

World
Watch
Research

Turkey: Country Dossier

December 2020



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Introduction

World Watch List 2021

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	11.1	94	94	94	94	92
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.2	94	93	94	93	89
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.3	9.8	92	92	91	91	91
4	Libya	15.6	15.4	15.9	16.3	16.3	12.4	92	90	87	86	78
5	Pakistan	13.9	14.2	15.1	14.9	13.5	16.7	88	88	87	86	88
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.9	15.9	15.4	11.1	88	87	86	86	82
7	Yemen	16.6	16.6	16.5	16.7	16.7	3.9	87	85	86	85	85
8	Iran	14.5	14.5	13.9	15.7	16.5	10.6	86	85	85	85	85
9	Nigeria	13.3	13.2	13.9	14.1	14.1	16.7	85	80	80	77	78
10	India	13.0	12.9	13.5	14.9	13.7	15.4	83	83	83	81	73
11	Iraq	13.6	14.6	14.2	14.8	13.8	11.5	82	76	79	86	86
12	Syria	13.3	13.9	13.5	14.5	14.0	12.0	81	82	82	76	86
13	Sudan	13.4	13.4	13.7	13.6	15.7	9.1	79	85	87	87	87
14	Saudi Arabia	15.1	13.9	14.4	15.8	16.6	2.2	78	79	77	79	76
15	Maldives	15.4	15.5	13.9	15.8	16.6	0.4	77	78	78	78	76
16	Egypt	12.5	13.2	11.5	12.7	11.0	14.1	75	76	76	70	65
17	China	12.6	9.7	12.0	13.2	15.4	11.1	74	70	65	57	57
18	Myanmar	11.9	12.0	13.1	12.9	12.3	11.9	74	73	71	65	62
19	Vietnam	12.1	8.8	12.7	14.0	14.5	10.0	72	72	70	69	71
20	Mauritania	14.3	14.0	13.5	14.1	13.6	1.9	71	68	67	57	55
21	Uzbekistan	15.1	12.9	14.1	12.2	15.7	1.3	71	73	74	73	71
22	Laos	12.1	10.2	13.6	13.5	14.3	6.9	71	72	71	67	64
23	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.8	13.3	15.7	1.5	70	70	69	68	67
24	Algeria	13.9	13.9	11.5	13.1	13.4	3.9	70	73	70	58	58
25	Turkey	12.5	11.5	10.8	13.3	11.6	9.3	69	63	66	62	57
26	Tunisia	12.0	13.1	10.4	11.5	13.2	7.4	67	64	63	62	61
27	Morocco	12.6	13.5	11.2	12.4	14.1	3.7	67	66	63	51	49
28	Mali	9.4	8.2	12.7	10.3	11.5	15.4	67	66	68	59	59
29	Qatar	14.0	13.9	10.8	13.1	14.1	1.5	67	66	62	63	66
30	Colombia	11.4	8.8	12.4	11.0	9.7	13.9	67	62	58	56	53
31	Bangladesh	11.5	10.3	13.0	11.3	10.1	10.6	67	63	58	58	63
32	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.0	9.4	11.8	14.3	67	66	48	-	-
33	Tajikistan	14.0	12.3	11.9	12.5	13.2	2.2	66	65	65	65	58
34	Nepal	12.4	9.7	9.9	13.0	12.3	8.5	66	64	64	64	53
35	CAR	9.0	8.6	13.1	9.6	9.9	15.6	66	68	70	61	58
36	Ethiopia	9.9	8.5	10.7	10.3	10.8	14.4	65	63	65	62	64
37	Mexico	10.3	8.1	12.4	10.7	10.3	12.6	64	60	61	59	57
38	Jordan	13.1	13.9	11.4	11.6	12.4	2.0	64	64	65	66	63
39	Brunei	13.9	14.6	10.7	10.9	13.5	0.7	64	63	63	64	64
40	DRC	8.0	7.9	11.2	9.4	11.6	16.1	64	56	55	33	-
41	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.5	11.0	12.5	13.4	2.4	64	64	63	63	56
42	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.0	12.3	15.7	64	60	54	38	-
43	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	11.9	12.7	13.8	0.0	64	61	64	62	61
44	Oman	13.2	13.5	10.3	12.5	13.0	0.9	63	62	59	57	53
45	Mozambique	9.3	7.6	11.3	7.9	11.1	16.1	63	43	43	-	-
46	Malaysia	12.1	14.3	12.9	11.5	10.0	2.4	63	62	60	65	60
47	Indonesia	11.5	11.4	12.4	10.7	9.3	7.8	63	60	65	59	55
48	Kuwait	13.2	13.5	9.9	12.2	13.2	1.1	63	62	60	61	57
49	Kenya	11.7	9.2	10.5	8.0	10.3	12.8	62	61	61	62	68
50	Comoros	12.5	11.1	11.4	11.3	14.2	1.9	62	57	56	56	56

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017
51	Cuba	10.9	7.7	11.8	12.9	13.4	5.4	62	52	49	49	47
52	Sri Lanka	12.2	9.1	11.7	12.2	9.7	7.0	62	65	58	57	55
53	UAE	13.4	13.3	9.7	12.0	12.4	1.1	62	60	58	58	55
54	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.3	7.2	11.6	10.6	62	60	52	45	47
55	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.3	11.2	10.4	12.0	1.3	58	57	56	54	48
56	Palestinian Territories	12.5	13.3	9.1	10.4	11.7	0.9	58	60	57	60	64
57	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	10.2	58	55	52	53	59
58	Russian Federation	12.3	8.0	10.2	10.5	12.1	3.9	57	60	60	51	46
59	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	10.3	10.0	11.2	0.0	56	56	56	56	57
60	Bahrain	12.1	12.5	9.1	10.7	10.5	0.9	56	55	55	57	54
61	Azerbaijan	12.8	9.8	9.4	11.1	12.6	0.0	56	57	57	57	52
62	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	3.7	53	56	48	40	-
63	Nicaragua	6.9	4.6	9.9	11.3	10.0	8.1	51	41	41	-	-
64	Burundi	5.1	5.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.9	48	48	43	-	-
65	Uganda	8.1	4.6	6.7	6.7	9.1	12.0	47	48	47	46	53
66	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	5.9	47	45	46	-	-
67	Honduras	6.8	5.0	10.6	7.6	9.0	7.6	46	39	38	-	-
68	Angola	6.4	3.6	7.0	10.1	11.4	7.2	46	43	42	-	-
69	South Sudan	5.7	1.5	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.0	43	44	44	-	-
70	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	0.6	43	43	43	-	-
71	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	9.8	0.7	43	41	42	-	-
72	Rwanda	5.3	4.4	6.7	7.8	10.1	8.1	42	42	41	-	-
73	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	6.6	3.3	42	42	43	-	-
74	El Salvador	6.6	4.9	9.8	4.2	8.7	7.8	42	38	30	-	-

Copyright notice

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- 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”.
- The WWL 2021 reporting period was 01 October 2019 - 30 September 2020.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic

In the WWL 2021 reporting period, travel restrictions and other measures introduced by the governments of various countries to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic did cause delays and create the need for restructuring grass-roots research in some cases. Through the agile cooperation of Open Doors field networks, research analysts, external experts and an increased use of technological options, Open Doors is confident that the WWL 2021 scoring, analysis and documentation has maintained required levels of quality and reliability.

External Links - Introduction

- Sources and definitions: World Watch List Documentation - <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>

WWL 2021 Short country profile / Turkey

Brief country details

Turkey: Population (2020 UN estimate)	Christians	Chr%
83,836,000	171,000	0.2

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020)

Turkey: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	69	25
WWL 2020	63	36
WWL 2019	66	26
WWL 2018	62	31
WWL 2017	57	37

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2017-2021 reporting periods

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Turkey: Main persecution engines		Main drivers
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials	
Ethno-religious hostility	Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Ethnic group leaders, Government officials	
Islamic oppression	Government officials, One's own (extended) family, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Political parties, Non-Christian religious leaders	
Religious nationalism	Government officials, Political parties, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Non-Christian religious leaders, One's own (extended) family	

Clan oppression	One's own (extended) family, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs
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Engines and Drivers are listed in order of strength. Only Very strong / Strong / Medium are shown here.

Brief description of the persecution situation

The very strong religious nationalism in society puts a lot of pressure on Christians. In contrast to previous WWL reporting periods, the government not only targeted foreign (Western) Christians, but has also banned foreign Christians with Turkish spouses and children from the country. In addition, society's nationalism leaves almost no space for Christians to make an alternative message heard. Although conversion from Islam to Christianity is not legally forbidden, converts from Islam are put under pressure by their families and communities to return to Islam. Christians therefore sometimes lead a double life and hide their conversion. Although converts from Islam can legally change their religious affiliation on ID cards to Christianity, it can be a stressful process and they can still face discrimination at the hands of individual government officials. Once discovered, a Christian with a Muslim background may be threatened with divorce and the loss of inheritance rights by family members.

The cocktail of Islam and nationalism also affects Christians who do not have a Muslim background. These are mostly from ethnic minorities (e.g. Greeks, Armenians, Syrians). They are hardly regarded as full members of Turkish society and encounter all kinds of legal and bureaucratic obstructions.

Christians from all categories of Christian communities have limited access to state employment, and experience discrimination in private employment, especially where employers have ties to the government. Since religious affiliation is still recorded on ID cards (nowadays via electronic chip), it is easy to discriminate against Christian job applicants.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

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

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

- Christian converts are ostracized and faced with opposition by their families, and threatened with divorce and loss of child custody (ICCPR Art. 18)

- Christian children are harassed because of their parents' faith (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Christians face restrictions in employment in the public sector and experience discrimination in the private sector (ICCPR Arts. 25 and 26, and ICESCR Art. 6)
- Christians face harassment and violence if they talk about their faith or engage in proselytization (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

July 2020, Istanbul: The [conversion of the Hagia Sophia](#) and Chora Museum into a mosque can be viewed as a sign of the increasing religious-nationalist intolerance towards Christians (CNN, 10 July 2020).

January 2020, south-east Turkey: The parents of the Catholic priest of the Catholic Chaldean Church in Istanbul were reported missing from their village in south-eastern Turkey on 11 January 2020. Hurmuz and Şimoni Diril were the [last remaining couple in their previously Christian village](#). The body of Şimoni was found on 20 March 2020, while Hurmuz is still missing. It is a telling story of the treatment of Turkey's remaining ancient Syriac Christian community. Assyrian activists believe that the abductors' aim was to intimidate any remaining Christians in the area and make them leave their ancestral land (CSW, 25 March 2020).

November 2019, Diyarbakir: [South Korean Jinwook Kim was stabbed to death](#) in Diyarbakir. He was known to be involved in a small house fellowship of Christians and to talk about his faith with neighbors and friends in the area. Although treated as a robbery by the Turkish authorities, Turkish Protestant Christians view the murder as being faith-related given the current anti-Christian climate, an example of which were the bill-board posters in the city of Konya reminding Muslim citizens not to befriend Christians or Jews, quoting a verse from the Quran (World Watch Monitor, 29 November 2019).

Specific examples of positive developments

For the first time in one hundred years, a new church is being built in Istanbul. The cornerstone of the [Syriac Orthodox Saint Ephraim church](#) was laid by President Erdogan himself in August 2019. The construction is expected to be finished in 2021 or 2022 (TRT World, 3 August 2019).

External Links - Short country profile

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: conversion of the Hagia Sophia - <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/07/10/europe/hagia-sophia-mosque-turkey-intl/index.html>

- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: last remaining couple in their previously Christian village. - <https://www.csw.org.uk/2020/03/25/press/4591/article.htm>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: South Korean Jinwook Kim was stabbed to death - <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2019/11/korean-murdered-in-southeast-turkey-for-mobile-phone/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Syriac Orthodox Saint Ephraim church - <https://www.trtworld.com/turkey/syriac-orthodox-church-is-new-wealth-for-istanbul-turkish-president-28737>

WWL 2021: Keys to understanding / Turkey

Link for general background information

- [Turkey country profile - BBC News](#)

Recent history

Turkey's history is marked by its focus on ethnicity and religion. This focus led first to the genocide on Armenians, Syriacs and Greek-Orthodox Christians starting during the 1st World War and extending into the 1920's, and has since instigated the further marginalization of minority groups.

Turkey is a remnant of the Ottoman Empire, which consisted of the Balkans in south-eastern Europe, modern-day Turkey, the Middle East and most of North Africa. The empire took part in World War I on the losing side of the German and Austrian-Hungarian empires. The Ottoman Empire lost all its territories outside current Turkey, when France and England divided up the Middle East and North Africa. The Turks felt utterly humiliated which led to the establishment of the Turkish National Movement. Under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Pasha (a.k.a. Atatürk), the Turkish War of Independence was waged, the occupying armies were expelled and a new political system was created. On 1 November 1922 the newly founded parliament formally abolished the Sultanate, thus ending 623 years of Ottoman rule. The Treaty of Lausanne of 24 July 1923 led to the international recognition of the "Republic of Turkey".

Mustafa Kemal became the republic's first president and subsequently introduced many radical reforms with the aim of transforming the Ottoman-Turkish state into a new secular republic. The country rapidly modernized. Turkey became a multiparty democracy in 1945. Politics were dominated by the Turkish army which staged coups in 1960, 1971, 1980 and 1997 against the elected governments. Strongly secular politicians were viewed by the Turkish public as incapable and highly corrupt, which led to a political change in 2002. Since 3 November 2002, Turkey has been governed by the conservative Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – AKP) under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

In August 2014, after three terms as prime minister, Erdoğan was elected Turkish president. On 15 July 2016 a coup took place but failed and the regime struck back fiercely. It accused the Islamic preacher and former ally, Fethullah Gülen (in self-exile in USA), to be behind the failed coup. Tens of thousands of soldiers, policemen, judges, politicians, journalists, teachers, imams etc. were arrested on accusation of supporting Gülen and many more were removed from their workplaces and made unemployed. Nationalism, which already played an important role in Turkey, soared to new heights and minorities have come under renewed pressure (especially the Kurdish population).

In April 2017, a referendum was held on [constitutional reforms](#) which would change Turkey from being a parliamentary democracy into a presidential one, granting considerable power to the president and making him the absolute decision-maker in Turkish politics (BBC News, 16 April 2017). In addition, the [new reforms would allow](#) Erdogan to stay in power till 2029 (BBC News, 16 April 2020). A small majority of 51% voted in favor of the reforms, with many yes-votes coming from the Turkish diaspora, and in April 2018 Erdogan announced new elections for both parliament and the presidency. Both elections in June 2018 [were won](#) by Erdogan and his AKP party, making him one of the most powerful leaders Turkey has ever had (BBC News, 25 June 2018).

Although President Erdogan cancelled the state of emergency which had been in place since the June 2016 coup, it did not stop the Turkish government from [cracking down](#) on (political) opponents and alleged coup supporters (BBC News, 8 July 2018). One case in particular was the detention of US Pastor Andrew Brunson for alleged support of Fethullah Gülen and the PKK, which [led to sanctions](#) being imposed by the USA (BBC News 2 August 2018). The Turkish economy [suffered quite severely](#) from these developments (BBC News, 10 August 2018). Brunson was eventually [released in October 2018](#), after being sentenced to three years imprisonment (World Watch Monitor, 12 October 2018).

In a major shift, the AKP party lost Ankara and Istanbul in the 2019 mayoral elections, which could be interpreted as sign that the president is losing popularity. An important and positive development was the AKP's [acceptance of the re-election results](#) for the position of mayor in Istanbul in June 2019 (BBC News, 24 June 2019). The acceptance of the results of the re-election was (internationally) regarded as a major test for Turkish democracy. However, Erdogan significantly undermined the elections by transferring authority from the mayors to government led ministries, making it impossible for opposition mayors to materialize their own plans ([Al Monitor, 25 Augustus 2020](#)). In addition, the lack of freedom of press and the strong accusations against opposition parties remain an issue of major concern.

In a show of strength, Turkish army units [invaded Syria](#) in October 2019 to drive Kurdish forces back from the Turkish border (BBC News, 14 October 2019). Turkey views the armed Kurdish groups in Syria as terrorists who support the PKK, the Kurdistan Workers Party, which Turkey has been fighting against for decades. Later on, in January 2020, Turkey officially began [deploying troops in Libya](#), in support of the West Libyan UN-backed Government of National Accord. Its intervention became a game-changer for the war in Libya, with the Turkey-supported forces ending the siege of Tripoli by East Libyan strongman General Haftar (The Independent, 6 January 2020).

On 10 July 2020, after a ruling by the Council of State which cancelled the decision to turn it into a museum, Erdogan signed a presidential decree to [convert Istanbul's Hagia Sophia into a mosque](#) again. The move was internationally widely condemned and viewed as derogatory towards especially Orthodox Christianity (CNN, 10 July 2020). Nonetheless, the move was a longstanding wish of Erdogan's religious support base, with Erdogan being in need of support given the various (economic) difficulties he is facing. Slowly, but steadily, Erdogan is reversing the legacy of Turkey's founder Ataturk, with some analysts asking if Turkish secularism is going to be replaced by Islamism for good ([Al Monitor, 24 July 2020](#)).

Political and legal landscape

Turkey is a presidential republic under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan. According to Turkish legislation based on the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, only four religious groups are recognized by the state: Sunni Islam, Greek Orthodoxy, Armenian Apostolics and Judaism. A citizen's religion is recorded in official documents, i.e. passport or ID card. The only other alternative is to leave the entry for religion blank. Since 2017, new ID cards do not have a written entry for religion anymore. However, religious affiliation is still registered on the ID card's electronic chip and it is still common for government officials to ask for one's religion.

Turkish legislation does not allow the training of church ministers in private education centers. As a result, all Greek Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic seminaries were forced to shut down in the 1970s and 1980s and remain closed to this day. But under the guarantees of the Lausanne Treaty, the Greek and Armenian communities still maintain church grade schools accredited by the Ministry of Education. The Catholic and Protestant churches are able to provide catechetical training to their children on church premises. Of course, Turkish Christians from a Muslim background have no facilities at all - they must either pursue their studies informally or train their pastors and leaders abroad.

Purchasing premises for church use can prove to be very difficult, since zoning laws tend to be arbitrary. Turkish law stipulates that only certain buildings can be designated as churches. Whether or not a building will be given to a religious group for use as a church is highly dependent on the political and personal leanings of the mayor, as well as on the attitude of the local population.

The [Economist Intelligence Unit](#) (EIU) has classified Turkey as a 'hybrid' regime (EUI, Democracy Index 2019).

According to [Middle East Concern](#) (accessed 18 September 2020):

- "The constitution establishes Turkey as a secular state, affording no privileged status to Islam or Islamic law. While a founding principle of the modern Turkish state is the separation of State and religion, a degree of tension is inherent in this as the State must control religion to the extent necessary to prevent religion controlling the State. The constitution affirms the principle of non-discrimination, including on the basis of religion, and guarantees the free exercise of worship and religious rites, including freedom from religious compulsion, provided religious practices do not undermine the fundamental rights of others. Religious conversion is legally permitted, including from Islam, though social disapproval may be encountered."
- "The Armenian Apostolic and Greek Orthodox churches, together with the Jewish community, have recognition under the Lausanne Treaty of 1923 – although their administrative structures do not have legal entity. These two churches may operate religious community schools, though restrictions on private universities prevent the operation of training colleges. All other religious groups must register as associations or foundations (with charitable or cultural objectives) in order to gain legal status. Although

the Lausanne Treaty stipulated that recognised non-Muslims could govern personal status issues according to their own rites, all citizens of Turkey are now subject to the secular civil code."

Religious landscape

Turkey: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	171,000	0.2
Muslim	82,418,000	98.3
Hindu	790	0.0
Buddhist	39,000	0.0
Ethno-religionist	12,700	0.0
Jewish	16,000	0.0
Bahai	23,000	0.0
Atheist	57,000	0.1
Agnostic	950,000	1.1
Other	148,800	0.2
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020)

According to WCD's 2020 estimates, 98.3% of the Turkish population is Muslim, a third of whom are Alevi or Shia Muslims. Most Turks are Sunni Muslims. Only 0.2% of the population are Christian.

Turkey is currently going through a gradual change from being a strictly secular country to a country based on Islamic norms and values. When secularism prevailed, Christians in Turkey experienced many restrictions since the state interpreted secularism to mean far-reaching state controls and that no religion should be encouraged to flourish. Under the current regime of President Erdogan, secularism has steadily diminished and the country is accepting a more pronounced Islamic influence.

Non-Muslims are tacitly banned from jobs in state administration and the security forces. Non-Muslims state that when they enlist for military service, their religious affiliation is noted by their superiors and there is also a "security check". There are no non-Muslims among Turkish military officers, provincial governors or mayors. However, for the first time in Turkey's history, a Syriac Orthodox citizen was elected to parliament in the June 2011 elections.

In May 2010 the government released a decree to all government organs stating that the rights of Christian and Jewish minorities should be respected and their leaders should also be treated with respect. In August 2011 the government published a decree to return state-confiscated assets that once belonged to Greek, Armenian or Jewish trusts. Two issues should be noted in this context: For the return of the properties it is essential to be a registered organization, which is difficult in Turkey; and in all these actions there is no mention at all of the emerging Turkish Protestant church. The decrees did not prevent the government from seizing over 100 title deeds from the Syriac Church since 2014. [55 deeds were returned](#) in May 2018 after the EU parliament also addressed the issue (World Watch Monitor, 1 June 2018).

Other sources report:

- In its annual report for 2020, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom has placed Turkey on the 'Special Watch List' after recording a sharp increase in violence. Various religious and ethnic minority communities faced both threats of violence and actual violence, including at least two killings ([USCRIF](#), accessed 17 September 2020).
- [Middle East Concern](#) (accessed 18 September 2020) reports: [Since 2018] "significant numbers of foreign Christians resident in Turkey have been banned from the country. In 2018 the Armenian Apostolic Church in Turkey attempted to elect a patriarch as the incumbent was suffering from dementia and unable to function in his role. The election was prevented by the state and this state interference was condemned by the Constitutional Court. The death of the patriarch in 2019 opened the way for elections to proceed. In 2019 President Erdogan laid the foundation stone of a new Syriac church in Istanbul – the first such church to be built since the founding of the republic in 1923."

Economic landscape

According to the [World Factbook](#) (accessed 14 September 2020) and [World Bank data](#) (June 2020):

- **GPD per capita (PPP):** \$27,000 (2017 est.)
- **Unemployment:** 12.9%, with youth unemployment being almost twice as high at 22.7%
- **Percentage of population below national poverty line:** 13.9% (2017 est.)

According to [World Bank's August 2020 Economic Monitor](#):

- **COVID-19:** "Despite an initial surge in COVID-19 cases, cross country data suggests that Turkey contained relatively quickly the spread and worst health effects of the virus. As in other countries, however, continued vigilance is essential to sustain this fragile trend." However, "the economic impact of the COVID-19 health crisis has understandably derailed a fragile economic recovery in Turkey." ... "The authorities' economic policy response to

COVID-19 was swift and comprehensive. Preliminary analysis seems to suggest that Turkey's short-term containment measures and economic support may have helped to balance the health and economic impacts of COVID-19.", nonetheless: "The global economy and Turkey will face a difficult 2020 followed by an uncertain rebound in 2021. The Turkish economy is projected to contract by 3.8 percent in 2020 in the baseline scenario."

According to the [Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development](#) (OECD, accessed 18 September 2020):

- **Economic growth:** Economic growth averaged nearly 7% over 2010 - 2017. The economy grew 0.9% in 2019 but, due to the COVID-19 crisis, is projected to grow only 0.5% in 2020, over 3 percentage points lower than the pre-COVID-19 estimate. Turkey's economy is becoming more dependent on industry in major cities, mostly concentrated in the western provinces of the country, and less on agriculture. However, traditional agriculture is still a major pillar of the Turkish economy. Caused by a mixture of policy failures, including the appointment of Erdogan's son-in-law as Finance Minister, the lira made a sharp fall in August 2018, followed by a loss of household and businesses confidence. The uncertainties associated with the failed coup-attempt in July 2016 and ongoing geopolitical tensions in the region, are still holding back investment and consumer spending.
- **Inflation and Unemployment:** Due to the fall in the value of the lira, exports and tourism grew during 2019, while imports decreased, resulting in a record low current account deficit. For decades, a high current account deficit made Turkey heavily relying on external investments. However, those investments are still needed, as high inflation and high unemployment rates among young people - male: 20.8%; female: 26.0% according to World Bank, 2020 - are clouding Turkey's economic future in addition to the negative effects of COVID-19, especially on tourism.

Other sources report:

- The World Bank puts the Turkish economy in the [upper middle income category](#) (World Bank, accessed 16 September 2020).
- The [2020 Fragile State Index](#) shows that there are steady improvements in the economic indicators (FSI, accessed 9 September 2020), despite an increase in "Human Flight and Brain Drain" after the 2016 coup attempt. However, it is likely that this will be negatively effected by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- A [recent study by SODEV](#) found that the majority (70.3%) of Turkish youth think that making a career is not possible without the right social contacts (i.e. nepotism) and more than 60% wants to move abroad (Middle East Eye, 21 May 2020).

Due to the increasing Islamization, it has reportedly become harder for women (both Christian and secular) who do not wear a head-covering to obtain employment. Many Christians also report that by not listing themselves as Muslims on their identity cards (or leaving it blank), they have been unable to obtain jobs in the private sector. In general, Christians in Turkey face discrimination in employment due to the hostile environment in Turkey. Christians are also kept out of senior positions in the government and armed forces.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the [World Factbook](#) (accessed 16 September 2020):

- **Main ethnic groups:** The majority of the Turkish population (70-75%) are Turkish. 19% of the population is from Kurdish descent, while other minorities make up 7 -12% of the population.
- **Main languages:** The official language is Turkish. Kurdish and other minority languages are spoken as well.
- **Population:** Turkey has a population of around 82.000.000 people.
- **Urban population:** In 2020, 76.1% of the population lived in urban areas, while the annual urbanization rate stands at 2.04%
- **Literacy rate:** 96.2% of the population can read and write; with a difference between men (98.8%) and women (93.5%) (2017).
- **Youth population:** The younger generation - up to 24 years of age - makes up 39% of the population, making it a country with a young population in need of (economic) opportunities.
- **IDPs/Refugees:** In 2020, Turkey hosted 3.6 million refugees from Syria. In addition, there are 170,000 Afghans, 142,000 Iraqi's and 39,000 Iranians living in Turkey. Around 1 million Kurds are internally displaced because of the conflict between the Turkish army and the Kurdish PKK.
- **Life expectancy:** 77.4 years on average; women (80.3 years), men (74.4 years).
- **Education:** Turkey's citizens enjoy 18 years of schooling on average (2016).

According to the UN Global [Human Development Indicators \(2019\)](#):

- **Human Development Index (HDI) score and ranking:** Turkey ranks #59 out 189 countries. The combined ratio of life expectancy, education and per capita income gives a very high score of 0.806, making it one of the highest scoring countries in the wider MENA region.
- **Gender inequality:** With a Gender Development Index (GDI) score of 0.924, women are somewhat disadvantaged in comparison to men. The GDI measures the differences in life expectancy, years of education and GNI per capita per gender.

Turkish society is on average conservative, Muslim, tribal and patriarchal. 'Turkishness' as an identity is continually used as a political weapon, since being Turk is commonly understood as being a Sunni Muslim. All other religious groups experience discrimination. In addition, many Arab refugees experience social hatred as they are blamed for rising prices and unemployment. Despite the social hatred, Turkey still host millions of Syrian refugees and has been called an example for other countries by the World Bank. Nonetheless, President Erdogan has used the migrant crisis to force the European countries to [pay six billion euro](#) for hosting the refugees or otherwise face a huge refugee influx (The Guardian, 17 March 2020).

Despite the agricultural roots of Turkish culture, modern day Turkey is young and urban. In addition, a recent poll by the Foundation for Social Democracy ([SODEV](#)) found that the majority of the youth prefer "freedom of speech for all" over national and religious values (Middle East Eye, 21 May 2020). The majority of the Turkish population (76.1%) lives in urban areas and the rate of urbanization stands at 2% in 2020. Meanwhile, the 80 million strong population is growing by 0.49% (2018) annually. The literacy rate is high (96.2%). Life expectancy has strongly increased over the last decades, standing at 77 years of age in 2017.

An issue of particular concern remains the social hatred towards Christians and Jews. For years, social hostility and hate-speech against Christians has been common. However, the government's response to the 2016 coup, vehemently attacking all (assumed) enemies, has stirred up nationalism in the country. The Hudson Institute wrote in April 2019: "Since the abortive coup, revisionist historical dramas disseminating anti-minority conspiracy theories [...] have become the most effective form of propaganda. [...] What is most alarming is the role of Turkey's state-run media outlets in smearing and scapegoating religious minorities, using state funds for incitement, particularly against Jews and Christians." ([Hudson Institute, 19 April 2019](#)).

Conversion is not prohibited by law. However, there are likely to be social and familial implications for conversion from Islam to Christianity or from one Christian denomination to another. This causes converts to sometimes lead a double life and hide their conversion. Christians with a Muslim background who hide their identity from their family and relatives would also hide their praying, their Bible and Christian materials and their accessing of Christian television and websites, etc. Those who hide their Christian identity are often too afraid to meet up with other Christians. Conversion to Christianity is widely considered to be unacceptable. In conservative Islamic families it is more difficult for converts to be open about their Christian belief - in particular for women. Converts are under close watch by their families and communities and are sometimes put under house arrest by their families in an attempt to force them to recant their new faith.

Technological landscape

According to [World Internet Stats](#) (accessed July 2020):

- **Internet usage:** 81.9% penetration - survey date: December 2019
- **Facebook usage:** 62.5% penetration – survey date: February 2020

According to World Bank's country profile (2018):

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 97.3 per 100 people

According to Freedom House's [Freedom on the Net Report 2019](#):

- Turkey is rated as "not free".
- Key internet controls include the blockade of "political, social, or religious content", the manipulation of (online) discussion by pro-government commentators, the arrest and detention of journalist and bloggers, as well as (technical) attacks on government critics and human rights organizations.

Turkey is a modern country, although rural areas tend to be less developed. The US International Trade Administration reports that "as of April 2018, 82.5% of households in Turkey had broadband Internet access, up from 78% the previous year. [...] The annual growth rate in number of Internet users is 13%. There are 52 million active social media users in Turkey. In comparison with last year's numbers, social media users increased by 2 million. The primary social media platform used is YouTube, followed by Instagram and Facebook" ([International Trade Administration, 13 October 2019](#)).

Epitomizing the current political situation is Turkey's record regarding journalism: For four years, Turkey was the country with the highest number of journalists in prison. This strict policy seems to have been successful: While the freedom of press [has further deteriorated](#) (CPJ, 11 December 2019), the number of imprisoned journalists has dropped slightly as journalists apply self-censorship. However, even more striking is the total control the Turkish regime has over almost all Turkish media, including TV channels and newspapers. All other programming is automatically paused when a speech by the president is being broadcast and there is a strict screening process for checking which commentators can appear on TV ([Al-Monitor, 12 June 2020](#)).

In addition, the Turkish government monitors all Internet use, mobile phones and landlines. Many websites are blocked in Turkey. Moreover, a new law forces all major social media companies to store their user data inside Turkey, making it potentially possible for the government to track down anonymous posts. This is another nail in the coffin for free speech in Turkey ([Independent, 29 July 2020](#)).

Turkey's intelligence agencies are well equipped and it is believed that the activities of Protestant Christians in particular are monitored closely. Nonetheless, Sat-7, God TV and other Christian television and radio channels are broadcasting into Turkey. The Internet is used by many Christian groups to access Christian materials, which is often preferred over owning a hard copy of the Bible. Bible correspondence courses are particularly popular.

Security situation

After the failed coup of July 2016, developments in Turkey changed dramatically. The government took on more dictatorial powers and both nationalism and Islamization soared. The fight against the militant Kurdish minority intensified and Turkey took a much more assertive stance on the international scene, becoming [militarily active](#) in neighboring Syria and Iraq, primarily targeting Kurdish forces (Reuters, 22 July 2020). As an example of this, WWR reported ([Open Doors Analytical, 8 July 2020](#)), that in June 2020 the Turkish airforce explicitly bombed Christian villages in the area surrounding Zakho in Dohuk district of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR), allegedly to target PKK supporters. The Turkish presence in Syria led to a further building up of tensions with Syria, Kurdish groups in Syria as well as with the USA. The conflict with the Kurdish PKK has intensified and internally Turkey has proved vulnerable to attacks and bombings from Kurdish and other groups in recent years.

Secondly, in a growing effort to enlarge its role in the wider region, Turkey opened a large [overseas military base](#) in Mogadishu, Somalia in 2017 (Reuters, 30 September 2017). However, Turkey has taken on a far bigger role in Libya in 2020, with its military support for the UN-backed West Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA). Turkey's navy, air and intelligence support, including thousands of pro-Turkish Syrian fighters, has proved to be a [game-changer](#) in Libya. Libya's capital Tripoli was in immediate danger of being overrun by East Libyan strongman General Haftar and the Libyan National Army; but with the Turkish support Haftar was driven back from the capital (Middle East Eye, 20 August 2020).

Turkey's support did not come for free; in exchange, the GNA signed a deal [allowing Turkey to drill for gas](#) in Libya's part of the Mediterranean Sea (DW, 4 January 2020). Furthermore, Turkey's involvement in Libya should also be seen in light of President Erdogan's neo-Ottoman visions, as well as in support for Islamist groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood. This pits Turkey, together with like-minded Qatar, against countries like the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Egypt who all strongly oppose the Muslim Brotherhood, which those governments view as a threat to their rule. Unsurprisingly, those countries support Libyan strongman Haftar.

In addition, Turkey is also battling with Russia for influence in the region. Russia actively supports Syrian President Assad, while mercenaries from Russian security firm Wagner fight alongside General Haftar's forces. And while Turkey supported Azerbaijan with drones and Syrian fighters during the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, it was Russia which ended the conflict before all of Nagorno-Karabakh was conquered by Azerbaijan and installed a peacekeeping force in the area.

To complicate its foreign activities even further, Turkey is involved in a [growing conflict with Greece](#) regarding natural resources in the eastern Mediterranean Sea (BBC News, 13 September 2020). Unsurprisingly, while Turkey made a deal with Libya's GNA, Greece made an agreement with Egypt regarding their mutual boundaries in the Mediterranean Sea. Hence, it is clear that the ideological battle and the battle for resources remains closely linked in the context of a wider battle for regional influence.

Trends analysis

1) The security services continue to clamp down on all opposition

The state of emergency which was declared after the failed 2016 coup attempt has officially ended, but the security services are continuing to clamp down on all forms of opposition. With new laws in place, human rights organizations are claiming that the state of emergency has now actually been made permanent. Even four years later, there are still arrests being made of alleged followers of Fethullah Gulen. For example, in September 2020, 132 arrest warrants were issued against (ex)soldiers who allegedly have links to the Gulen movement ([Anadolu Agency, 16 September 2020](#)). Anti-terrorism laws are also frequently used to target government critics and the last remaining independent journalists in Turkey ([Committee to Protect Journalists, accessed 17 September 2020](#)).

2) Turkey's economy and geopolitical activities point to an uncertain future

Although Turkey has seen huge economic growth since 2000, there is now a lot of uncertainty about the future. The value of the Turkish Lira has been in a downward spiral for almost two years, youth [unemployment](#) remains high and the negative impact of COVID-19 will add further damage (Trading Economics, accessed 18 September 2020). The unstable political situation on the geopolitical level is another major challenge, with Turkey fighting against the PKK inside Turkey and the Kurdish-led SDF in Syria, and supporting the GNA in Libya, and having supported Azerbaijan during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Hence, President Erdogan is playing an insecure (geopolitical) game on multiple fronts which might deeply affect Turkey in the coming years.

3) All non-Sunni citizens have faced growing pressure

As a result of strict government policies, the level of intolerance has risen and all those not siding with President Erdogan face oppression. Non-Sunni citizens (including the tiny Christian minority) are facing growing pressure, which is increasingly translating into violent incidents. Christians do not seem to be direct targets for government persecution but the general situation for Christians is deteriorating. The situation for Historical Christian communities in the southeast of Turkey is particularly worrying. A lot of their property has been taken away by the Turkish government in recent years and their ancient culture is gradually disappearing. Besides that, the arrest and prosecution of US Pastor Andrew Brunson, who was being held as a political hostage from 2016 to 2018, shows clearly that the Turkish government under President Erdogan has developed into a regime without scruples. Overall, Christians will have to act carefully, especially in the public sphere.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Link for general background information: Turkey country profile - BBC News - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17988453>
- Recent history: constitutional reforms - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38883556>
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- Recent history: cracking down - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-44756374>
- Recent history: led to sanctions - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-45036378>
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- Political and legal landscape: Economist Intelligence Unit - <https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index>
- Religious landscape description: 55 deeds were returned - <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/06/turkey-returns-confiscated-syriac-church-property-deeds/>
- Religious landscape description: USCRIF - <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Turkey.pdf>
- Religious landscape description: Middle East Concern - <https://meconcern.org/countries/turkey/>
- Economic landscape: World Factbook - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tu.html>
- Economic landscape: World Bank data - <https://data.worldbank.org/country/turkey>
- Economic landscape: World Bank's August 2020 Economic Monitor - <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/34318/Turkey-Economic-Monitor-Adjusting-the-Sails.pdf?sequence=6&isAllowed=y>
- Economic landscape: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - <http://www.oecd.org/turkey/>
- Economic landscape: upper middle income category - <https://data.worldbank.org/?locations=XT-TR>
- Economic landscape: 2020 Fragile State Index - <https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/>
- Economic landscape: recent study by SODEV - <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turkish-youth-wants-leave-country-prosperity-and-freedom>
- Social and cultural landscape: World Factbook - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tu.html>
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- Security situation: game-changer - <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/libya-turkey-qatar-military-deal-haftar-gna>
- Security situation: allowing Turkey to drill for gas - <https://www.dw.com/en/turkeys-operation-in-libya-targeting-gas-reserves/a-51883874>
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- Trends analysis: unemployment - <https://tradingeconomics.com/turkey/youth-unemployment-rate>

WWL 2021: Church information / Turkey

Christian origins

Christianity has a long history in Turkey. Due to the missionary activity of the Apostle Paul and others, Christian congregations were founded in what is now Turkey in the earliest New Testament days. In the Bible, the Book of Revelation starts off with letters written to seven congregations in western Turkey.

Under Constantine (Roman emperor from 306 to 337 AD) Christianity became the state religion. The city of Byzantium (a.k.a. Constantinople - the current Istanbul) became a hub for Christianity. In 1054 the Great Schism took place which caused a lasting split between the Western and Eastern Church. The result was that Byzantium became the centre of eastern or Orthodox Christianity, and also the capital of a huge empire - the Byzantine Empire.

In 1453 the Ottoman Turks conquered this empire when they took the capital by military force. Since then, Christians in Turkey have been under Muslim domination. A policy of Islamization began and Christianity gradually lost its influential position in the country. Since the 19th century, the power of the Ottoman Empire began to crumble, and territories were lost. During the First World War the Ottoman Empire sided with Germany and Austria-Hungary. In 1915 (and following years) more than 1 million Armenians and Assyrians [Syriacs] were killed, decimating the Armenian Orthodox Church and causing tensions with Russia throughout Anatolia, the Armenian homeland. The Ottoman Empire finally collapsed in 1917.

At the close of the 1st World War, many issues needed to be settled in Turkey, the most important being the position of the various ethnic minorities and their religions. In the newly formed state of Turkey, the Greek, Armenian and Syriac minorities faced heavy discrimination. Pressure built up in the years up to 1923, when the Treaty of Lausanne was concluded. Millions of people were moved. A large part of the Greek minority was forced to leave Turkey and moved to Greece, weakening not just the position of the Greek Orthodox Church but also the wider Christian witness in Turkey.

Church spectrum today

Turkey: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	80,000	46.8
Catholic	45,000	26.3

Protestant	24,700	14.4
Independent	10,800	6.3
Unaffiliated	10,000	5.8
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
Total	170,500	99.7
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	8,000	4.7
Renewalist movement	8,500	5.0

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020)

Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Renewalist movement:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

Originally in 1923 only two churches were recognized by the Turkish state - the Greek Orthodox Church and the Armenian Orthodox Church. At that time, they together formed about 70% of all Christians in Turkey. In addition to the Syriac Orthodox community, which was not included in the protections of the Lausanne Treaty, there are also Christians belonging to the Roman Catholic Church, expatriate Protestant Christians and indigenous Turkish Christians. After a lengthy court battle, official status was granted in 2000 to the Istanbul Protestant Church in Altintepe. This was the first (and up until now, only) official recognition of a Protestant church in Turkey.

WWL 2021: Persecution Dynamics / Turkey

Reporting period

1 October 2019 - 30 September 2020

Position on the World Watch List

Turkey: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	69	25
WWL 2020	63	36
WWL 2019	66	26
WWL 2018	62	31
WWL 2017	57	37

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2017-2021 reporting periods

The country score rose 6 points in WWL 2021 in comparison to WWL 2020. Although the average pressure on Christians remains at 11.9 points, the increase in total score was caused by a strong increase in the violence score - from 3.7 to 9.3 points. In contrast with WWL 2020, two Christians were killed during WWL 2021. In addition, there were a higher number of reported attacks on church buildings during WWL 2021, including the reconversion of the Hagia Sophia into a mosque, which had a profound influence on the historical Christian communities in Turkey. Thirdly, more Christians were detained or attacked during WWL2021.

In Turkey, Islam is totally blended with fierce nationalism. Aggressive rhetoric from the government has left less space for other voices, including the Christian one. Distrust of Christians has grown, making public outreach hard, and resulting in high levels of societal opposition.

Persecution engines

Turkey: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Strong
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Strong
Clan oppression	CO	Medium

Christian Denominational protectionism	CDP	Very weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Very weak
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Very weak

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

Islamic oppression (Strong) combined with Religious nationalism - Islamic (Strong):

Fierce, fanatical nationalism affects all Christians in Turkey. The biggest pressure is on Christian converts from a Muslim background. Family, friends and community will often exert heavy pressure on them to return to Islam, the faith of the fathers. The general opinion is that a true Turk is a Muslim. Conversion is not only a question of family honor being hurt, it is also seen as a case of 'insulting Turkishness'. This can result in court cases and imprisonment. The cocktail of Islam and nationalism also affects other Christians who are mostly from ethnic minorities (e.g. Greeks, Armenians, Syriacs). They are hardly regarded as full-fledged members of Turkish society and encounter all kinds of legal and bureaucratic obstructions.

Ethno-religious hostility (Strong):

This persecution engine grew stronger in the previous reporting period (WWL 2020) in the context of the Kurdish conflict. Syriac Christians in the south-eastern region particularly feel the pressure from the Syrian civil war and are caught between Kurdish clans, the government and the Kurdish militant group, PKK. Tribal leaders use their power to push out the Syriacs from their homeland in the southeast. This mostly affects rural Christian populations. Many Christians live in large cities in western Turkey and are not strongly affected by this, although social hostility towards ethnic Christian minorities is present in all of Turkey.

Clan oppression (Medium):

Tribal law and customs still play an important role in especially the eastern provinces of Turkey. Converts from Islam are likely to face more pressure there, as conversion to Christianity is not only seen as betrayal of Islam, but also of the family and clan.

Dictatorial paranoia (Strong):

Since the failed coup of July 2016, President Erdogan's government has dropped its mask of supporting democracy and is openly restricting freedom throughout Turkish society. The media have been curtailed, and all forms of opposition face persecution. In addition, President Erdogan has [declared](#) that "democracy and free press are incompatible", which is not surprising given the many journalists that are imprisoned. Although Turkish Christians are not directly targeted

by the government at the moment, the regime has openly declared Sunni Islam to be the religious norm in the country, thus clearly marginalizing Christianity.

Drivers of persecution

Turkey: Drivers of persecution per engine									
	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG	STRONG	STRONG	MEDIUM	VERY WEAK	-	VERY WEAK	STRONG	VERY WEAK
Government officials	Strong	Strong	Medium	-	-	-	-	Strong	-
Ethnic group leaders	Weak	Weak	Medium	-	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	Medium	Medium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	-	Very weak	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	Weak	Weak	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Medium	Strong	Strong	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
One's own (extended) family	Strong	Medium	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
Political parties	Medium	Strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Organized crime cartels or networks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

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.

Drivers of Islamic oppression and Religious nationalism - Islamic:

- **Government officials (Strong/Strong):** President Erdogan seems intent on changing Turkey from being a secular country into a Sunni Muslim one. So far, the changes have been implemented very gradually. One of those steps was the change in the Constitution after the [referendum](#) in April 2017, which gave the president more power and freed the way for him to stand in two more elections. In contrast to previous years, the government has now also started targeted Turkish Christians as some non-Turkish spouses of Turkish Christians have been banned from the country. In addition, many expatriate Christians who fulfilled important roles within the Turkish Protestant church have been banned from the country. In the recent past, there have been issues over church property, particularly in the troubled south-eastern region. The government closed down and confiscated church buildings there for a variety of reasons. In some cases, the government said this happened because of reformed land registry laws and the reorganization of municipalities, in other cases the government [seized control over churches](#) for security reasons. Although it is difficult to prove whether the government is purposely hindering Christian communities or not, one country researcher is convinced that the government is trying to push the already diminished historical Christian communities out of Turkey.
- **Extended family (Strong/Medium), non-Christian religious leaders (Medium/Medium) and citizens (Medium/Strong):** Converts from Islam are put under pressure by their families and communities to return to Islam. Once discovered, a Christian with a Muslim background may be threatened with divorce and the loss of inheritance rights.
- **Political parties (Medium/Strong):** In July 2017 the opposition party, Republican People's Party (CHP), organized a "Justice March" against the government, which was joined by hundreds of thousands of people. Nevertheless, it seems that none of the opposition parties are vocally supporting the historical Christian or other Christian communities, which leaves them vulnerable to government pressure. In contrast, the coalition parties encourage the Islamic-nationalism narrative.
- **Violent religious groups (Weak/Weak):** The Turkish Grey Wolves are a group that has grown in influence in Turkey, also due to the nationalist rhetoric of President Erdogan. Being fiercely nationalistic, they blend Turkish identity with Islam. The Grey Wolves are not shy of using violence and it is believed that its members have been behind several attacks on Christians, especially Christian refugee communities. However, they do not seem to be well-organized in their attacks on Christians.

Drivers of Ethno-religious hostility:

- **Citizens, including mobs (Strong):** Turkish society is in general hostile towards its ethnic religious minorities. Refugee children in particular have been bullied in schools, while right-wing mobs intimidatingly drove through Armenian neighborhoods in Istanbul during the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war.

- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** In the more rural areas, conservative norms and values are upheld by ethnic leaders. In the southeast, it would seem that Kurdish chiefs are trying to force the historical Syriac community out of the traditionally Christian territory. The Kurdish PKK is also trying to purposely drag the Syriacs into their conflict with the Turkish government for nationalistic reasons.
- **Government officials (Medium):** Government officials often have a negative attitude towards the ethnic historical Christian communities (Armenians, Syriacs and Greeks).

Drivers of Clan oppression:

- **Citizens and (extended) family members (Medium):** Family ties can be strict within Turkey and society regards a true Turk to be a Sunni Muslim. Christians, even those coming from historical Christian communities, are seen as foreigners and a conversion from Islam to Christianity is often regarded as a shame for the honor of the family.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia:

- **Government officials (Strong):** The backlash resulting from the attempted coup of July 2016 has led to heightened polarization and public scapegoating of anyone who (allegedly) does not support Turkey or President Erdogan's vision for Turkey. The fact that the alleged mastermind behind the coup, Fethullah Gülen, is residing in Pennsylvania and that the USA has not extradited him so far (due to lack of evidence that he orchestrated the attempted coup) has increased tension between Turkey and the USA. Protestants in particular have felt the deterioration in relations. Since the USA is seen as Christian, Christians in Turkey are portrayed as spies of the West. Hate-speech and threats to Protestant churches have increased. The general atmosphere is tense and the murder of South Korean evangelist Jinwook Kim in November 2019 has stirred up fear.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Historical Christian groups like the Armenian and Assyrian (Syriac) churches face high pressure and hostility in the south-eastern region of Turkey. For decades, they have been caught between the rivalries of the Turkish army and Kurdish resistance groups. Most of those Christians do not live in their ancestral region anymore but have moved to western areas of Turkey.

Most Turkish Protestant communities are located in the Western coastal cities, including Istanbul. Those cities tend to be more liberal and secular, while inland areas are more conservative, Islamic and socially hostile towards Christians. However, there are also gradations within bigger cities, with some urban areas being conservative as well.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

There are expatriate Christians in the country, but they are not involuntarily isolated from other Christian communities. Because these foreign Christians can freely interact with other Christian communities, they are not considered as a separate category for scoring and WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities:

These include the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox and Greek Orthodox churches (the only churches "recognized" in the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923), and the Assyrian, Syriac Orthodox and Syriac Catholic churches, all of which are monitored regularly and subjected to controls and limitations by the government; their members are considered "foreign" in many official dealings, as well as in the minds of the general public. They are hardly regarded as full members of Turkish society and encounter all kinds of legal and bureaucratic obstacles. For example, the Armenian and Greek Orthodox churches need permission from the Turkish government to select new church leaders.

There are also expatriate Christians belonging to Historical Christian churches. There are Russian Orthodox Christians who have residency permits, while there are also Roman Catholics, mostly immigrants from Africa and the Philippines. In the past few years, their ranks have swelled with the thousands of Christian refugees arriving from Syria and Iraq to escape the war in their homelands.

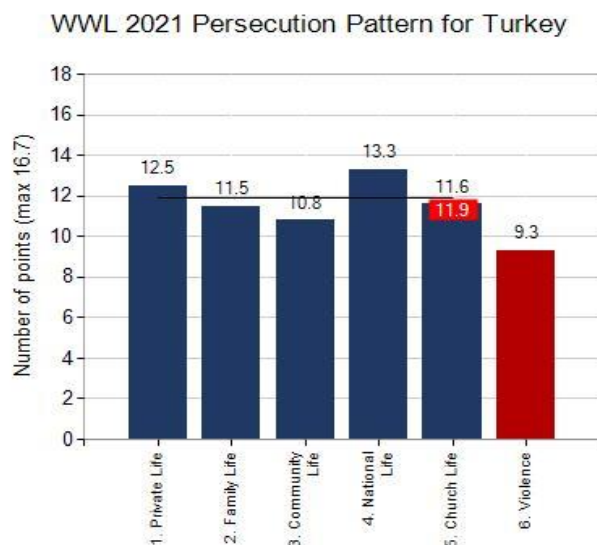
Converts to Christianity:

Christian converts from a Muslim background bear the brunt of rights violations in Turkey. Pressure comes from family, friends, community and even the local authorities. They are considered traitors to the Turkish identity. Besides converts from a Turkish background, there are also communities of [converts from other countries](#) such as Iran (222 Ministries, 12 August 2016).

Non-traditional Christian communities:

Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations mostly exist as small groups and some are unable to afford a rented place of worship. Many of them are meeting in private homes, which can lead to opposition from neighbors.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2021 Persecution pattern for Turkey shows:

- The average pressure on Christians remains at a very high level (11.9 points), staying at the same level as in WWL 2020. Overall pressure remains very high, in particular in the *National sphere of life*. This is directly related to the growing animosity towards Christians (caused both by nationalistic feelings and growing societal opposition against Christians).
- Although all *spheres of life* show very high levels of pressure, pressure is highest in the *Private* and *National spheres of life*. The score for *Private life* reflects both the difficulty for converts to openly practice their faith among their family members as well as the growing pressure on all Christians to be careful how and with whom they speak about their faith in a climate that is hostile towards Christianity. The very high score for *National life* indicates not only the difficulty Christians experience but also that of Christian organizations operating in Turkey. Media reporting on Christians is also very biased and Christians regularly experience discrimination when engaging with the authorities.
- The score for violence rose from 3.7 points in WWL 2020 to 9.3 in WWL 2021. Two killings were reported during the WWL 2021 reporting period and the number of attacks on church buildings was higher than in WWL 2020. In addition, there was the forced deportation of at least 25 expatriates and their families (affecting over a 100 Christians), who were working with various church groups. This increased the score for violence significantly.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2021 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.50 points)

Conversion is not prohibited by law. However, there are likely to be social and familial implications for conversion from Islam to Christianity or from one Christian denomination to another. Although the level and nature of oppression from families would vary considerably depending on the background of the family, conversion to Christianity is widely considered unacceptable.

Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.50 points)

Public expressions of faith in writing can result in some level of persecution, either in writing or in other forms. Especially converts from Islam to Christianity can sometimes lose their jobs, face harassment by family and friends, or receive threats after their new faith has come to be known.

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.50 points)

Levels of social hostility towards Christianity are high in Turkey and conversion to Christianity is widely considered unacceptable. Discussing one's Christian faith with fellow citizens can lead to harassment and social exclusion.

Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (3.25 points)

Harassment of Christians is common in Turkey and displaying Christians symbols can provoke hostility and (physical) violence.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.75 points)

Several instances of children of Christians being bullied have been reported over the years. Children of Christians, and especially of converts, are often harassed either because of society's religious intolerance or because of nationalist zeal.

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.50 points)

If the ID card of a convert parent reads Muslim, the family's children are obliged to attend courses on Islam at school. Although it has recently become easier to get an exemption from Islamic classes, many converts have not changed their religious registration because of the social stigma for them and their children. In addition, the Turkish curriculum is in general influenced by Turkish nationalism and the idea that Christianity is something alien to Turkish society.

Block 2.6: Christian couples have been hindered in adopting children or serving as foster parents because of their faith. (3.00 points)

Adoption is not a common practice in Turkey, but Christians are even more likely to be unable to adopt a child. In 2013, President Erdogan stated that Turkish children adopted by Christian (and gay) couples in foreign countries should be retrieved and brought back to Turkey. Hence, it is nearly impossible for Christians to adopt a Muslim child.

Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.00 points)

The hostile environment makes it difficult for Christian parents to raise their children in a Christian way, especially if there is also pressure from the (extended) family.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (4.00 points)

Christians have no access to state employment and experience discrimination in private employment, especially where employers have ties to the government.

Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.75 points)

Name calling, receiving death threats and other types of harassment are commonly experienced by many Christians in Turkey.

Block 3.9: Christians have faced disadvantages in their education at any level for faith-related reasons (e.g. restrictions of access to education). (3.75 points)

There are compulsory Islamic classes in the schooling system, although non-Muslim children can opt out. However, there have been reports of societal and teacher discrimination against those who opt out. Christian schoolchildren are regularly discriminated against in classes, by both teachers and other students. There are Christians who study at Turkish universities but they are barred from reaching higher positions or professorships at university level. In addition, hundreds of new [Imam Hatip schools](#) have been opened in recent months (Reuters, 25 January 2018), raising the total number of these Islamic education schools to over 5000. Hatip schools are playing a more and more important role within the Turkish educational system and are inaccessible for Christians.

Block 3.5: Christians have been put under pressure to take part in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events. (2.50 points)

Individual Christians are being watched by both the government as well as society. Turkish Christians know that all their communication is monitored by the government and infiltration is not uncommon. Even newspapers are a threat here, as some media have been publishing negative articles (including names and pictures) about several Christians.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (4.00 points)

The Turkish Constitution is very restrictive in its approach towards the rights of religious minorities. Although the Constitution does not technically limit the freedom of religion, it clearly

promotes 'Turkishness' above all other ideologies.

Block 4.6: Christians have been barred from public office, or has promotion been hindered for faith-related reasons. (4.00 points)

Access to public sector jobs, the state's security apparatus and law enforcement is denied to Christians, as is promotion in the army, despite obligatory military service. Although one's religious affiliation is no longer displayed on the [new ID cards](#), it is still registered on the chip in the card.

Block 4.10: Media reporting has been incorrect or biased against Christians. (4.00 points)

Local media and columnists in particular have been biased against Christians. There have been several reports of intolerance and prejudice against Christians.

Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.75 points)

Christians have to be very careful when expressing themselves in public. Social prejudice makes it difficult to speak out and the Turkish government does not accept criticism.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.2: It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government. (4.00 points)

It is impossible to register as a new religious community. Although there is an option for churches to register as an "association", this is also a difficult process and some applications have been denied. Establishing a foundation with the aim of supporting a new religious community is also prohibited.

Block 5.3: Christian communities have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings or in claiming historical religious premises and places of worship which had been taken from them earlier. (4.00 points)

It is very difficult to get official permits for repairing or renovating church buildings. Many church buildings, seminaries or schools that have in the past been confiscated, have not been returned. Building new church buildings is almost impossible. It is an absolute exception - the first time in a hundred years! - that a new church is under construction in Istanbul. (The cornerstone of the Syriac Orthodox church was laid by President Erdogan himself in August 2019.) ([TRT World, 3 August 2019](#)).

Block 5.10: Christians have been hindered in training their own religious leaders. (3.75 points)

The training of Christian leaders legally is impossible. The seminaries of the historical Christian communities were closed down in the 1970's and have remained closed ever since, despite a campaign from the Greek Orthodox Church to reopen their seminary in Halki. Only unofficial training can take place. Many church leaders are sent abroad for their training.

Block 5.18: Churches have been hindered in establishing, managing, maintaining and conducting schools, or charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural organizations, institutions and associations. (3.75 points)

It remains very difficult to formally establish and run any kind of association with a clear Christian profile. All activities in this area are monitored and Christians struggle even more as they are in most cases supported by foreign churches, which is viewed with suspicion.

Violence

Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures. In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10, 100 or 1000) is given. (A symbolic number of 10 could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100 could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1000 could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain.) In cases where it is clear that (many) more Christians are affected, but a concrete number could be given according to the number of incidents reported, the number given has to be understood as being an absolutely minimum figure. The symbol "x" denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security considerations.

Turkey: Violence Block question	WWL 2021	WWL 2020
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	2	0
6.2 How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	11	4
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	3	0
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	2	0
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	0
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	22	5

6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	2	1
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	1	0
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	1	3
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	100	23

- **Christians killed:** Two Christians were killed for their faith. In November 2019, South Korean Christian evangelist Jinwook Kim was stabbed to death in Diyarbakir. In January 2020, Chaldean couple Hormuz and Şimoni Diril were abducted from their village in south-eastern Turkey. While Hormuz remains missing, Şimoni was found dead in March 2020.
- **Christians attacked:** Several Christians have faced harassment and bullying.
- **Christians arrested:** Assyrian priest Fr. Sefer Bileçen was arrested and detained on charges of supporting the outlawed PKK. His case is a typical example of historical church Christians becoming the victim of the ongoing strife between the Kurdish separatists and the Turkish authorities.
- **Christians forced to leave the country:** At least 25 expatriate Christians received entry bans or were otherwise forced to leave the country with their families, affecting more than a 100 people in total.
- **Churches attacked:** In addition to the reconversion of the Hagia Sophia and Chora to mosques, which had a profound negative affect on the historical Christian communities in Turkey, several other church buildings have been attacked and several Christian graves and cemeteries have been vandalized too. In addition, many historical church buildings are in great need of renovation. Such neglect results in the slow but ongoing disappearance of Christian heritage in the country.
- **Christian homes/shops attacked:** Several incidents took place in which property of individual Christians and Christian communities was damaged.

5 Year trends

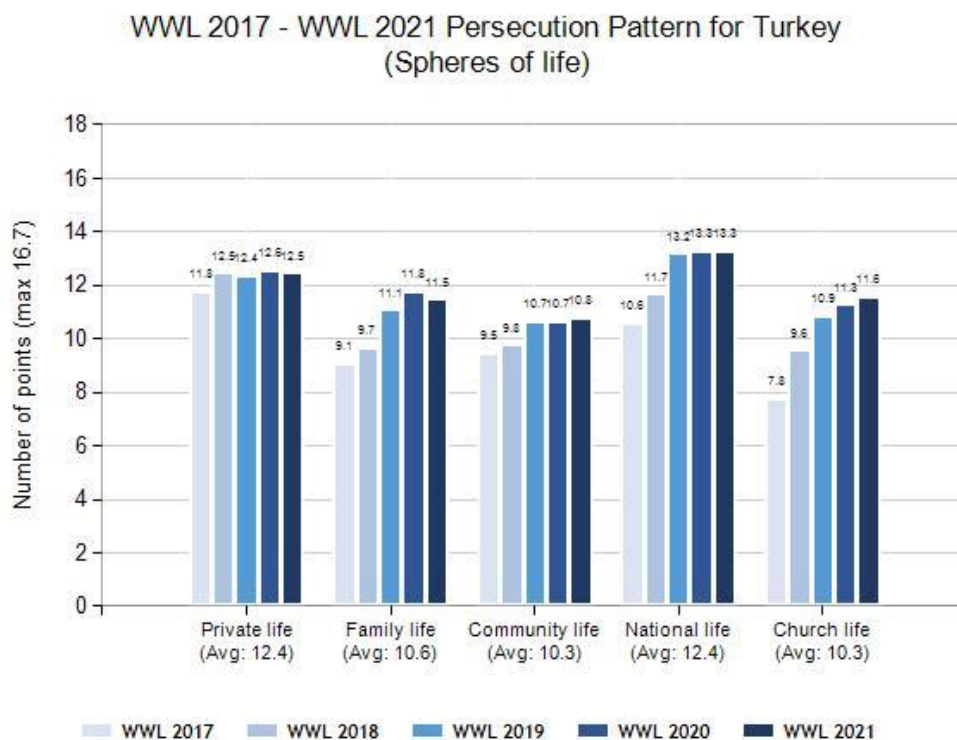
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

Turkey: WWL 2017 - WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2021	11.9
2020	11.9
2019	11.7
2018	10.7
2017	9.8

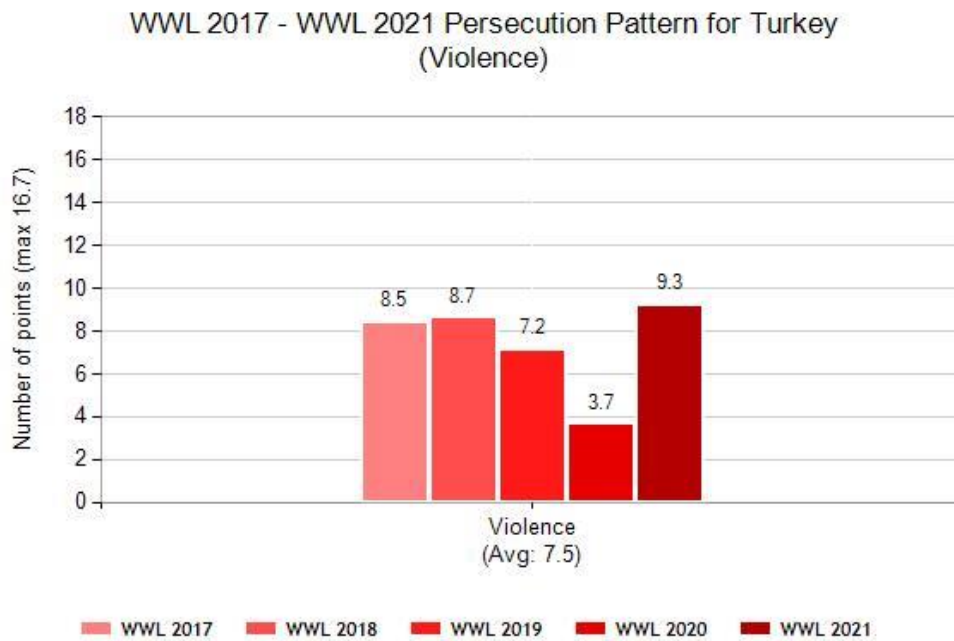
The table above shows that the overall level of pressure on Christians has risen from a high level to a very high level in the last four reporting periods. This reflects the growing pressure on Christians in general due to the changing political climate.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



The chart above shows that the level of pressure in all spheres of life, except *Private life* (where the very high levels have been stable) have more or less been growing steadily over the last five years. The high score for the *National sphere of life* for three consecutive WWL reporting periods reflects the difficult political and public climate for Christians in Turkey.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The chart above shows that the score for violence targeting Christians in Turkey was at a very high level from WWL 2017-WWL 2019, but then decreased considerably in WWL 2020. The lower score was, however, only temporary. The highest score occurred in WWL 2021 and was mainly caused by the killing of two Christians and a higher number of attacks on church properties being reported.

Gender-specific religious persecution Female

Female Pressure Points
Denied access to social community/networks
Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Enforced religious dress code
Forced out of home – expulsion
Forced to flee town/country
Incarceration by family (house arrest)
Violence – physical

Violence – psychological

Violence – sexual

Although the Turkish legal system is generally not prejudicial as regards religious freedom, “elevating Islam’s public role in this constitutionally secular republic has been more than a slogan; it has found expression in many government policies,” according to the [Economist](#) (reporting on 1 July 2019). As regards the rights of men and women, the prevailing culture and the lack of implementation of their equal rights under law allows for some gender inequality in practice.

In addition, one country expert writes: “There is a deep-seated feeling that women are responsible for the honor and shame of a family or community and if they are beaten or murdered that they might have done something to deserve it. Treating a wife like this is also a sign of manliness. Men feel that they can be aggressive to any women they feel that the woman is not being sufficiently modest.” Unsurprisingly, Turkey knows high levels of domestic violence and femicide. Several campaigns have been organized to change these attitudes, but Turkey nonetheless considers withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention combating violence against women ([BBC News](#), 30 July 2020, [New York Times](#), 25 August 2020).

Female converts are most vulnerable to persecution, particularly in rural areas. Within Islamic society they are already considered to have less authority than men and are subject to familial control. Becoming a Christian, or marrying a Christian, contradicts the expectations on women to bring honor to their family; they are expected to honor their families by their career choices, their relationships and their marriage choices. The violation of rights of women and girls affects their families, inspiring anger, fear and anxiety in other family members.

Converts – particularly those who are unmarried - face the threat of being locked in the family home. Reports indicate that girls have fled their homes to other cities in order to find safety. Converts also experience sexual abuse, harassment and rejection. Sexual abuse is rarely talked about in Turkey’s shame and honor culture – as such, many victims carry trauma alone. Experts indicate that female Christians experience greater levels of mental abuse than men in general. They also note that “there is a rise in physical abuse for both genders.”

Christians also face pressure in the public sphere. Given the current increased emphasis on Islam in Turkey, women are likely to face increasing pressure to meet Islamic expectations of dress and conduct. Those who fail to do so risk being harassed, insulted and even physically harmed.

Gender-specific religious persecution Male

Male Pressure Points
Denied inheritance or possessions
Discrimination/harassment via education
Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Forced to flee town/country
Imprisonment by government
Military/militia conscription/service against conscience
Violence – physical
Violence – psychological
Violence – Verbal

In Turkey, media, police, bureaucratic and communal discrimination and hostility target both male and female Christians. However, men face the additional pressure of interwoven religious and cultural expectations: They are expected to be defenders of Islam and Turkishness, concepts which are closely aligned in public perception. Failure to live up to that expectation creates pressure on men that can prevent them from ever stepping foot into a church.

According to sources, men and boys are more likely to be deported, detained or threatened. They may be arrested and mistreated by the authorities, face job loss, inheritance loss or family rejection. During military service men are in an environment where, if their Christian religion is recorded in their ID, they are likely to be viewed with suspicion by their superiors and bullied by their peers. Despite obligatory military service, Christians are unlikely to rise in army ranks. Christians also have much difficulty finding employment in the public sector, while they also face discrimination in the private sector.

As men are the main financial providers, the violation of rights of male Christians can hit his wider family and community hard. It can cause anger, fear and anxiety. An expert notes the psychological toll for men in not being able to provide for their families: “The lack of work or properly paid work can impact the families financially. This can make them more dependent on foreign help rather than the church, in an honor/shame culture this could make men feel that they are not being 'manly' enough.”

Persecution of other religious minorities

Both government and society verbally attack religious minority groups such as Alevites and Jews and ethnic minority groups such as the Kurds. This trend is likely to continue. Turkey is a supporter of Muslim Brotherhood entities such as Hamas and hence has become opposed to Israel. Public attitudes have therefore become increasingly anti-Israel and anti-Semitic in nature. This has naturally made the small Jewish community in Turkey anxious and some hundreds have recently emigrated to Israel, leaving those behind even more vulnerable.

In Turkey, young nationalistic Turks can be quickly won over by hate-speech propaganda and carry out violent acts, thinking they have the state's and public approval. In addition, the Gülen movement has been heavily persecuted since the 2016 coup. Yazidis in Turkey's southeast face similar issues as the Syriac Christians. Nusayri refugees (Alawites) from Syria feel enormous pressure to leave the country. The Alevites are also discriminated against (officially they do not exist as specific group and cannot run any houses of worship) as well as Kurds in general.

According to the US Department of State's [International Religious Freedom Report for Turkey 2019](#) (p.1, 9): "The government continued to limit the rights of non-Muslim minorities, especially those not recognized under the government's interpretation of the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, which includes only Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Christians, Jews, and Greek Orthodox Christians. [...] The government continued to treat Alevi Islam as a heterodox Muslim "sect" and not to recognize Alevi houses of worship (cemevis), despite a ruling by the Supreme Court of Appeals that cemevis are places of worship. In March 2018, the head of Diyanet said mosques were the appropriate places of worship for both Alevis and Sunnis."

Non-Sunni religious minorities are also disadvantaged in the educational system: "Non-Sunni Muslims and secular Muslims said they continued to face difficulty obtaining exemptions from compulsory religious instruction in primary and secondary schools and often had to choose from electives dealing with different aspects of Sunni Islam [...]. The government said the compulsory instruction covered a range of world religions, but some religious groups, including Alevis and members of Christian denominations, stated the courses largely reflected Hanafi Sunni Islamic doctrine and contained negative and incorrect information about other religious groups." (IRFR Turkey 2019, p. 15,16).

In November 2018, [the Appeals Court ruled](#) that the government should pay the electricity expenses of *cemevis* (Alevi's houses of worship), just as the government also does for mosques. However, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) gave a similar ruling in 2016, which was also ignored by the government. If the government does heed this ruling, that might open up possibilities for churches to ask for equal treatment too.

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Islamic oppression / Religious nationalism - Islamic:

There has been a rise in the use of hate-speech in the press (often local press) directed against churches and foreign Christian church workers. This has led to municipalities and local officials trying to close churches. The general atmosphere remains tense. Christian refugees are experiencing increasing restrictions from the authorities and are being threatened with deportation. It is not likely that the situation will improve. The country's Islamization is continuing and the pressure on the Christian community has increased massively ever since the coup attempt in 2016 - and is still growing.

Ethno-religious hostility:

The Christian population is tiny, consisting only of 0.2% of the population. Taking into consideration the fact that just a century ago Christians made up 20% of the country's population, the [fear of total extinction](#) is not unrealistic, in particular for the ancient Historical Christian communities (Reuters, 22 January 2009). The overall atmosphere against Christians is hostile, with Christianity being seen as something foreign. As long as "Armenian" is used as a slur, instead of being spoken of as a respected and legitimate minority, it is unlikely that the attitude towards Christians will change.

Clan oppression:

Although urbanization and modernization are continuing, it is likely that adherence to tribal customs and laws will remain important in parts of the country. This will continue to make conversion from Islam to Christianity difficult.

Dictatorial paranoia:

The arrest and detention of Andrew Brunson during the WWL 2019 reporting period resulted in many foreign families leaving the country and in fewer new workers considering taking up positions in Turkey. Furthermore, the government has expelled at least 25 foreign Christian workers and their families during the WWL 2021 reporting period. There is a fear that the Turkish government will increasingly target the indigenous Turkish Christians after all expatriate Christians have been driven out. In addition, although President Erdogan ended the state of emergency in July 2018 after a two year period, thanks to his new presidential powers, he does not need the state of emergency laws in order to control the country with an iron fist and oppress all political opponents of the regime.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines description: declared - <https://ahvalnews.com/press-freedom/media-and-democracy-not-compatible-says-erdogan>
- Drivers of persecution description: referendum - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/10/turkish-referendum-all-you-need-to-know>
- Drivers of persecution description: seized control over churches - <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/07/legal-limbo-turkeys-syriac-christian-properties-still-unresolved>

- Christian communities and how they are affected: converts from other countries - <http://www.222ministries.com/articles/view/104>
- Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere: Imam Hatip schools - <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/turkey-erdogan-education/>
- Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere: new ID cards - <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/religion-be-left-new-identification-cards-turkey-326099214>
- Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere: TRT World, 3 August 2019 - <https://www.trtworld.com/turkey/syriac-orthodox-church-is-new-wealth-for-istanbul-turkish-president-28737>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Economist - <https://www.economist.com/erasmus/2019/07/01/in-turkey-demography-is-a-brake-on-islamisation>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: BBC News - https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-news-from-elsewhere-53596483?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/c207p54mdq3t/turkey&link_location=live-reporting-story%5C
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: New York Times, 25 August 2020 - <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/25/world/europe/turkey-domestic-abuse-treaty.html>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: International Religious Freedom Report for Turkey 2019 - <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/TURKEY-2019-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: the Appeals Court ruled - <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/12/turkey-court-recognizes-alevi-houses-of-worship.html>
- Future outlook: fear of total extinction - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-religion-turkey-christians-factbox/factbox-christians-in-turkey-idUSTRE50L08O20090122>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on World Watch Research's Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) and on the World Watch Monitor website:

- <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Turkey>
- <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/Turkey>