

FINAL WWL 2019 COUNTRY DOSSIER

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

LEVEL 3/EMBARGO

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

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Introduction

World Watch List United Arab Emirates	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2019	58	45
WWL 2018	58	40
WWL 2017	55	44
WWL 2016	55	47
WWL 2015	49	49

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

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

WWL 2019: Keys to understanding United Arab Emirates

Link for general background information

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14703998>

Recent country history

The UAE consists of seven emirates which have their own rulers and which were united in a federal state in the early 1970s. The Arab world's only successful attempt at forming a federation is regionally considered a model of success and - according to [BTI Research](#) - served as a model for the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Yet there are some clear differences between the several emirates. Especially Abu Dhabi (the largest emirate) and Dubai are the richest emirates and have more influence – UAE's President Khalifa bin Zayid al-Nahayyan is the ruler of Abu Dhabi. The northern states are poorer, for instance Sharjah, which is also more conservative. All emirates have a seat in the 'Federal Supreme Council' – the highest constitutional, executive and legislative authority.

The UAE has been heavily influenced by Saudi Arabia over the last months and years. Besides siding with Saudi Arabia in the [Qatar crisis](#), the UAE is also involved in the costly [Yemen war](#); two issues that might change and even destabilize the future of the region.

The religious landscape

Like many countries in the region, society in UAE defines itself mainly by its religion. Thus, Islam dominates private, public life as well as the political discourse of the kingdom. Consequently, all citizens are defined as Muslims. The law of the kingdom does not recognize conversion from Islam to Christianity, and the legal punishment is death. To avoid the death penalty, social stigma or other penalties, Christian converts from a Muslim background are at times compelled to hide their faith or travel to another country where their conversion is allowed. Even though there are no reported cases of the death penalty being enforced against such converts, the mere fact that the law exists is an effective deterrent. In addition, the government does not allow any formal or informal education that includes religious teaching other than Islam, except for a very small number of private church-affiliated schools that are allowed to provide religious instruction tailored to the religious background of the pupils. Evangelism is prohibited, but non-Muslim groups can worship in dedicated buildings or private homes.

The political landscape

UAE is not a democracy and the rulers exert pressure on society, allowing no dissent. All political decisions rest with the dynastic rulers of the seven emirates and there is no place for the will of the people at large. Freedom of religion, press, assembly, association and expression are severely restricted in the kingdom. There is no space for or recognition of political parties, according to Freedom House which rated the country as "not free" in its [2018 report](#). In recent years, Reporters Without Borders have listed many instances where freedom of the press and expression were curtailed and critics faced prosecution. The constitutional provision regarding religious freedom has claw-back-clauses. On the one hand, it provides for religious freedom, on the other hand, it states that the practice of freedom of religion should not violate established customs, public policy or public morals. Blasphemy is prohibited. Apostasy is punishable by death.

Contrary to fellow Gulf country Bahrain, the wave of Arab Spring uprisings in 2011 hardly seem to have affected the UAE. This is remarkable, especially since Emirati society is based more on tribal loyalty

than on democratic norms. However, the population appears to trust the government and its generous distribution of oil wealth obviously plays a significant role, UAE being the world's fourth richest state per capita. Nevertheless, the authorities did take precautionary measures to maintain stability: Internet restrictions were implemented in 2012 to prevent the use of social media as a means of organizing protests. Also, more than 90 Islamists were arrested at the beginning of 2013, accused of planning a coup. Since then, there have been no potential visible threats to the stability of the country.

In July 2018, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, [ruled](#) that the UAE had violated the rights of Qatari nationals who were banned from the country when the UAE joined the boycott of Qatar.

The socio-economic landscape

While the UAE had depended predominantly on the fishing and pearl industry in the past, this changed after oil was found in the fifties and first exported from Abu Dhabi in the early sixties. Today the UAE holds the world's sixth-largest oil reserves and this has brought a lot of immigrants to the country where only 15% of the population are national citizens. The UAE have developed and implemented structural diversification strategies to avoid too much dependence on oil.

According to the [2018 Index of Economic Freedom](#), the country's economy ranked as the 8th most free in the world and topped the list for the Middle East and North Africa. The report stated: "Recent years' broad-based and dynamic growth in the United Arab Emirates has been underpinned by continuous efforts to strengthen the business climate, boost investment, and foster the emergence of a more vibrant and diverse private sector. The generally liberal trade regime has helped to sustain momentum for growth. The UAE aims to be a regional financial hub, and its banking sector is resilient."

Concluding remarks

Looking to the future, political stability can be expected as the Emirati rulers support one another. National elections do not exist and political parties are forbidden, which prevents citizens from changing their government. Government posts are mainly filled through tribal loyalties and economic power. There are some calls for greater political representation but these demands are not entertained by the rulers. For now, most of the population does not seem to be very involved in politics – the elections for the legislative institution FNC in 2006, 2011 and 2015 saw low turnouts especially in the largest and richest emirates. An equal distribution of wealth seems to appease the population at the moment, though the historically poorer northern states with their demand for political change do pose a certain risk. Emirate-wide, a significant youth population combined with a process of globalization which loosens the state's monopoly over information do imply that the UAE should start to take the call for more democracy seriously. Externally the country is facing confrontation with Iran over the islands of Abu Musa and the Lesser and Greater Tumbs, which have been occupied by Iran since 1971.

Furthermore, the UAE joined Saudi Arabia in its boycott of Qatar since June 2017. The Qatari crisis seems only to be a major test for Qatar at the moment, but the ongoing tensions might also affect the Emirates in the long term because the high dependency on trade requires an open and non-hostile environment.

External Links - WWL 2019: Keys to understanding United Arab Emirates

- Recent country history: BTI Research
<http://www.bti-project.org/en/reports/country-reports/detail/itc/are/>
- Recent country history: Qatar crisis
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-40173757>
- Recent country history: Yemen war
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-40173757>
- The political landscape: 2018 report
<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/united-arab-emirates>
- The political landscape: ruled
<https://www.icj-cij.org/en/case/172>
- The socio-economic landscape: 2018 Index of Economic Freedom
<http://www.heritage.org/index/country/unitedarabemirates>

WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

How many Christians?

Pop 2018	Christians	Chr%
9,542,000	1,226,000	12.8

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

How did Christians get there?

Archaeological findings show that Christianity was quite widespread in the Gulf region prior to the emergence of Islam. In modern times, Christianity came to the Gulf region with the arrival of Western missionaries in the early 19th century who built mission hospitals. "As early as 1841 a Roman Catholic priest of the Servites travelled through the region. In 1889 the vicariate of Arabia was erected at Aden. South Yemen expelled the vicariate, which relocated to Abu Dhabi. In the 1970s the vicariate had 11 parishes and 15 chapels, two of which were in the UAE. Both parishes were founded in the 1960s and serve expatriates." (Source: Melton J.G. and Baumann M., eds., *Religions of the world*, p.2960.)

"Protestantism entered the area in 1890 in the person of Samuel M. Zwemer (1867–1952) of the Reformed Church in America; Zwemer eventually settled in Bahrain. The Church of England established work once the British acquired some hegemony in the Gulf. Parishes in the region emerged only in the 1960s and were limited to expatriates from the British Isles. The primary Anglican parish, St. Andrew's Church in Abu Dhabi, is now attached to the Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf, a diocese within the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East. Other Protestant/Free church ministries include the Christian Brethren, The Evangelical Alliance Mission (TEAM), and the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod. The small work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is attached to the Gulf Section in the Middle East Union Mission. Also, members of various Orthodox churches have relocated to the UAE." (Source: Melton J.G. and Baumann M., eds., *Religions of the world*, p.2961.)

What church networks exist today?

Church networks: United Arab Emirates	Christians	%
Orthodox	77,600	6.3
Catholic	1,106,000	90.2
Protestant	30,700	2.5
Independent	16,200	1.3
Unaffiliated	28,800	2.3
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-32,700	-2.7
Total	1,226,600	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	10,100	0.8
Renewalist movement	119,000	9.7

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

evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. Renewalist movement: Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

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

Today's Christians in the UAE are mostly expatriates from Asia, but large numbers also come from Africa and the West.

Religious context

Religious Context: United Arab Emirates	Numbers	%
Christians	1,226,000	12.8
Muslim	7,292,000	76.4
Hindu	603,000	6.3
Buddhist	181,000	1.9
Ethnoreligionist	0	0.0
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	46,900	0.5
Atheist	14,600	0.2
Agnostic	107,000	1.1
Other	71,100	0.7

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

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

According to WCD statistics, the majority of UAE's inhabitants are Muslim (76.4%). Christians make up the second largest religious group in the country.

Notes on the current situation

As with other Gulf States such as Kuwait and Bahrain, the UAE are relatively open and tolerant toward religions other than Islam. It probably houses the highest number of (registered) churches in the entire Arabian Peninsula, and these are often built on land donated by the government. This relative religious freedom is mostly enjoyed by Western expatriates and to a lesser extent by Asians and Africans, which is also true for other human rights. Obviously this religious freedom does not entail evangelizing Muslims. Muslims who convert to Christianity often live as secret believers in their families and society because of the huge taboo of leaving Islam.

WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

With a score of 58 points, UAE ranked 45th in WWL 2019.

What type of persecution dominates?

Islamic oppression: Islam dominates private and public life, as well as political discourse in the kingdom. To avoid the death penalty, social stigma or other penalties, Christian converts from a Muslim background are at times compelled to appear to be Muslims and hide their faith, or travel to another country where their conversion is allowed. Evangelism is prohibited, but non-Muslim groups can worship in dedicated buildings or private homes.

Dictatorial paranoia: The country is ruled by a dynasty that exert pressure on society and do not allow any dissent. Freedom of expression, freedom of press and freedom of association are restricted.

Ethnic antagonism: Islamic norms and values shaped in a tribal context (such as family honor) are forced upon Christians. This particularly affects converts from Islam to Christianity.

Who is driving persecution?

Emirati society is fairly tolerant towards the Christian expatriate communities, and these are free to worship in dedicated buildings or private homes. In contrast, converts from Islam to Christianity face a lot of pressure from their families and surrounding society, making it unnecessary for the government to act against them. In this way, the government can actively promote religious tolerance, while at the same time upholding Islam as the one true religion.

What it results in

Christian expatriates are free to worship in private but the government does not allow them to evangelize or pray in public. Because Emirati society is conservative, Christians exercise self-restraint in public. Converts from Islam endure the most persecution as they face pressure from family members and the local community to recant their Christian faith. This makes it almost impossible for converts to reveal their conversion, which is why there are hardly any reports of Christians being killed or harmed for their faith.

Violence

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

United Arab Emirates	Reporting period	Christians killed	Christians attacked	Christians arrested	Churches attacked	Christian-owned houses and shops attacked
WWL 2019	01 Nov 2017 - 31 Oct 2018	0	21	0	0	1
WWL 2018	01 Nov 2016 - 31 Oct 2017	0	0	0	0	0

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

Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period

- Converts from Islam to Christianity, both Emirati nationals and foreign workers, continue to face high pressure from their (extended) families, employers and society. Losing inheritance and parental rights, being forced to marry, being fired or placed under pressure to work for 'free', all happen to converts from Islam to Christianity. Many seek asylum in another country.
- During the WWL 2019 reporting period, at least one female convert was threatened with forced marriage and some converts had to flee to another emirate because of pressure. There were also some converts who were placed under financial pressure and forced to recant their faith.
- There are too few churches in the United Arab Emirates to meet the demand. Especially since it has recently become harder to use non-designated buildings like hotels and schools for gatherings, which was tolerated before. Although the ruling Emirati families donated land to build churches on, it remains difficult to officially establish new churches. Religious organizations are not required to register with the government, but there is a lack of clear legal designation, which results in an ambiguous legal status for many groups. This created difficulties in carrying out certain administrative functions, including banking and signing leases.
- Violent incidents against Christians are rarely reported. The country is well policed and it is in general peaceful. However, persecution incidents involving Christian foreign workers probably go unreported because it is in nobody's interest to publicize them (the victim wants to keep his or her job and other actors like the government are not interested in matters of this sort). Also, it is difficult to discern whether mistreatment occurs solely due to the foreigner's Christian faith. However, in general it is assumed that the faith of non-Muslim migrant workers, including Christians, leads to extra vulnerability.

- According to the US State Department's [International Religious Freedom report](#) for 2017 (page 8): The country's two primary internet service providers, both majority owned by the government, continued to block certain web sites critical of Islam or supportive of religious views the government considered extremist, including Muslim sites. The service providers continued to block other sites on religion-related topics, including some with information on Judaism, Christianity, atheism, and testimonies of former Muslims who converted to Christianity. In this way, the government actively censors the internet, which forces Christians to be careful with the online practice of their faith.

External Links - WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: International Religious Freedom report
<https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/269162.pdf>
- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: International Religious Freedom report
<https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/281254.pdf>

WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 58 points, UAE ranked 45th in WWL 2019. In WWL 2018 the score was also 58 points which reflects the stability of the current situation for Christians in the country.

Persecution engines

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

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

Islamic oppression (Strong):

Islam dominates private and public life, as well as political discourse in the kingdom. Consequently, all citizens are understood to be Muslims. The law of the kingdom does not recognize conversion from Islam to Christianity, and officially the legal punishment is death. Christian converts from a Muslim background are at times compelled to appear to be Muslims and hide their faith. Even though there are no reported cases of the death penalty being enforced against converts, the mere fact that the law exists is an effective deterrent. Tribalism is very much mixed with Islam and hence leaving Islam is interpreted as betraying one's family. In general, families put strong social pressure on converts to make them return to Islam, leave the region or to be silent about their new faith. Besides this, some ethnic Arabs regard foreign Christians as a threat to their religion, culture and language (as Arabic is seen as the holy language of the Quran).

Dictatorial paranoia (Medium):

UAE is not a democracy. The country is ruled by a dynasty that does not recognize various fundamental human rights. The rulers exert pressure on society and do not allow any dissent. Since the persecution engines Islamic oppression and Dictatorial paranoia overlap to a certain degree, the government also shows characteristics of Islamic oppression by limiting the rights of Christians compared to Muslims, especially regarding church life.

Drivers of persecution

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

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

Drivers of Islamic oppression:

Conservative Islamic society is the biggest threat to Christians in UAE. Emiratis expect Islamic governance from their rulers, with Sharia law being a [principal source of legislation](#). The government will act against any Christian who makes an attempt to share the Gospel, since proselytizing is illegal and punishable under the law. Conversion from Islam to Christianity is socially totally unacceptable. Converts face the risk of being ostracized by their families and might even be killed for shaming their families. Beside this, ethnic Arab Emiratis are at the top of the social ladder and look down upon foreigners, especially the poor and low-skilled workers from South East Asia and Africa. Employees are tied to their employers and thus vulnerable to their bosses' demands. The latter can easily discriminate, humiliate or abuse expatriate Christians. Expatriate Christians can also face discrimination and mistreatment from their fellow Muslim expatriates.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia:

The UAE government does not allow criticism, especially not from (foreign) Christians. According to [Freedom House's](#) 2017 report: "[...] the domestic media environment is tightly controlled. Nearly all media outlets serving Emirati audiences are either owned or heavily influenced by the authorities. Individuals who use internet-based platforms to publicize dissenting views or sensitive information have for years been subjected to arbitrary and extralegal detention or criminal prosecution with little due process." In this environment, Christians always have to operate carefully.

Context

For a more detailed overview, please see the Keys to Understanding section above.

The UAE consists of seven emirates which have their own rulers and which were united in a federal state in the early 1970s. All emirates have a seat in the Federal Supreme Council – the highest constitutional, executive and legislative authority. UAE is not a democracy and the rulers exert pressure on society, allowing no dissent. All political decisions rest with the dynastic rulers of the seven emirates and there is no place for the will of the people at large. Freedom of religion, press, assembly, association and expression are severely restricted in the kingdom.

In contrast to fellow Gulf country Bahrain, the wave of Arab Spring uprisings in 2011 hardly seem to have affected the UAE. This is remarkable, especially since Emirati society is based more on tribal loyalty than on democratic norms. However, the population appears to trust the government and its generous distribution of oil wealth obviously plays a significant role. UAE is the world's fourth richest state per capita and holds the world's sixth-largest oil reserves. This has brought a large number of immigrants to the country where only 15% of the population are national citizens. The UAE have developed and implemented structural diversification strategies to avoid too much dependence on oil.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Of the four WWL categories of Christianity, two exist in UAE and are affected by persecution:

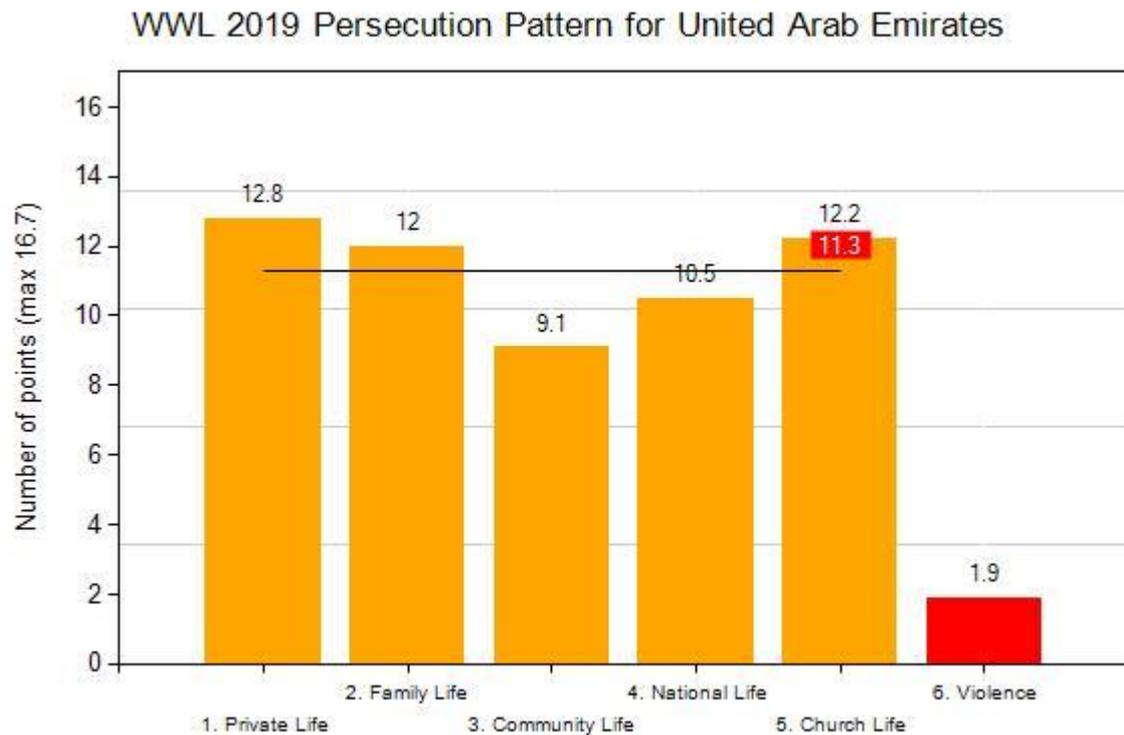
Communities of expatriate Christians: The majority of Christians in UAE belong to this group which enjoys some freedom but also faces certain restrictions. African and Asian expatriates do not have as much freedom as Western ones, but do have more freedom than converts (see below), as long as they do not evangelize Muslims.

Historical Christian communities: There are no historical Christian communities in UAE (other than expatriate ones covered in the first category above.)

Converts to Christianity: Converts from Islam to Christianity are the most vulnerable Christian group in the country. They are under severe pressure from relatives, family and Muslim society due to the Islamic government, law and culture.

Non-traditional Christian communities: There are no non-traditional Christian communities in UAE (other than expatriate ones covered in the first category above).

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence



The WWL 2019 Persecution pattern for UAE shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (11.3), a decrease from 11.6 in WWL 2018. The main reason for this fall is that pressure on converts from a non-Emirati background was reported to be slightly lower.
- Although all *spheres of life* show high and very high levels of pressure, pressure is highest in *Private, Church and Private life* (all 12.0 points and above). This reflects on the one hand the difficult situation for convert Christians who face very high pressure from their (extended) family. On the other hand, church life is difficult for both convert and expatriate Christians, as proselytizing and integrating converts from a Muslim background are socially unacceptable.
- The score for violence went up from 0.2 in WWL 2018 to 1.9 in WWL 2019. There were more reports of incidents and the situation of (female) domestic workers was scored more precisely. Although this led to an increase in score, it is probable that violence has been underreported in previous years.

Private sphere:

The pressure on Christians – particularly converts - is strongest in this sphere of life. Conversion from Islam to any other religion is prohibited. Due to the serious social discrimination and stigma against Christians, openly possessing Christian materials is dangerous especially for Muslims who might be converting or who have already converted but have not risked being identified as Christian for safety reasons.

Family sphere:

Pressure in this sphere of life is also very high and is particularly evident concerning marriage, child upbringing, inheritance and child custody. Mixed marriage is only legal between a Muslim man and a

non-Muslim woman. In the event of divorce, the law grants custody of any children of non-Muslim women who do not convert to Islam to the Muslim father. By law, a non-Muslim woman who fails to convert is also ineligible for naturalization as a citizen and cannot inherit her husband's property unless named as a beneficiary in his will.

Community sphere:

For Christians in the UAE, community life can be difficult, although one's ethnic background can be as important as one's religious convictions. In a society which is very conservative and Islamic, being Christian can be challenging. A country researcher states: "There are no specific laws or active practices prohibiting Christians from participating in communal or other similar institutions. However, Christians frequently exercise self-restraint for safety reasons. As a result, due to the already existing societal abuse and discrimination, Christians and other non-Muslims don't feel safe to engage freely in communal institutions and forums."

In addition, convert Christians are likely to be ostracized by society if their faith is known.

National sphere:

In UAE, Islam is the state religion and Sharia law is the principal source of legislation. Courts also use legislation based on Islamic law. Christians thus have to live their lives in a manner that is defined by others – e.g. they are required not to eat and drink in public during the Ramadan month. Christians are also not permitted to proselytize while Muslims are encouraged to do so. In general, (social) media are in favor of Islam and are biased against Christians.

Church sphere:

As there are a significant number of expatriate Christians in the country, there are more than two dozen official churches. The number of the existing churches is not large enough to cater for demand. Secondly, the government does not allow congregations to worship, preach or pray in public. Furthermore, the Emirati society is conservative, forcing churches to exercise self-restraint in their public expressions of faith. They also have to be careful in their contact with the Muslim population, especially because anything which could be construed as proselytizing Muslims is strictly prohibited. Expatriate churches have to be careful with accepting converts into their congregations.

In contrast to previous years, in the WWL 2019 reporting period, the Dubai government acted against congregations gathering in non-designated areas like hotels and conference centers. Although sources say that the actions were not religiously motivated, but were in line with public order policies, the lack of church buildings and spaces to worship is the underlying problem which the Dubai government does not seem to be concerned about.

Violence:

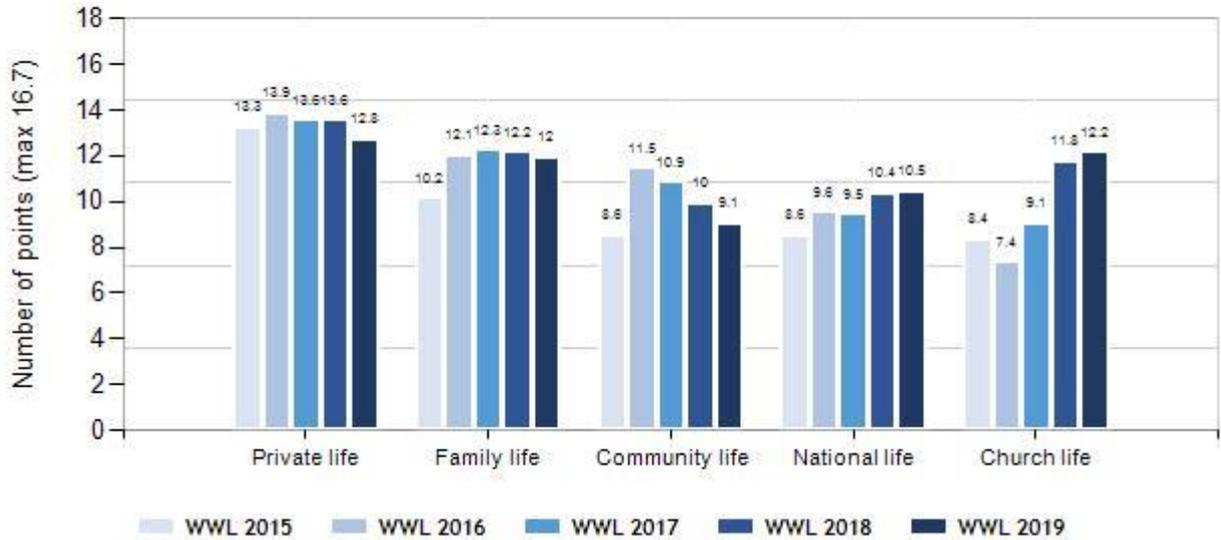
The low level of violence against Christians is typical for a Gulf country. The government does not have to act against Christians as the pressure from society is very high and Christians practice self-restraint. For a summary of the statistics on violence and examples, please see the Short and Simple Persecution Profile section above.

5 Year trends

Over the last four reporting periods, there have been notable increases in pressure in the *Church sphere of life* and notable decreases in the pressure on Christians in *Community life* (Chart 1). Chart 2, depicting average pressure, shows that the overall level of pressure on Christians has crept up since

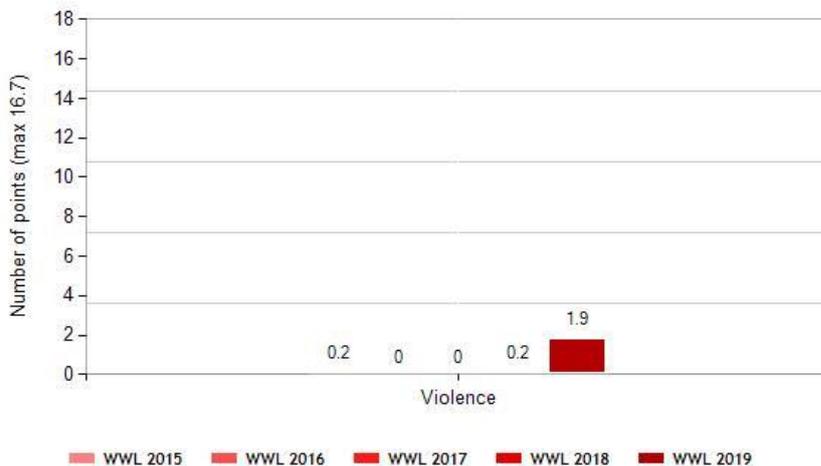
WWL 2015 and stabilized at just over 11 points, a very high level. This is a reflection of the fact that the situation for converts in particular has deteriorated and remains very difficult. The number of violent incidents (Chart 3) recorded in the period WWL 2015-2018 was very low but the score rose in WWL 2019 to a low level. This pattern is typical for a Gulf country.

WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Profile for United Arab Emirates (Spheres of life)



WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Pattern history: United Arab Emirates	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2019	11.3
2018	11.6
2017	11.1
2016	10.9
2015	9.8

WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Profile for United Arab Emirates (Violence)



Gender specific persecution

Female:

Christian women remain especially vulnerable, as women in general in the UAE are treated as being inferior to men. Tribal society also affects the level of persecution experienced by converts from Islam to Christianity. This persecution would be felt most keenly by women and girls, corresponding with their low level of status and freedom within the culture. A key restriction on women who come from a Muslim background is the legal marriage restriction whereby they cannot marry a non-Muslim. Amnesty International has also reported that some laws improving the rights of foreign workers explicitly excluded domestic staff, many of whom are Christian women. (Amnesty International, Annual Report 2016/17, p. 381) The ill-treatment of migrant workers, including sexual abuse, has become a high-profile issue. Although not primarily faith-related, there are indications that non-Muslim domestic migrant workers, very many of whom are female, are more vulnerable to such abuse than Muslims.

Male:

If expatriate male Christians face pressure because of their faith, it is most likely that they will encounter it on the work-floor. For convert males, the impact of their new faith is more far-reaching. Most likely they will be ostracized by their families which results in social exclusion: i) Their families will not support them any longer;; ii) They lose access to daily necessities normally provided by the family; iii) Finding a job will be harder in UAE's network-based society; and iv) no family will allow their daughter to marry a man who does not show respect to his family.

If a convert has a family and job before converting, he is likely to lose everything when his conversion becomes known - the custody of any children, his wife through divorce and his current employment. This has major implications for all his family members as the men are nearly always the breadwinners for their families. According to one country researcher: "Most of the time, men and boys are breadwinners and therefore they have to face the brunt of discrimination to help their families."

Persecution of other religious minorities

Among expatriate communities, many other religious minority communities enjoy a similar level of freedom to Christians. For example, it is notable that permission has been granted for the first Hindu Temple in the Middle East to be completed in Abu Dhabi by 2020 (analysts say it is remarkable to see this level of accommodation of a polytheistic religion). Shia Muslims face some challenges, for political as well as religious reasons - they do not receive a comparable level of State assistance (for example, salary payments for leaders) as the majority Sunni communities. According to the US State Department's [International Religious Freedom report for 2017](#): "The government continued to allow private worship [...] and granted permission to build houses of worship on a case-by-case basis." [UAE IRFR 2017, p. 7].

Future outlook

The political outlook: Looking to the future, political stability can be expected as the Emirati rulers support one another. National elections do not exist and political parties are forbidden, which prevents citizens from changing their government. Government posts are mainly filled through tribal loyalties and most of the population does not seem to be very interested or involved in politics. A generous distribution of wealth seems to appease the population at the moment, though the historically poorer northern states with their demand for political change do pose a certain risk. Generally, the UAE continues to be comparatively stable and liberal in comparison to some of its neighbors and near-

neighbors. A liberalizing trend in social attitudes, especially among younger generations, seems to be continuing, and the rhetoric (plus certain actions) of the Federal authorities continues to emphasize that the UAE is a country of religious tolerance.

The outlook for Christians - viewed through the lens of:

- *Islamic oppression:* An area of concern is the treatment of non-authorized churches by the Dubai authorities. Although sources indicated that the recent crackdown was not religiously motivated, it has been described as 'heavy-handed and insensitive'. The continuing lack of will by the Dubai government to consider applications for new church buildings is a reason for concern and is likely to remain an issue in other Emirates too.
- *Dictatorial paranoia:* It is unlikely that the UAE government will change its suspicious approach towards all kinds of associations and meeting, including church meetings. Monitoring will continue and the government will probably keep up its strict control over anything that could cause public unrest, including evangelism.

Conclusion: The UAE continues to enjoy stability within an increasingly turbulent regional context. It remains to be seen whether the UAE's more assertive posturing in the region (e.g. in respect of Somalia, Yemen, Qatar etc) will lead to a bolstering of the UAE's influence as a progressive Islamic nation, or whether such forays will prove unsuccessful and therefore damaging to the 'brand' of Islam the UAE is seeking to portray. If unsuccessful, or if it gets bogged down in regional conflicts, the UAE could potentially face growing domestic discontent, and possibly the emergence and growing influence of more conservative religious factions - though this does not seem a very probable prospect at present. More immediate are economic challenges, especially for Dubai - the imperative to attract further international investment is likely to ensure a continued openness to, and tolerance of, diversity. As one source described it: "We enjoy a good bit of religious freedom. This country is open to the world. That is also the secret of the development of this country."

External Links - WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

- Drivers of persecution: principal source of legislation
https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/United_Arab_Emirates_2004.pdf
- Drivers of persecution: Freedom House's
<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2017/united-arab-emirates>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: International Religious Freedom report for 2017
<https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/281254.pdf>

Additional Reports and Articles

WWR in-depth reports

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

Open Doors article(s) from the region

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

World Watch Monitor news articles

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

Recent country developments

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