

# FINAL WWL 2019 COUNTRY DOSSIER

## SUDAN

### LEVEL 3/EMBARGO

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

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## Introduction

### Copyright Notice

### Introduction

World Watch List Sudan	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2019	87	6
WWL 2018	87	4
WWL 2017	87	5
WWL 2016	84	8
WWL 2015	80	6

*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 Sudan

### Link for general background information

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14094995>

### Recent country history

Since becoming independent from Great Britain in 1956, Sudan has experienced persistent and recurring violent conflicts, primarily driven by struggles between the central government in Khartoum and armed groups from the country's peripheries. Sudan's traditional power structures are dominated by an Islamist regime, headed by President Omar al-Bashir, who came to power in a coup in 1989. Present-day Sudan is infamous in the international community for funding terrorism, committing atrocities and fundamentally undermining freedom of religion. The government has been fighting against different rebel groups in Darfur and other parts of the country. In places such as the Nuba Mountains, the government is using attacks by anti-government groups as a pretext for indiscriminately attacking civilians, a significant number of whom are Christians. In 2018, the country has also had to deal with protests against the economic situation.

### The religious landscape

The religious composition of Sudan is another controversial issue. World Christian Database (WCD 2018) estimates the Christian population at 4.6% and the Muslim majority at 91.6%. According to the government, around 97% of the population is Muslim, which would make the Christian presence less than 3%. Various advocacy groups contest these low figures (and those of WCD), saying that non-Muslims in the country are 15-20%. Coptic Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and various Protestant denominations are present in the country. These groups are found mainly in Khartoum, Port Sudan, Kassala, Gedaref, El-Obeid, El-Fashe and some parts of the Nuba Mountains.

The radical Islamic influence in Sudan is increasing in many ways, and particularly since South Sudan gained independence in July 2011. Within the Muslim majority, the main traditional Salafist group, Jama'at Ansar al-Sunna al-Mohammediya, advocates peaceful means for achieving its objectives. However, the newer radical groups tend to be more militant and confrontational, beginning with attacks on Sufi, Shia and Christian targets in 2011 and 2012.

For over a decade, Sudan has been designated by the US State Department as a "Country of Particular Concern" for its serious and systematic violations of religious freedom. Religious freedom, although guaranteed by the 2005 Interim Constitution, is not upheld in practice. Moreover, Sudan's criminal law based on Islamic law (allowing the use of amputations and floggings for crimes and acts of 'indecent' and 'immorality') has been applied indiscriminately especially against indigenous African Christians. The government continuously arrests Christians for proselytizing and apostasy. The country has also embarked on a program for demolishing Christian churches in the country.

### The political landscape

Sudanese politics has been always a bone of contention. The country that has never been at ease with the international community, nor with its own people. This has particularly been the case with the indigenous Africans in the country and led to the independence of South Sudan. The secession of South Sudan on 9 July 2011 (after a referendum in January 2011) was the culmination of a painful and decades-long history of internal conflict between the powerful Muslim Arabs in the north and the Christian and indigenous African population of the south. Despite South Sudan's independence, armed

conflicts over dwindling resources and political power positions (typical aspects of Sudan's post-independence situation) have persisted.

While the root causes of the conflicts remain constant – political marginalization, land dispossession and unimplemented promises - ethnic dynamics in the various regions of Sudan and South Sudan have kept changing. For example, in Abyei, a province that is being claimed by both Sudan and South Sudan, the Misserya Arabs (the government of Sudan's main local supporters) have grown increasingly frustrated with Khartoum, while the Ngok Dinka tribe (which enjoys support from the government of South Sudan) has become vocal and strong. Although Sudan's political system is based on a decentralized system of governance and multi-party politics, real power is wielded by President Bashir and his ruling Islamist National Congress Party (NCP). The independence of South Sudan, which signaled the end of the Government of National Unity and the withdrawal of the South's representatives from parliament, has further reinforced the dominance of President Bashir's political party. It also signaled the start of another civil war: SPLA-North versus the government of Sudan. This resulted from the fact that the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) failed to solve the problem of the marginalization of Sudan's peripheral regions, in particular, the so-called 'three areas', consisting of Abyei, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile. Located strategically along Sudan's volatile North-South border and possessing considerable natural resources (including oil), finding solutions to the contested issues in these three areas has long been deemed critical for the stability of the two countries. Dominated by two main tribes, Abyei in particular held tremendous significance to the domestic politics of both Sudan and South Sudan. The Ngok Dinka tribe, a subset of South Sudan's largest ethnic group, have traditionally lived in Abyei, and have strong representation in both the Sudan People's Liberation Army's (SPLA) and Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) leadership. During the civil war years, this tribe - which has a largely African Christian population - was heavily displaced. At the same time, the Misserya, a largely Arab Muslim nomadic tribe which migrates through the region to graze their cattle, form an important constituency of the NCP and fought against the Ngok Dinka during the civil war. This problem is expected to continue for the foreseeable future.

## The socio-economic landscape

South Sudan's secession caused a watershed in Sudan's economic history. Sudan lost about 80% of its agricultural and water resources, in addition to the loss of about 75% of oil reserves and about 90% of total exports and about 50% of government revenues. Following the loss of oil and population, economic growth contracted by 4.4% in 2012. Even as it concluded an agreement with South Sudan that will cover the export of oil from South Sudan, as well as US\$3.03bn of "transitional assistance" to be paid by South Sudan, Omar Bashir announced a series of deep budget cuts in June 2012 to control a ballooning fiscal deficit. Moreover, the World Bank has projected that Sudan will fall back into the low-income country category, with 47% of Sudan's population living below the poverty line. In 2018, the country saw a series of demonstrations protesting about the poor [economic situation](#). The country is bracing itself for more economic problems since it can no longer afford to provide subsidies. On another note, this economic crisis might force the government of Sudan to resolve its issues with South Sudan so that it can obtain payment for letting South Sudanese petroleum use its pipelines.

## Concluding remarks

The president is still in firm control of the country. There are talks that the US government is planning to remove Sudan from the list of '[States sponsoring terrorism](#)'. On the economic front, the country is feeling the pressure of losing its sources of revenue (due to the independence of South Sudan). Christians in the country are under immense pressure. The government is still following a programme to demolish significant numbers of churches in the country.

## External Links - WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Sudan

- The socio-economic landscape: economic situation  
<http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article64425>
- Concluding remarks: 'States sponsoring terrorism'  
<https://www.state.gov/j/ct/list/c14151.htm>

## WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

### How many Christians?

Pop 2018	Christians	Chr%
41,512,000	1,910,000	4.6

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

### How did Christians get there?

Christianity was very influential in Sudan from the 4th century onwards; for nearly a millennium the majority of the population was Christian. Christians suffered when invading Arabs brought Islam - especially in the northern part of the country - and gradually Islamized the region by the 15th century. However, the Greek Orthodox and Ethiopian Orthodox churches survived. Following the defeat of the self-proclaimed Islamic Mahdi and his supporters by the British in 1898, many Christian groups entered the country. Roman Catholics, Anglicans via the Church Missionary Society and American Presbyterians also came from their base in Egypt. The Anglican Sudan United Mission, the Africa Inland Mission, and the Sudan Interior Mission all followed. Several African-initiated churches have also become established. Many missionaries went to South Sudan from Khartoum.

### What church networks exist today?

Church networks: Sudan	Christians	%
Orthodox	107,000	5.6
Catholic	1,099,000	57.5
Protestant	803,000	42.0
Independent	20,600	1.1
Unaffiliated	34,200	1.8
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-154,000	-8.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,909,800</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	415,000	21.7
Renewalist movement	142,000	7.4

*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)

According to the World Christian Database, the main denominations are the Roman Catholic Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Episcopal Church of Sudan and the Sudan Church of Christ.

## Religious context

Religious Context: Sudan	Numbers	%
Christians	1,910,000	4.6
Muslim	38,040,000	91.6
Hindu	810	0.0
Buddhist	900	0.0
Ethnoreligionist	1,114,000	2.7
Jewish	2,100	0.0
Bahai	2,500	0.0
Atheist	62,400	0.2
Agnostic	378,000	0.9
Other	1,900	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)*

Statistics for the number of Christians in the country are disputed. Sudan's Culture and Information Ministry estimates that Christians make up only 3% of the population and that they are primarily resident in Khartoum, the north, and the Nuba Mountains. Almost all Muslims are Sunni but significant distinctions exist, particularly among the Sufi orders. In addition, there are small Muslim minorities, including Shia and the Republican Brothers, based predominantly in Khartoum. There is also a growing, yet still small, percentage of Salafists.

## Notes on the current situation

- Christians have to deal with deep stigma and discrimination.
- Christians have to cope with a school curriculum which is based on Islamic ideology aimed at strengthening the Islamization and Arabization policy of the government of Sudan.
- Churches are being demolished (many in 2017 and 2018) and Christians do not have enough places for worship.
- Christian leaders are being arrested on trumped-up accusations and charged (also in 2018).
- Christians, especially converts, have to deal with serious 'legal' issues. The Constitution offers some religious freedom, but in practice, those aspects of religious freedom are arbitrarily abused. The [Naivasha Agreement](#) of January 2005 established some protection for non-Muslims in the north (although apostasy is still legally punishable by death).

## External Links - WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

- Notes on the current situation: Naivasha Agreement  
<https://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/164/28488.html>

## WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

### Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

In WWL 2019 Sudan ranks 6 with a score of 87 (the same score as in WWL 2018 and WWL 2017).

### What type of persecution dominates?

**Islamic oppression:** Historically, Islam is deeply embedded in Sudan's society and the ruling elite aims at enforcing an Islamic regime in the country. Apostasy is criminalized and blasphemy laws are being used country-wide to prosecute Christians. The president has repeatedly stated that Sudan is to be an Islamic state and that there should be no room for other religions since South Sudan declared independence.

**Dictatorial paranoia:** Sudan has been run by an authoritarian regime ever since al-Bashir came to power through a coup in 1989. The government is strictly implementing the policy of one religion, one culture and one language. There is no freedom of the press and no freedom of expression.

**Organized corruption and crime:** The government has been arming tribal militias and using these groups to work towards creating an Islamic state at the expense of other religious groups in the country. These militias have been accused of committing human rights violations against non-Arab citizens (including Christians).

According to [Transparency International's 2017 Corruption Perceptions Index](#), Sudan ranks 175 out of 180 countries, 180 being the worst for corruption.

### Who is driving persecution?

Persecution is driven by the government and radical Muslims. At times this is systematic and reminiscent of a policy of *ethnic cleansing*. Under the authoritarian rule of President al-Bashir and his party, there is no rule of law in Sudan; press and media laws are restrictive, and freedom of expression has been highly curtailed. In its 2018 World Press Freedom Index, [Reporters without Borders](#) states: "Harassment of the media intensified at the start of 2018. Eighteen journalists, including the correspondents of foreign media, were arrested in January while covering opposition protests. An independent radio station was shut down, and two journalists were banned from practicing their profession for a year."

### What it results in

The WWL 2019 reporting period has been difficult for Christians in many ways: It has been tough because Christians are losing churches that they have used for worship for years. It has been tough because the government has arrested or intimidated many Christian leaders.

The ethnic-cultural landscape of the country is also complicated: Arab versus ethnic African, Muslim versus Christian. The secession of South Sudan in 2011 did not solve these problems. This is particularly true for ethnic Africans, as a significant number are Christian and still living in the country. All Christian communities in Sudan are afraid of having conversations about their faith with Sudanese Muslims as this might be construed as being an 'act that encourage apostasy against Islam'. The level of persecution that converts and ethnic Africans face is enormous. There have been arrests; many churches have been demolished and others are on an official list awaiting demolition; many Christians

are attacked indiscriminately in areas like the Nuba Mountains where there is an ongoing conflict between government forces and rebel groups.

So as not to be discovered, converts will often refrain from raising their children as Christians because this might attract the attention of the government and community leaders (since children might inadvertently reveal the faith of their parents). This fear even extends to funerals where Christians with a Muslim background who die are often buried according to Islamic rites in Muslim cemeteries, even though Christian and Muslim cemeteries are separate.

## Violence

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

Sudan	Reporting period	Christians killed	Christians attacked	Christians arrested	Churches attacked	Christian-owned houses and shops attacked
WWL 2019	01 Nov 2017 - 31 Oct 2018	0	31	63	10	110
WWL 2018	01 Nov 2016 - 31 Oct 2017	3	120	20	25	200

*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

- The government has [demolished](#) and closed down churches.
- Christian converts with a Muslim background are particularly at risk since the law officially punishes conversion from Islam to another religion by death. They usually refrain from owning Christian materials or accessing Christians TV or internet which, if discovered, could be used as evidence against them by family or officials.
- Christian children are often harassed in school or playgrounds due to their parent's faith.
- A very high level of violence against Christians is evident, particularly in the Nuba Mountains region where Christians are being targeted indiscriminately by government security forces.

## External Links - WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

- What type of persecution dominates?: Transparency International's 2017 Corruption Perceptions Index  
<https://www.transparency.org/country/SDN>
- Who is driving persecution?: Reporters without Border  
<https://rsf.org/en/sudan>

- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: demolished  
<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/02/sudan-government-demolishes-church-despite-pending-appeal/>

## WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

### Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

### Position on World Watch List (WWL)

In WWL 2019, Sudan ranks 6 with a score of 87 (the same score as in WWL 2018 and WWL 2017). Sudan has become a country where Christians face serious restrictions individually and collectively. The government has intensified its demolition of churches and arresting of Christians. This is one of the results of the application of full Sharia law that President al-Bashir vowed to implement following the secession of South Sudan. The dictatorial, Islamist government has also continued its policy of persecuting Christians in the Nuba region. In the WWL 2019 reporting period, more than 40 Christians were detained and charged.

### Persecution engines

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

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

#### **Islamic oppression (Very strong):**

This persecution engine is rooted in the Muslim Brotherhood ideology advocated by the founder of the current ruling party, Hassan al-Turabi, who helped Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir consolidate power during a bloodless coup in 1989. The Sudanese government is not only working towards forming an Islamic state at the expense of other religious groups in the country but has also been accused of supporting radical Islamic militants for the past three decades. The USA first labeled Sudan as a state sponsor of terrorism on 12 August 1993 for knowingly harboring local and international terrorists and for allowing the country to be used as a transit point for terrorists and weapons. Osama Bin Laden was there before he moved to Afghanistan, for example. Historically, Islam - including its radical tendencies (such as the [19th century Mahdist movement](#)) is firmly rooted in Sudanese society. The overwhelming majority of the population in the country is Sunni Muslim. Sharia law is the foundation of Sudan's legal system and Sudan's elite has aimed at enforcing an Islamic regime in the country. Apostasy is criminalized, punishable by the death penalty. Blasphemy laws are being used countrywide to prosecute Christians. This engine has also a nationalist element.

#### **Dictatorial paranoia (Very strong):**

Sudan is run by an authoritarian regime since al-Bashir came to power through a coup in 1989. The influence of the government in private and public life is enormous. The country has its own deep-

rooted challenges: The Darfur crisis has continued, the conflict with Sudan's People Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) shows no sign of reaching a permanent solution even though [ceasefire agreements](#) were reached. Some argue that the agreements were made due to the pressure of sanctions from the US government and that the Sudanese government complied in the hope that the sanctions would be lifted. Whenever President al-Bashir's government faces socio-economic and political challenges, support among the population at large is revived by using inflammatory language against the West. This, in turn, has an adverse effect on Sudanese Christians, as the government regards Christians as the agents of Western countries.

Even though the majority of Sudanese are Sunni Muslims, the government of Sudan has strong ties with Shia Iran. There seems to be a symbiotic relationship between *Islamic oppression* and *Dictatorial paranoia*. Moreover, it has become apparent that those leading the regime are mainly people with radical ideologies. The ruling National Congress Party (NCP), therefore, is serving as a means to strengthen the Islamic agenda. This implies that the role of the government in the persecution of Christians is not only driven by totalitarian tendencies but also by radical Islamist sympathies as well. In the past three decades, the willingness of the current president of Sudan to opportunistically discard beliefs and promises in exchange for hanging on to power has become increasingly evident. Almost all of his decisions – whether related to supporting terrorist and armed militias groups or cracking down on all forms of dissent - are motivated mainly, if not solely, by the desire to stay in power at all costs. It is also worth noting that the International Criminal Court (ICC) has indicted President Omar al-Bashir of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide for what has happened in Sudan under his leadership - but his desire to stay in power at all costs remains strong. The country was rated 'not free' in Freedom House's [2018 Freedom in the World report](#) (by scoring the lowest possible points in its scoring grids).

**Organized corruption and crime (Very strong):**

The government of Sudan is employing all means available to make sure that its plan of staying in power remains effective. There is a coordinated governmental effort aimed at mobilizing and militarizing tribal militias (including but not limited to Arab militias) known as Janjaweed and using these groups to work towards creating an Islamic state at the expense of other religious groups in the country. A number of reports by different human right groups have accused these militias of committing a gross violation of human rights against the non-Arab citizens of Sudan in conjunction with the government. Christians are among the minorities who are victims of this sort of organized crime.

**Ethnic antagonism (Strong):**

The Sudanese population consists of about 19 different ethnic groups and almost 600 subgroups. Most of the inhabitants of the southern parts of the country are of Ethnic African origin, and Arabs live predominantly in the northern parts of the country. Due to the deeply religious nature of the Sudanese people, most of the population are adherents to a religious faith, mainly to Christianity or Islam, however, indigenous religions still persist. For many years, the Arabs from the North have tried to spread not only Islam but also a specific cultural and ethnic identity associated with Arabism. This led to decades of civil war and was ultimately responsible for the independence of South Sudan. Even today, this is happening all over the country.

## Drivers of persecution

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

Imams in mosques and madrassas preach anti-Christian sentiment. Followers of Wahhabism and advocates of Sharia law (as the basis for regulating all aspects of life in Sudan) are closing the spaces available for a Christian life. State security forces are arresting, harassing and intimidating Christians, and demolishing churches. Violent religious groups organized as militias are responsible for the death and destruction of property of Christians all over the country. Christian converts face serious persecution from family, extended family members and the community at large. They can be sentenced to death if reported to the government as apostasy is punishable by death.

### Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia:

The drivers of Dictatorial paranoia in Sudan are government officials, government-supported groups and all who subscribe to the Islamic ideology refusing to allow conversion and refusing to allow a place for Christians in the country. What is more troubling in this regard is the alleged association between the government and violent Islamic groups. Government officials are also forcing Christians to go to school on Sundays. The ruling National Congress Party (which was founded in 1996 and is headed by the president) has also pushed for the application of Sharia law in the country.

**Drivers of Organized corruption and crime:**

Government officials, ethnic leaders and others operate with impunity. They undermine the rule of law in the country. They work hand in hand so that Christians lose their churches/property before courts of law.

**Drivers of Ethnic antagonism:**

There are ethnic leaders that are backed by the government in different parts of the country. These ethnic groups and their leaders often see ethnicity and Islam as one and the same. Thus, if they see one of their members converting to Christianity, they will persecute him/her.

**Context**

Surrounded by Egypt, Libya, Chad, Central African Republic, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and the Red Sea, the country has never been out of the spotlight due to the wars and conflicts that have engulfed it for decades. The current civil war in South Sudan has diverted the international community's attention away from the crimes being committed by the al-Bashir government. Al-Bashir is, in fact, presenting himself as a peacemaker helping to solve the conflict in South Sudan, while in reality he is arming both factions.

The persecution of Christians in Sudan is not a simple violation of freedom of religion. It is systematic and more reminiscent of a policy of [ethnic cleansing](#). It has a pattern which shows that government policy is driven by anti-Christian sentiment. The persecution is not a collection of isolated incidents, but rather a pattern. Historically, Islam is deeply embedded in Sudan's society, but, paradoxically, even though Christianity preceded Islam as a religion in Sudan by hundreds of years, Christianity is perceived as being foreign to Sudanese culture. Sudan is one of a few African countries that has consistently been on the World Watch List since it was first launched (for internal research purposes) in 1993. The country's rank on the list has been oscillating mostly between the top ten and the top twenty countries. This is in line with how reports by other governmental and non-governmental organizations characterize the human rights situation and freedom of religion in particular. Furthermore, for the past decades there was no rule of law in Sudan; press and media laws have been restrictive, and freedom of expression and religion has been highly curtailed. Yet President al-Bashir and his government showed their power by claiming more than 90% of the votes in a landslide victory in the elections held in April 2015 - despite grievances among sections of the population about the country's weakened economic position due to the loss of oil revenue which is in South Sudan's hands. The merging of the war between Sudan and SPLM-N and South Sudan is creating another dimension to the challenges faced by minorities in the country.

The ethnic-cultural landscape in the country is very diverse and complicated: Arab versus Ethnic African and Muslim versus Christian. The secession of South Sudan did not solve these problems. This is particularly true for Ethnic Africans, as a significant number are Christian and still living in the country. The government of Sudan is strictly implementing the policy of one religion, one culture and one language. This policy has been practiced for many decades and was reiterated by President al-Bashir in 2010 when he declared that Sharia law is to be the main source for the Constitution, Islam the official religion and Arabic the official language of Sudan. Thus, President al-Bashir has continued to put immense pressure on Ethnic African Christians remaining in Sudan, especially in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states.

The government of Sudan seems to be repeating the policy it employed in the 1980s and 1990s. During that period, the government of Sudan devised a strategy to "decimate the people of the Nuba

Mountains by denying them basic human needs such as food, medical attention, and adequate shelter” (quoted from: Totten S. and Grzyb A., *Conflict in the Nuba Mountains - From Genocide by Attrition to Contemporary Sudan Crisis*, 2017, p.2). The situation in the Nuba Mountains is exacerbated by the fact that the civil war in South Sudan and the conflict with SPLA-N have merged together in the border region of the two countries.

Sudan tried its best (but failed) to prevent the secession of South Sudan, and now al-Bashir is suspected of using the war between the two main tribes in South Sudan, the Nuer, and Dinka, to weaken the country by arming both groups. Equally important is the fact that President al-Bashir is accused of using the tactics to divert attention away from his arrest warrant issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC). The fact that many African countries are pushing to withdraw from the ICC is a moral victory for al-Bashir. In its [April 2018 press release](#), the USCIRF designated Sudan as a country of particular concern (CPC) and recommended the same to the State Department. The US State Department re-designated Sudan a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) on 22 December for the 18th consecutive year for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom – as defined by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). In conclusion, the corrosive connection and symbiotic relationship between *Islamic oppression* and *Dictatorial paranoia* is making the lives of Christians unbearable.

## Christian communities and how they are affected

In Sudan all Christian communities face persecution. However, the level of persecution that Christians from a Muslim background and ethnic Africans face is enormous. Many of them have been arrested and charged with crimes like espionage; many churches have been demolished and it is planned to continue this action; many Christians are attacked indiscriminately in areas such as the Nuba Mountains region where government forces and rebel groups are in conflict. Churches are under pressure to close down.

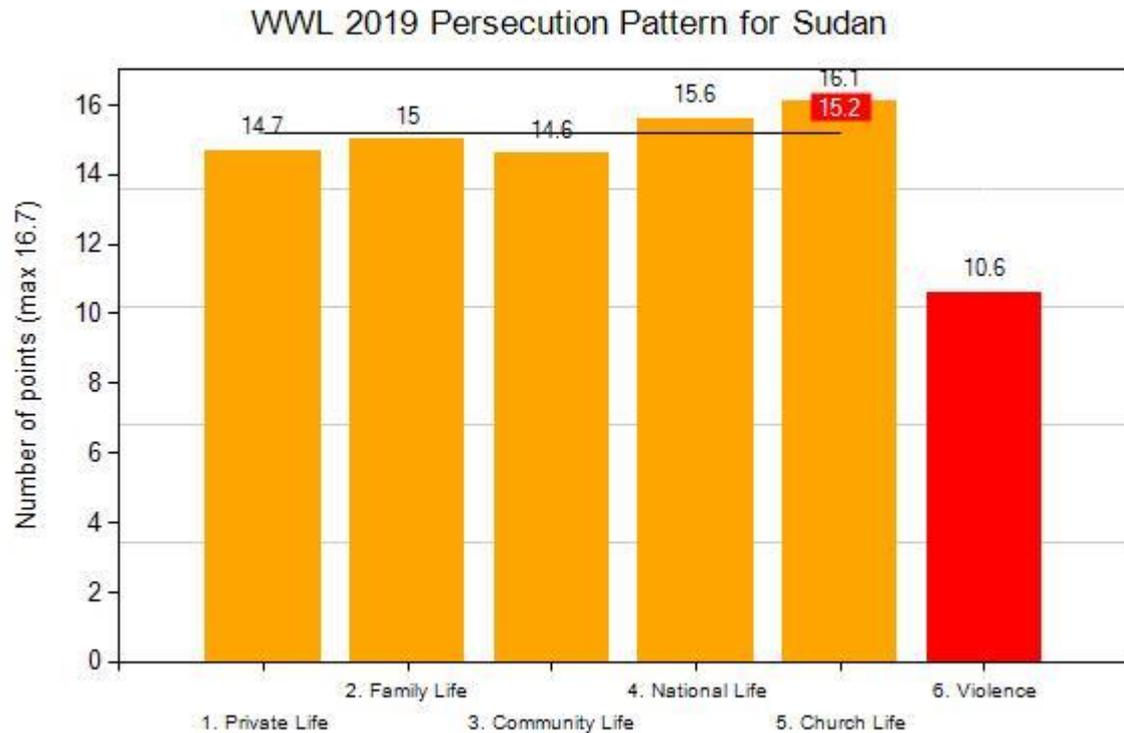
**Communities of expatriate Christians:** Expatriates are being forced to close their churches. These are groups mainly from Western countries and South Sudan. Their churches have faced demolition and have been denied registration. Some of them face arrest and detention without due process of law.

**Historical Christian communities:** Christians belonging to historical churches such as the Coptic Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches face persecution resulting from both *Islamic oppression* and *Dictatorial paranoia*. Judging by the program of church demolition in the country, it can be said that the government has set its agenda to close the majority, if not all, churches in the country, including those belonging to the Historical Christian communities.

**Converts to Christianity:** This group, which consists mainly of Christians with a Muslim background, experiences the most intense pressure. Not only do converts feel the pressure of persecution in the *national and church spheres of the life*, but also in severe form from family and neighbors in their *community, family and private life*.

**Non-traditional Christian communities:** Sudanese who belong to Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal denominations also face persecution from *Islamic oppression* and *dictatorial paranoia*. This group is also facing the prospect of having most of its churches in the country closed down.

## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence



The WWL 2019 Persecution pattern for Sudan shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Sudan is at the extreme level of 15.2, but did decrease from 15.4 in WWL 2018.
- Pressure is at an extreme level in all *spheres of life* and is strongest in the *Church sphere* (16.1), which reflects that the government is continuously targeting church life in the country in a variety of ways.
- The score for violence remains at a very high level, but went down from 12.0 in WWL 2018 to 10.6 points in WWL 2019.

### Private sphere:

According to one country researcher: “Due to the risk of discovery and use as evidence against them by family, society and officials, [converts] would refrain from owning Christian materials or accessing Christians TV or internet.” There have been instances where converts have been put under house-arrest by family members for the mere fact of conversion to Christianity. There is a clear law to punish Christians, especially those coming from a Muslim background. Article 126 of the Criminal Code states: “Whoever propagates the renunciation of Islam or publicly renounces it by explicit words or an act of definitive indication is said to commit the offence of apostasy.” In the past, there were cases wherein converts to Christianity were sentenced to death for holding mere conversations. Christian converts are particularly affected since the law punishes conversion from Islam to another religion by death. Furthermore, all categories of Christians are afraid of having conversations about their faith with Sudanese Muslims as these might be construed as being “acts that encourage apostasy against Islam”.

**Family sphere:**

Christians in the country face different forms of persecution in this *sphere of life*. Sudan is not an easy place for Christian to easily marry. If a marriage is between a Muslim and Christian, the Christian is expected to convert to Islam. While the law to a certain extent allows that non-Muslims will not be subjected to the application of Islamic law which the government wants to impose, in practice a Christian wedding will not take place as smoothly as a wedding between Muslims. Christian children are often harassed in school or playgrounds due to their parent's faith. Child custody or inheritance is made complicated for Christians solely due to their faith. This is another *sphere of life* where converts suffer the most and the problems even extend to funerals as deceased converts with a Muslim background are often buried according to Islamic rites in Muslim cemeteries, even though Christian and Muslim cemeteries are separate. Converts also often refrain from raising their children as Christians because this might attract the attention of the government (since the children might inadvertently reveal the faith of their parents).

**Community sphere:**

In addition to the simple harassments and threats that Christians face in their daily lives, it is very important to distinguish between what is going on in the Nuba Mountain and Blue Nile regions of the country and what is taking place in other parts of the country, especially in the cities. Starting in June 2011, the government of Sudan has been carrying out ground offensives and an aerial bombardment campaign against alleged "rebels." Most experts of the region know however that the intention of the government of Sudan and the militias carrying out these attacks has one goal in mind, namely ethically cleansing the area of minority ethnic groups, and most importantly of Christians. Thousands of Christians have been killed because of attacks from government-supported groups and many thousands have been displaced from their villages for no reason other than having a religion different from those leading the country.

Public order laws, based largely on the government's strict interpretation of Islamic law, are in force in Khartoum State and prohibit "indecent dresses" and other "offenses of honor, reputation, and public morality". Islamic morality police have been known to harass and arrest Christians for not following official dressing codes. Christians also suffer discrimination when it comes to assuming public offices or sharing community resources. In addition, Christians, especially converts, are monitored by Muslim religious leaders and politicians. Christians also face immense pressure to renounce their faith.

**National sphere:**

At the national level, the general environment is not favorable to Christians. Christians are regarded as second-class citizens. Even though Article 38 of the Interim Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, the ruling party believes that the country belongs to Muslims. Emanating from this, almost all of laws and policies are derived from Sharia and are not flexible to accommodate freedom of religion. The other laws also limit freedom of religion in their additional claw-back clauses. Christians - especially those from South Sudan and Western missionaries – are frequently monitored by government security forces. Conversion from Islam to Christianity is not only considered unlawful under the current laws of the country, it can lead to hostility within the family of converts. The case of [Mariam Yahia Ibrahim](#), who was sentenced to death for apostasy in 2014, but later released due to the pressure from the international community, is a good example showing the extent of risk involved for anyone who decided to convert from Islam to Christianity.

A country researcher states: "Because of Islamic law being implemented in the country, it is very difficult for non-Muslims to get licenses to open business when compared to Muslim business owners.

In addition to the legal limitation, it is also worth noting that most Christian business owners are discriminated by customers because of their religion. In most cases while dealing with the government, it is very difficult for Christian business owners to win government sponsored bids because of the discriminatory attitude of the government officials in charge of the government offices responsible for these bids.”

### **Church sphere:**

In the WWL 2019 reporting period, many churches have been forced to shut down and demolished. One country researcher reported that the Sudanese government has increasingly interfered in the internal running of religious institutions. Due to rules issued by the Ministry of Guidance and Religious Endowment, pastors have felt forced to censor themselves and curtail their activities. In some places, Sudanese security forces have forced Christians to hand over their Christian schools. Christians have found it difficult to build new churches, the major obstacle being the government offices responsible for issuing the required permit. Even if a permit is issued, Christians then face challenges from local Islamic leaders and radical Muslims on a daily basis. One researcher states: “Of course, the level of monitoring and obstruction varies from one part of the country to another. While Christians in the capital city and other major cities are subject to monitoring and obstruction mainly from government forces, churches in the remote parts of the country, especially in areas affected by the civil war, are subject to more obstruction and monitoring from both government and non-government groups.” Furthermore, the government keeps interfering in church business and plays a significant role in setting up [rival church committees](#) which replace church-elected committees. The government then endorses these rival committees and allows them to sell churches behind the backs of the main congregation. However, in one recent [dispute](#), a Sudanese court ruled in August 2018 in favor of the church committee and against the government. Considering the lack of independence of the judiciary, it is not certain that the government will refrain from its destructive action.

### **Violence:**

Although lower than in WWL 2018, the very high level of violence against Christians (reflected in the score 10.6) has resulted from the Persecution engines operating together. Christians are being targeted indiscriminately in the Nuba Mountains region by government security forces, although the government claims it is targeting rebels. Churches and Christian properties are being targeted and [pastors](#) are being prosecuted for speaking out against persecution in the country. More than 40 Christians have been arrested during the WWL 2019 reporting period because of their faith.

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

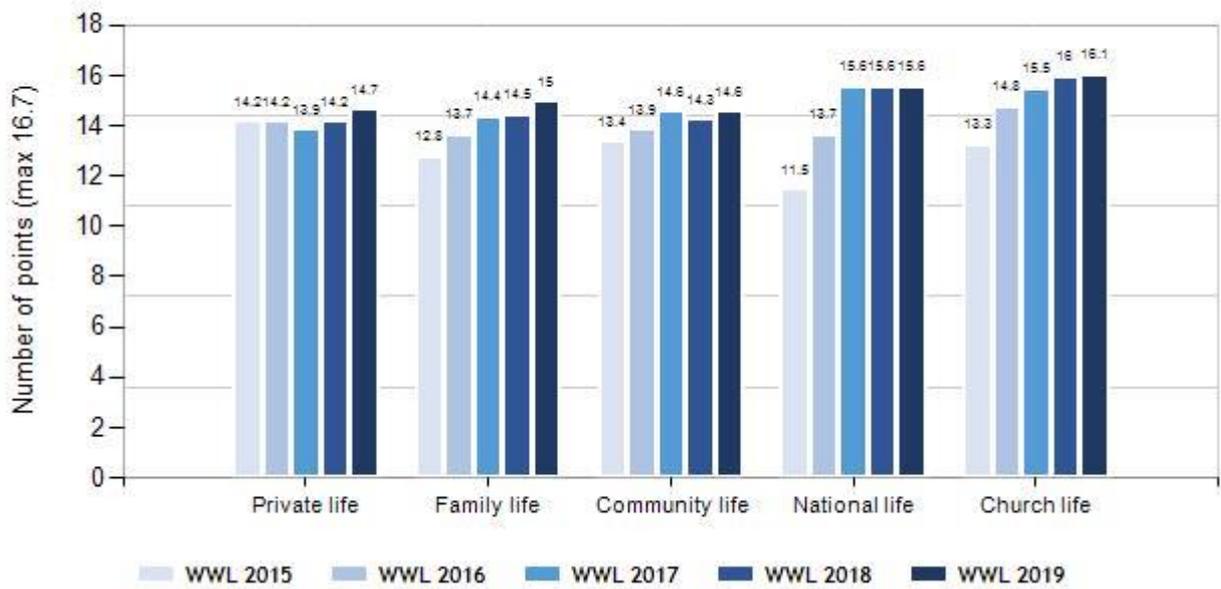
## **5 Year trends**

Chart 1 below shows the pressure on Christians in the various *spheres of life* over the last five reporting periods. It can clearly be seen that the pressure on Christians in virtually all spheres of life is very high (and often extreme) and has increased over the last years. shows .immense. The pattern shows that the pressure seems to be stabilizing at an extreme level in the *National* and *Church spheres*. This is an indication that persecution in Sudan is typically targeting Church life with the government playing a key role. It also reflects the restrictive policies and anti-Christian sentiment projected by the government. Chart 2 shows that the average pressure on Christians started at a very high level in WWL 2015 and has increased yearly to its current extreme level. This is also consistent with how other organizations describe the situation in the country. For example, the US State Department has

designated Sudan as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for more than 15 times for gross violation of freedom of religion.

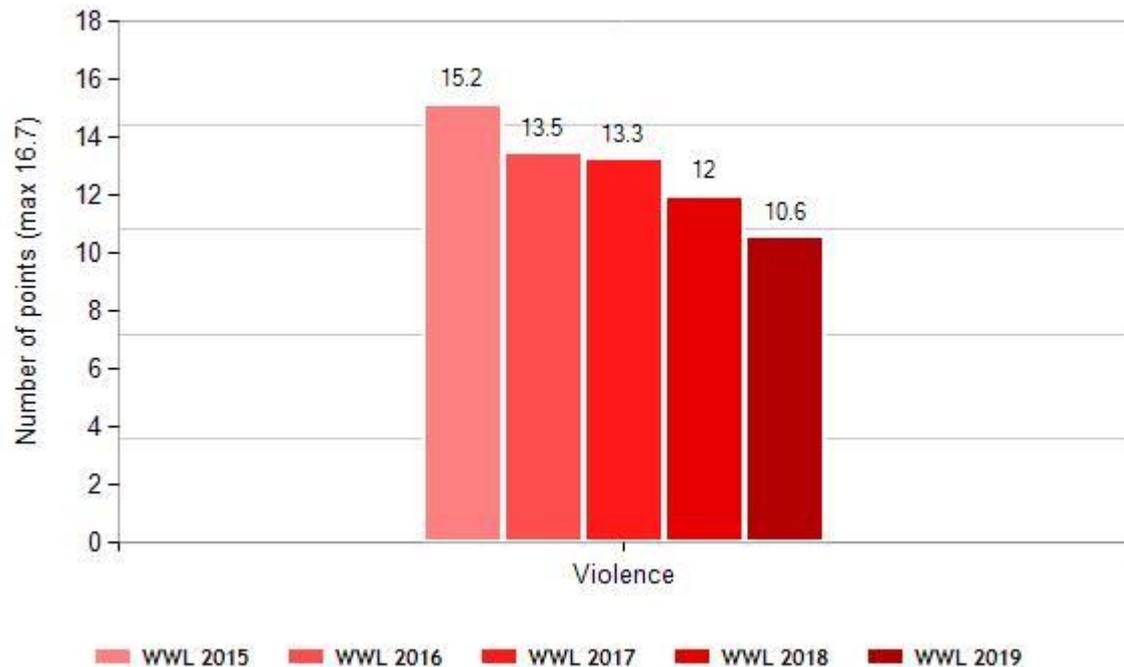
Chart 3 depicts the scores for violence over the last five reporting periods. Unlike the chart for pressure, the scores for violence have been decreasing over the past five years. However, this decline is due to the impossibility of verifying that the killing of Christians have been due to their faith. In places like Nuba Mountains, the government is still committing serious atrocities against civilians most of whom are Christians. Thus, the decrease in violence score does not necessarily lead to a conclusion that Christian life is getting better in Sudan.

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



WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Pattern history: Sudan	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2019	15.2
2018	14.9
2017	14.8
2016	14.1
2015	13.0

## WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Profile for Sudan (Violence)



## Gender specific persecution

### Female:

Female Christians in the country face tremendous challenges. They are forced to dress like Muslims. Girls who are arrested for “indecent dressing” often face groping and humiliation during interrogation. The apostasy ordeal that Mariam Yehya Ibrahim had to go through, even giving birth in jail in May 2014, serves as an example of the sort of treatment a Christian woman in Sudan can experience. Furthermore, girls/women face forced marriage, rape, and other gender-based violence because of their faith.

### Male:

The government targets male Christians with a variety of serious charges. For instance, the security forces often accuse Christian males of spying for the West. This has the potential to cause family disintegration and weaken the Church.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

Other religious minorities such as the Jewish community also face [serious challenges](#) in Sudan. In 2017, for example, football fans were seen praising Adolf Hitler and denying the ‘Holocaust’. One Imam also said during a sermon that Jews are to blame for all things evil. The Bahai community is not recognized in the country and can only operate in secret. Jehovah’s Witnesses also face harassment. Shia Muslims are not allowed to hold worship services. In a nutshell, any religious group apart from Sunni Islam faces tremendous challenges to exercise their faith. Examples can be found under <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>.

## Future outlook

### The political outlook:

Despite the fact that President al-Bashir faces two international arrest warrants, the international community's attention has been diverted to the troubles in South Sudan and the outbreak of civil war there among the two-main rival ethnic groups.

### The outlook for Christians - seen through the lens of:

**Dictatorial paranoia:** Known for its poor record in human rights, the government of Sudan has continued violating the rights of Christians in the country. It has also been on the US State Department's list of "Countries of Particular Concern (CPC)" since 1999. Pressure from the international community helped the release of some Christians who were detained because of their faith; however, the government has not changed its general attitude and behavior towards Christians. The looting and destruction of churches, hospitals, and schools are all common, especially in the Nuba Mountains region. This persecution engine looks set to remain in operation at least as long as the government of al-Bashir is in power.

**Islamic oppression:** Besides the authoritarian government, radicals imams and even radical and armed groups like the Janjaweed militia are targeting Christians. These militias are funded and trained by the Sudanese government. This persecution engine will remain in operation in the coming years.

### Conclusion:

Looking to the future, there is the very slim possibility that - as economic pressure mounts - the government of Sudan might give in and respect freedom of religion so that sanctions could be lifted. However, the following points are most likely:

- The arrest of Christians will continue.
- The demolition of churches will continue.
- Christians will continue to find it difficult to get building permits for churches.
- The government of Sudan will in all likelihood continue targeting the Nuba Christians indiscriminately.

## External Links - WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines: 19th century Mahdist movement  
<http://oxfordre.com/africanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277734-e-256>
- Persecution engines: ceasefire agreements  
<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/11/ceasefire-holds-but-food-shortage-threatens-sudans-nuba-people/>
- Persecution engines: 2018 Freedom in the World report  
<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/sudan>
- Context: ethnic cleansing  
<http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Sudan-Ethnic-cleansing-WWR.pdf>

- Context: April 2018 press release  
<http://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/press-releases-statements/uscirf-releases-2018-annual-report-recommends-16-countries-be>
- Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence: Mariam Yahia Ibrahim  
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/meriam-ibrahim-sudanese-apostasy-woman-rearrested-with-family-at-airport-9559894.html>
- Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence: rival church committees  
<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/10/government-pressures-sudan-church-christ-leaders/>
- Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence: pastors  
<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/coe/sudanese-church-leader-charged-with-apostasy/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: serious challenges  
<http://everydayantisemitism.com/2017/11/28/football-fans-in-sudan-display-banner-of-hitlers-face-with-the-word-holocaust-in-gruesome-first-for-the-country/>

## 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).