "roots and identity" which has caused some individuals and groups to become hostile to Christianity. Until 1974, the EOC represented the state religion. The

country was under Communist rule from 1974 to 1991, when it was overthrown (after 17 years of civil war) by a coalition of various rebel groups formed from different ethnic groups. The ethnic groups were promised respect and acknowledgment of their culture and identity during the 1991 Ethiopian Transitional Charter - a charter that was set up after the fall of the Communist regime in 1991. This was initially seen as being a politically sound move, but the government stirred up resentment towards Christianity among some ethnic groups. In regions like Afar and Somali (Ogaden), Islam is interconnected with ethnicity. Other tribes also demand that Christians participate in tribal clashes and they retaliate if Christians fail to do so. A country researcher also adds: "Although the majority of the population practices either of the two major religions (Christianity and Islam), in some parts of the country, traditional religions are still practiced. Individuals living in those communities are expected to comply with all the religious and cultural rites of the community, failure of which would likely result in banishment. But even among Christians and Muslims the practice of dark magic is quite widespread; practices such as dedicating a newborn to the local magician are commonplace."

Drivers of persecution

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

There are many drivers behind the persecution of Christians in Ethiopia.

Drivers of Islamic oppression: These include Muslim religious leaders through their sermons and tacit approval of Christian discrimination, family and ordinary citizens. According to reports, some Muslim leaders have engaged in inciting violence against Christians.

Drivers of Denominational protectionism: These include priests, ultra-conservative groups within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, family and ordinary citizens. Regarding the role of Orthodox Church leaders and members, one researcher states: "There is a clear religious demographic change in the country mainly due to the rapid expansion of new forms of Christianity, especially the Protestant Church. Such rapid expansion is not welcomed by the leaders and followers of the Orthodox Church. Resentment against the new forms of Christianity manifests itself in different forms at different levels by acts of both the leaders and followers of the Orthodox Church. The association called Mahibere Kidusan has been publishing inflammatory as well as derogatory articles about Protestant Christians for years. Things are getting better in the capital city, other major cities and areas like the southern and southwestern part of the country where the new forms of Christianity are getting strong."

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia: The main drivers are government officials, although the level of participation in persecution varies from region to region. Mid-level and lower-level officials have especially been in action against the so-called new forms Christianity. Officials at the local level have more control over the day-to-day activities and thereby get more involved in the persecution including (but not limited to) the refusal to grant permits for meetings and worship.

Drivers of Ethnic antagonism: The drivers here are community leaders and ordinary citizens. This engine is active in some remote areas and in some areas, it is blended with Islamic oppression. Thus, these two Persecution engines share drivers. For example, in Afar and Somali regions, religion (i.e. being Muslim) is a part of belonging to the community.

Context

Ethiopia is a country where a variety of different persecution engines are in existence causing pressure on Christians in all *spheres of life*. The following points aim to give background information on the persecution dynamics in Ethiopia.

Protest and state of emergency/new prime minister/current affairs: During the WWL 2017 and WWL 2018 reporting periods, Ethiopia experienced a great deal of political turbulence. That continued into the WWL 2019 reporting period until the new prime minister was appointed in April 2018 following the resignation of the prime minister who was under pressure to answer the demands of the people. There were persistent and intense demonstrations particularly in Oromia and Amhara regional states to which the government responded with force. However, the security forces did not target any religious group in particular and acted indiscriminately, especially as far as the religion of the protestors is concerned. In the WWL 2019 reporting period, there were also attacks by Muslim mobs targeting churches and killing Christians. Under the new leadership, the country is bracing itself for new elections to be held in 2019. Many political parties including those that had previously been banned, are returning to the country to struggle peacefully and participate in the elections.

Historical perspective: Ethiopia has a long history of both Christianity and Islam. Over time, both religions have been engaged in attempts to expand their sphere of influence and have fought many bloody wars that involved foreign actors such as Turkey, Portugal and Egypt. Secondly, Ethiopia has many tribes. These are not necessarily favorable to Christianity; and in some places like the Afar and Somali regions, tribes are interconnected with Islam. Thirdly, the government had closed all possible avenues for freedom of expression and assembly, and had also tried to control all religious institutions in a bid to curb perceived dissent. In 2009, the government enacted a law that limits freedom of

religion, association, expression, and assembly. As per the law, Christian charities could no longer raise money from abroad and work on human rights issues, conflict resolution or democracy-related issues. The ruling party tightened its grip on power by claiming to have won 100% of the seats in parliament during the May 2015 elections. Former Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn ignored all calls for reform from the international community regarding giving space for civil society, freedom of the press and so forth. Following the protests and violence that rocked the country in 2015-2017 (and which continued into 2018), the former prime minister dissolved the cabinet. Many investors left the country due to the uncertainty that surrounded the country. Despite this, Ethiopia remains a major destination for international aid.

The ongoing narrative concerning the EOC: The EOC targets Protestants and reform-oriented groups within the EOC itself. This is mainly orchestrated by groups of fanatics in the EOC. Through their magazine, website and newspaper, these fanatical groups use inflammatory rhetoric against non-traditional Christian communities, in particular, using expressions like “newcomers”, “false prophets”, “*Menafikan*” (deniers of the Virgin Mary and the saints) and other words to portray them as non-believers or false believers. It is believed that the Protestant community is growing at an annual rate of 6.7% in the country. Putting this into perspective, according to the 1994 census, Christians in the country made up approximately 62.5% of the total population and Muslims 32.8%, animist 4.6%. Back then, Ethiopian Orthodox Christians made up half of the Ethiopian population and Protestants only 10%. This was found to have changed in the 2007 census which listed Orthodox churchgoers as being 43.5% of the population, Protestant 18.6% and Muslims 33.9%. This swift change in population demography has created animosity towards Protestants both from EOC and Muslims. Most of those who have become Protestant are from the EOC.

Christian communities and how they are affected

All Christian communities in the country face persecution but the sources and level of persecution vary.

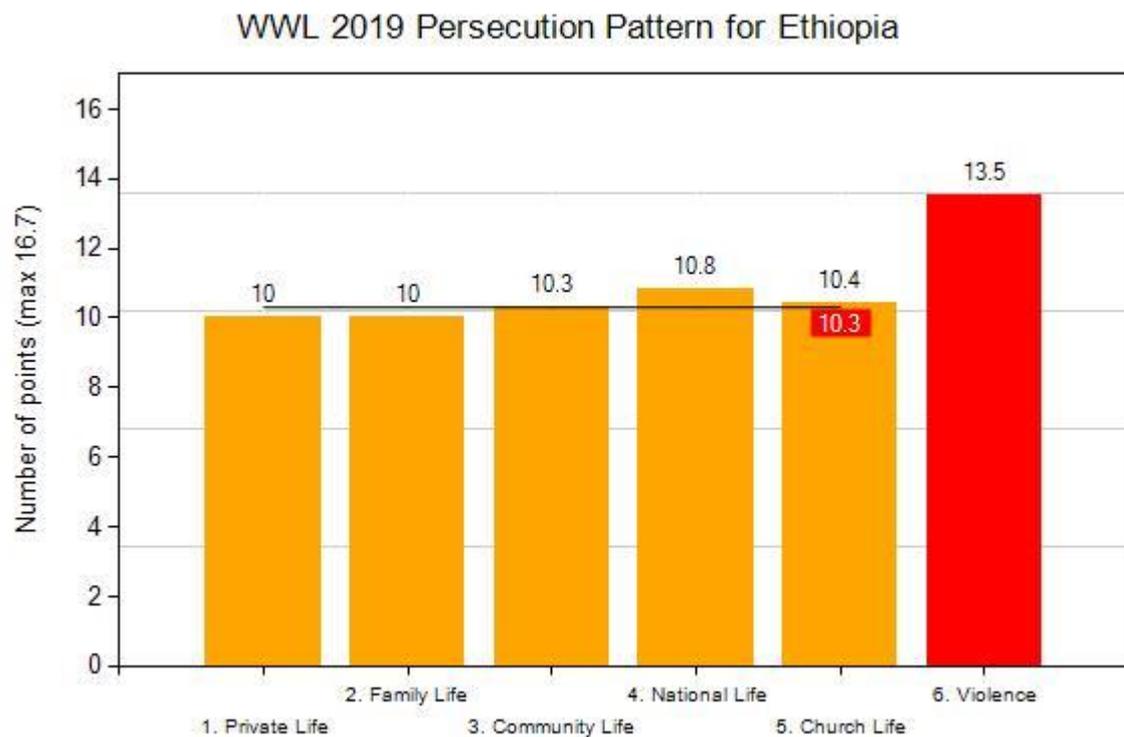
Communities of expatriate Christians: These are not involuntarily isolated and so have not been included as a separate category in WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities: The EOC is a typical example of this category and has a massive presence in the country. It is one of the factors contributing to the complexity of the persecution dynamics in Ethiopia; as well as being persecuted itself, the EOC also plays a pivotal role as a persecutor. This type of Christianity faces persecution mostly from the government and Islamic radicalism. Also in areas where tribalism is dominant, there is pressure on the EOC. Orthodox Christians are mostly concentrated in northern and central Ethiopia. Also, those Christians living in Muslim-dominated regional states (Harrari, Somalia, Afar), as well as local communities (e.g. among the Silte), face difficulties in living out their Christian faith.

Converts: This category includes i) Christians with a Muslim background, ii) cross-denominational converts – i.e. from one Christian denomination to another, and iii) converts from ethnic traditional beliefs to Christianity. Converts in the country face persecution via different persecution engines. In Muslim-dominated areas, converts from Islam face persecution mainly from family, extended family, community leaders, and non-Christian religious leaders. In areas dominated by EOC, the engine behind the persecution is mainly driven by EOC followers. Converts also face persecution from the government in all parts of the country. In areas with a prevalence of *Ethnic antagonism*, converts may face persecution from adherents of traditional belief systems and Muslims seeking to force their participation in various religious activities.

Non-traditional Christian communities: This category includes Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations which have a huge presence in the country. It also attracts serious persecution mainly from the government, EOC, and Islamic groups. It is growing very fast compared to other types of Christianity. A country researcher states: "Many parts of Southern Ethiopia, as well as parts of Oromia, are dominated by Evangelicals/Protestants. As the majority in these communities, they do not face [serious] persecution. But Protestants who live in parts dominated by Muslims and Orthodox Christians face various forms of persecution." This category of Christianity is seen as a threat by many as it keeps growing in number and influence. As a result, they face persecution from many sides.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence



The WWL 2019 Persecution pattern for Ethiopia shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Eritrea is at the high level of 10.3 (very similar to the level in WWL 2018 when it was 10.4).
- There is no *sphere of life* where the pressure on Christians scores less than 10; which shows despite being a Christian majority country, Christians in Ethiopia face high levels of persecution.
- The score for violence increased by 3 points from 10.4 in WWL 2018 to the extreme level of 13.5 . The main reason behind this rise was the violent attacks on Christians and churches in the Ogaden region in August 2018.

Private sphere:

This is a sphere of life where particularly converts suffer as individuals. One country researcher states: "The first factor is whether it is an urban or rural area. In the few (relatively) big cities, converting to another type of Christianity will result in less serious consequences (perhaps only opposition from some family members). But in the rural areas where the social bonds are still strong, conversion is

likely to cause outrage and will be followed by persecution." The situation also varies from one region to the other. For example, in much of northern Ethiopia (which is the heartland of the EOC) if someone converts from Orthodox Christianity to Protestantism, it often results in that person being forced to live a secluded life cut off from social interactions or being forced to leave the community altogether. Whereas in some areas of southern Ethiopia and parts of Oromia where Protestantism is the norm, converts will not face such persecution for their conversion.

Owning Christian materials, accessing Christian media, and meeting other Christians as a convert is difficult. When an Orthodox background Christian leaves the EOC and joins a Protestant group (locally called *Pentay*), family members, priests and other fanatical groups in EOC put pressure on the individual to return to their former faith. Sometimes those who leave the Orthodox Church to join a Protestant congregation are forced to drink what is called "holy water" on the assumption that the convert is possessed by a devil.

Family sphere:

This is another area where converts, in particular, face various forms of persecution. Obtaining places for burial in both Muslim and EOC dominated areas is very difficult for non-EOC Christians. In Muslim dominated areas, children are obliged to attend Islamic schools. Furthermore, children of Christians are harassed because of the faith of their family in many parts of the country. This also extends to the celebration of weddings. One researcher gave this example: "When a Christian is getting married to someone who is from a Muslim family or another type of Christianity, the family of the other person may raise a lot of trouble about the wedding being in a church etc. ... A particular issue is singing secular music at a wedding (since most Evangelicals/Protestants in Ethiopia consider secular music a sin, there may be trouble with members of the family.)"

Community sphere:

This is perhaps one of the spheres of life where Christians face particularly serious difficulties because of *Denominational protectionism* and *Islamic oppression*. In a very communal society like Ethiopia, religious differences play a pivotal role in many aspects. In EOC majority areas, Protestants (and those who have left the EOC) face serious challenges from their own family, community members and EOC leaders. A country researcher says: "There are a number of challenges faced by Evangelicals and Pentecostals in areas where the majority is Orthodox. They are not allowed to participate in social events and associations; they have trouble finding schools where their children would be safe; there may be obstructions to daily life such as going to the market etc. ... Especially during the major lent season of the EOC in some areas, it may be nearly impossible to find non-fasting items of food. In extreme cases, they may be forced to leave the area."

In the case of Christians from a Muslim background, imams, madrassa teachers and those who assume leadership responsibilities in their community always make life difficult for such Christians. In some places, converts are not allowed to share community resources. In other places, Christians will be intentionally overlooked or discriminated against in employment. It is common for Christians to be seen as the unwanted group in their community. In some places, during harvesting season, while community members help each other turn by turn, Christians (especially converts) are left on their own.

National sphere:

At the national level, the government under Hailemariam Desalegn clearly aimed to control every aspect of society. It restricted freedom of religion by employing restrictive civil society laws aimed

against freedom of expression and association. Security and administrative issues were used as a reason to discourage the movement of missionaries in the country. There were also reports that indicated negligence on the part of the government in dealing with violence against Christians. Immediately prior to the WWL 2018 reporting period, the country declared a state of emergency for the first time in twenty-six years. Christians found it difficult to gather in public and at times it put the church under pressure to censor itself in many ways to make sure that it would not be accused of transgressing the ambiguous and overreaching state of emergency. The national laws also restricted the establishment of broadcasting services for religious purposes. A ban on religious activities (including worshipping in groups) within educational institutions was also implemented. A country researcher also reports that Christians were subject to smear campaigns: "This [smear campaign] is common practice especially by religious leaders. There have been teachings and circulating videos of some Muslim preachers who engage in hate speech against Christians. Among Christians too, it is common to hear priests of the EOC running smear campaigns against Pentecostals/Evangelicals using derogatory terms to refer to them and depicting them as people who feign religion in order to get foreign aid. Some Pentecostal preachers also make statements against the Orthodox painting them as backward." In the new political environment, many believe that all Christian denominations (and others faiths) will be encouraged to live together in tolerance.

Church sphere:

The pressure in this *sphere of life* has many forms: First, church registration is a challenge. The government does not require registration for the EOC (or the Muslim community), yet other Christians are required to register to operate legally. Secondly, some EOC-affiliated officials monitor non-EOC Christians, and they use their official capacity to deny registration permits. Thirdly, in Muslim majority areas, speaking against instigators of persecution has become risky; as a result, many church leaders do not want to speak openly against perpetrators. Furthermore, in Muslim-dominated areas converts are most likely to hide their faith and avoid going to church for fear of attack. One researcher adds: "In areas where Christians or Pentecostals are the minority, the respective leaders will be seen as primarily responsible for the 'corruption' of societal values and are often persecuted even more severely than the new converts themselves. Community members would resort to various means to make such leaders leave the area before more damage is done; they often have to live in hiding." The new administration under the leadership of Abiy Ahmed is trying to solve some of the constraints that were imposed by the government. For example, the civil society law is being discussed.

Violence:

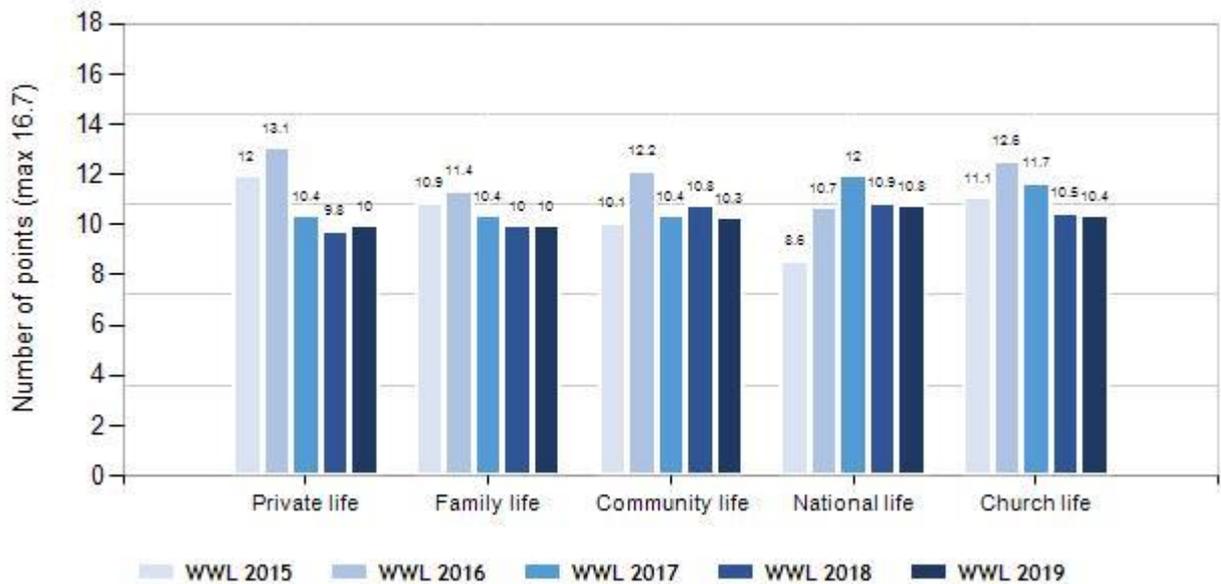
The WWL 2019 reporting period has been one of the most violent ones for Christians in Ethiopia. Despite the fact that an evangelical Christian is now prime minister and despite the fact that there are hopes of change in the country, many Christians have been attacked by Islamic groups because of their faith. In the Ogaden region, one of the nine regional states in the country, more than 20 Christians (including Orthodox priests) were killed in [August 2018](#) and many churches were ransacked and burnt to the ground.

For a summary of the statistics on violence and examples, please see the Short and Simple Persecution Profile section above.

5 Year trends

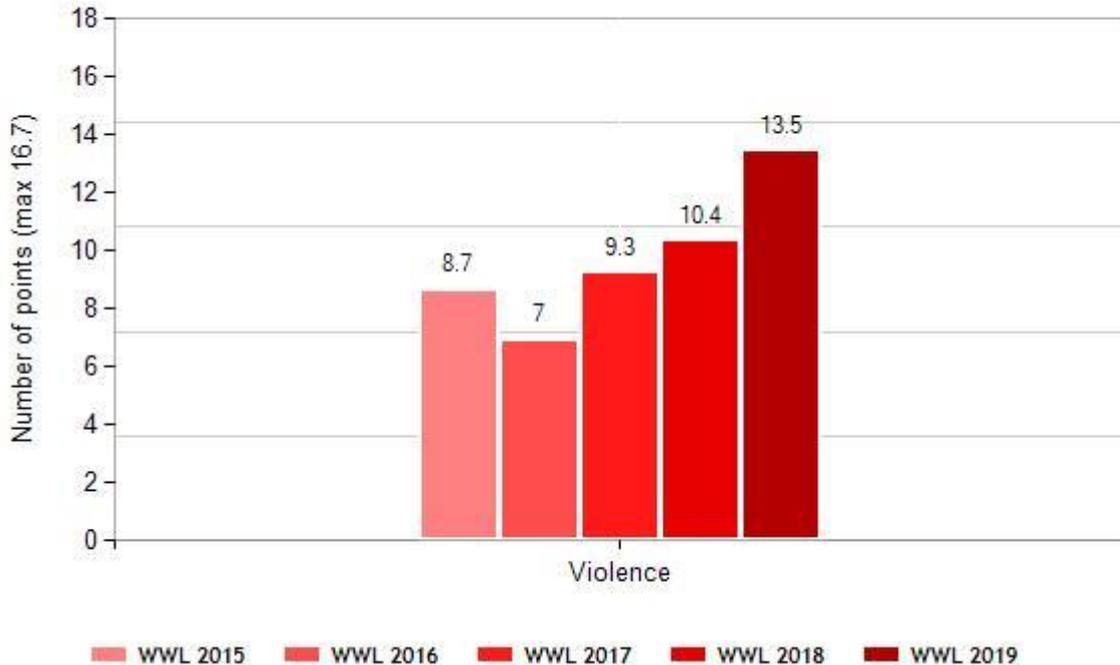
The three charts below show the situation for Christians in Ethiopia over the last five reporting periods. Chart 1 clearly shows that the suffering of Christians in all *spheres of life* has been high, but has gone down following the peak in WWL 2016. All *spheres of life* have scored consistently 10 or more (except in two occasions). So far the private sphere and church sphere reached the highest scores (13.1 and 12.6 in WWL 2016 respectively). In general, there are similar levels of pressure in all the spheres of life. In Chart 2 it can be seen that the average pressure has consistently been above 10, yet slightly decreasing after WWL 2016. Chart 3, which depicts the violence scores over the last five reporting periods, shows how violence against Christians in Ethiopia has more or less steadily risen (with the exception of WWL 2016).

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



WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Pattern history: Ethiopia	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2019	10.3
2018	10.4
2017	11.0
2016	12.0
2015	10.5

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



Gender specific persecution

Female:

Women are mostly victim to abduction, rape and divorce. A country researcher says: "Some believers will also face the challenge of living without marriage. Church leaders explain that women comprised the majority of their members. But, these women would not find husbands and the community and their relatives will pressure/insult them."

Male:

A country researcher states: "Physical attack is more serious on men and boys than on women and girls. They will also face more scrutiny in *Ethnic antagonism* areas."

Persecution of other religious minorities

There are a few religious minorities in the country and these are also affected by the broadcasting legislation, the role of faith in education and the civil society law. Generally, the civil society law requires an application for registration for any religious groups except for Orthodox and Catholic Christians, Muslims and Jews. In addition, the registration law requires a minimum membership of 50 persons for registration as a religious community and a minimum of 15 persons for a ministry or association to be registered and granted permission. As it stands, the requirements of minimum membership do not have an impact on Christian denominations; however, this has a serious impact for religious minorities especially the newer ones: In some areas, the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses (where their numbers are less than 50) struggle to have a place of worship.

Future outlook

The political Outlook:

The recent political development in Ethiopia is interesting. The pace at which the country is undertaking political reform has attracted global attention. After signing a peace treaty, the country has opened its borders with Eritrea. Thousands of political prisoners were released. Opposition parties that were banned were allowed to return to Ethiopia. The country has pledged to reform its electoral laws, reform the justice sector and other sectors. The new prime minister has been lauded by both domestic and international actors for his bold move. If this continues, there is a realistic chance that the country will improve its human rights record as well as the security situation. At the same time, it is important not to dismiss the challenges that the country faces: It will always be very difficult to navigate the complex realities of the country - the political actors have very divergent views and there are also neighboring countries that might interfere.

The outlook for Christians:

Ethiopia has seen continuous struggles between the different church denominations and this weakens the possibility of a unified Christian response to the challenge of persecution. In this regard, the EOC has been ruthlessly accusing and persecuting Protestants. According to some hardliners, Protestantism is working to dismantle the EOC. There is also a challenge posed by radical elements in the Muslim community (for example, causing the destruction of churches and the killing of Christians in the Ogaden region) and this is likely to remain a challenge for Christians in the future.

Conclusion:

The Christian situation in Ethiopia is likely to have the following outlook:

- The persecution of Christians in general (and in particular of converts and Protestants) will continue, especially at the hands of radical Muslims and EOC circles.
- *Islamic oppression* will continue to increase, posing a further threat to the state and Christians.
- *Dictatorial paranoia* might cease to be an engine after a while. As a beginning, the new administration will likely ease many of the restrictions imposed on the church by the previous administrations.

External Links - WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines: 2018 report
<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/ethiopia>
- Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence: August 2018
<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/08/ethiopian-pm-sends-condolences-to-orthodox-church-after-15-priests-killed/>

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).