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## Maldives: Country Dossier

December 2019



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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# Contents

Introduction .....	3
World Watch List 2020 .....	3
Copyright notice .....	4
Brief note on sources and definitions .....	4
WWL 2020: Persecution summary / Maldives .....	5
Brief country details .....	5
Dominant persecution engines and drivers .....	5
Brief description of persecution situation .....	5
Specific examples of persecution in the reporting period .....	5
WWL 2020: Keys to understanding / Maldives .....	7
Link for general background information .....	7
Recent history .....	7
Political and legal landscape .....	7
Religious landscape .....	8
Economic landscape .....	8
Social and cultural landscape .....	9
Technological landscape .....	9
Security situation .....	10
Trends analysis .....	10
External Links - WWL 2020: Keys to understanding .....	10
WWL 2020: Church information / Maldives .....	13
Christian origins .....	13
Church spectrum today .....	13
WWL 2020: Persecution Dynamics / Maldives .....	14
Reporting period .....	14
Position on World Watch List (WWL) .....	14
Persecution engines .....	14
Drivers of persecution .....	16
Geographical hotspots of persecution .....	18
Christian communities and how they are affected .....	18
The Persecution pattern .....	18
Pressure in the 5 spheres of life .....	19
Violence .....	24

5 Year trends .....	24
Gender profile of persecution.....	26
Persecution of other religious minorities.....	27
Future outlook for the church.....	27
External Links - WWL 2020: Persecution Dynamics.....	28
Additional reports and articles.....	29
WWR in-depth reports.....	29
World Watch Monitor news articles.....	29
Recent country developments .....	29

# Introduction

## World Watch List 2020

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017	Total Score WWL 2016
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	11.1	94	94	94	92	92
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.0	93	94	93	89	88
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.5	9.4	92	91	91	91	87
4	Libya	15.3	15.5	15.8	16.0	16.4	11.3	90	87	86	78	79
5	Pakistan	14.0	13.9	15.0	14.9	13.7	16.7	88	87	86	88	87
6	Eritrea	14.5	14.9	15.9	15.9	15.4	10.9	87	86	86	82	89
7	Sudan	14.2	14.6	14.5	15.7	16.1	10.4	85	87	87	87	84
8	Yemen	16.6	16.4	16.4	16.7	16.7	2.6	85	86	85	85	78
9	Iran	14.1	14.3	14.1	15.8	16.5	10.4	85	85	85	85	83
10	India	12.9	13.0	13.5	15.0	13.5	14.8	83	83	81	73	68
11	Syria	13.5	14.2	13.0	13.9	14.4	12.6	82	82	76	86	87
12	Nigeria	12.2	11.9	13.5	12.8	13.0	16.7	80	80	77	78	78
13	Saudi Arabia	15.1	14.9	14.1	15.5	16.5	2.4	79	77	79	76	76
14	Maldives	15.4	15.6	14.0	15.9	16.6	0.7	78	78	78	76	76
15	Iraq	14.0	14.6	13.9	14.5	13.6	5.6	76	79	86	86	90
16	Egypt	12.1	13.1	10.7	13.2	10.5	16.1	76	76	70	65	64
17	Algeria	13.5	14.3	10.4	12.8	13.2	9.3	73	70	58	58	56
18	Uzbekistan	15.1	12.9	14.1	12.2	15.7	3.0	73	74	73	71	70
19	Myanmar	11.8	11.9	13.5	12.5	12.2	10.7	73	71	65	62	62
20	Laos	12.8	9.9	14.1	14.4	14.9	5.6	72	71	67	64	58
21	Vietnam	12.3	8.5	12.9	13.6	14.5	9.8	72	70	69	71	66
22	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.2	13.8	13.3	15.7	1.9	70	69	68	67	66
23	China	11.6	8.4	11.6	12.8	15.1	10.2	70	65	57	57	57
24	Mauritania	13.9	14.0	13.0	13.7	13.4	0.2	68	67	57	55	50
25	Central African Republic	10.1	9.1	13.1	9.8	10.2	15.6	68	70	61	58	59
26	Morocco	12.4	13.3	10.8	11.7	14.1	4.1	66	63	51	49	47
27	Qatar	13.6	13.4	10.8	12.2	14.1	2.2	66	62	63	66	65
28	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	10.2	9.4	11.8	15.6	66	48	-	-	-
29	Mali	9.2	8.2	12.8	10.0	11.7	13.7	66	68	59	59	55
30	Sri Lanka	11.5	9.0	11.0	10.9	9.6	13.1	65	58	57	55	53
31	Tajikistan	13.9	12.3	11.9	12.4	13.1	1.1	65	65	65	58	58
32	Nepal	12.4	10.8	9.9	12.1	12.2	7.0	64	64	64	53	53
33	Jordan	13.1	14.1	10.7	11.7	12.5	1.7	64	65	66	63	59
34	Tunisia	12.0	12.8	10.3	10.8	12.3	5.4	64	63	62	61	58
35	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.5	10.7	12.4	14.0	1.7	64	63	63	56	55
36	Turkey	12.6	11.8	10.7	13.3	11.3	3.7	63	66	62	57	55
37	Brunei	13.8	14.3	10.7	10.3	13.5	0.6	63	63	64	64	61
38	Bangladesh	11.1	9.9	12.7	11.1	8.9	9.3	63	58	58	63	57
39	Ethiopia	10.0	9.2	10.6	10.8	10.4	11.9	63	65	62	64	67
40	Malaysia	12.1	14.6	12.7	12.0	9.6	1.5	62	60	65	60	58
41	Colombia	8.9	7.8	11.9	9.8	8.9	15.0	62	58	56	53	55
42	Oman	12.7	13.1	10.0	11.5	12.7	2.0	62	59	57	53	53
43	Kuwait	13.2	13.1	9.9	11.5	13.4	0.7	62	60	61	57	56
44	Kenya	11.7	10.5	10.9	8.3	10.9	9.1	61	61	62	68	68
45	Bhutan	12.8	10.9	11.8	11.6	13.9	0.0	61	64	62	61	56
46	Russian Federation	12.2	8.3	10.7	10.4	12.1	6.9	60	60	51	46	48
47	United Arab Emirates	12.9	13.0	9.5	11.1	12.6	1.1	60	58	58	55	55
48	Cameroon	8.8	7.2	11.6	7.0	10.4	15.0	60	54	38	-	45
49	Indonesia	10.9	11.1	11.6	10.2	9.5	6.5	60	65	59	55	55
50	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.3	7.2	11.1	9.3	60	52	45	47	53
51	Palestinian Territories	12.2	13.0	9.2	10.2	11.9	3.1	60	57	60	64	62
52	Mexico	8.4	6.8	12.2	10.6	10.0	11.5	60	61	59	57	56
53	Azerbaijan	13.0	10.0	9.3	11.1	12.4	1.5	57	57	57	52	57
54	Comoros	11.7	11.5	9.1	9.9	13.9	0.9	57	56	56	56	56
55	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.3	11.1	9.4	11.9	1.1	57	56	54	48	46
56	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	10.3	10.0	11.2	0.2	56	56	56	57	58
57	Democratic Republic of the Congo	5.6	6.7	10.6	7.4	10.4	15.6	56	55	33	-	53
58	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	5.9	56	48	40	-	51
59	Bahrain	12.1	12.3	9.1	10.1	10.5	0.9	55	55	57	54	54

60	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	7.0	55	52	53	59	57
61	Cuba	9.6	5.6	9.5	11.8	12.0	3.5	52	49	49	47	42
62	Uganda	8.1	4.6	6.7	6.7	9.1	13.0	48	47	46	53	45
63	Burundi	5.1	5.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.7	48	43	-	-	-
64	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	3.7	45	46	-	-	-
65	South Sudan	5.7	1.5	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.6	44	44	-	-	-
66	Mozambique	6.9	4.6	7.1	5.2	8.0	11.7	43	43	-	-	-
67	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	1.1	43	43	-	-	-
68	Angola	6.4	3.6	7.0	8.7	10.4	6.7	43	42	-	-	-
69	Venezuela	3.8	4.4	10.6	9.3	9.5	4.8	42	41	34	-	-
70	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	6.6	3.5	42	43	-	-	-
71	Rwanda	5.3	4.4	6.7	7.8	10.1	7.2	42	41	-	-	-
72	Nicaragua	5.8	4.2	8.5	9.8	9.0	4.1	41	41	-	-	-
73	Togo	8.6	6.7	8.5	7.1	8.4	1.1	41	42	-	-	-

## Copyright notice

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## Brief note on 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 2020 reporting period was 1 November 2018 - 31 October 2019.

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).

# WWL 2020: Persecution summary / Maldives

## Brief country details

The number of Christians listed below is an Open Doors (OD) estimate:

Pop 2019	Christians	Chr%
Maldives		
452,000	a few thousand	OD estimate

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2019).

World Watch List Maldives	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2020	78	14
WWL 2019	78	14
WWL 2018	78	13
WWL 2017	76	13
WWL 2016	76	13

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2016-2020 reporting periods.

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Maldives: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Government officials , Non-Christian religious leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family, Political parties, Violent religious groups, Organized crime cartels or networks
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials , Non-Christian religious leaders, Political parties, Organized crime cartels or networks

Engines and Drivers are listed in order of strength. Only Very strong / Strong / Medium are shown here.

## Brief description of persecution situation

The Maldives has one of the highest population densities worldwide, especially on its main island, Malé. The close-knit, homogeneous communities serve as natural watchdogs for any deviation of its members, which naturally includes religious choice. Conversion to Christianity can thus easily result in being reported to Muslim leaders or authorities. Expatriate Christians, most of them working in the tourist sector and coming from India and Sri Lanka, are closely watched as well, making Christian fellowship very difficult.

## Specific examples of persecution in the reporting period

Due to security issues and the small size of the Christian community living in the Maldives, examples cannot be published.

In a country where, according to Article 9(d) of the Constitution, non-Muslims may not become a citizen of the Maldives and accordingly, if someone is found to have converted to Christianity, will be stripped of his or her citizenship as well punished for violating Sharia law, it is not hard to imagine that pressure is extremely high and converts remain well hidden. Some Maldivian Christians have preferred to leave the islands and stay abroad due to the enormous pressure they were put under.

# WWL 2020: Keys to understanding / Maldives

## Link for general background information

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12651486>.

## Recent history

The Maldives are a politically divided country. After the ousting of the first democratically elected president, [Mohamed Nasheed](#), in February 2012, his successors have frequently reiterated the importance of Islam for the country and their plans to promote the religion. Opposition forces (or simply those perceived as a danger to the rulers) have been driven out of the country or arrested and some founded a United Maldives Opposition in May 2016, headed by ex-President Nasheed who was granted asylum in the UK.

The leaders' intention to protect the country from becoming less than 100% Islam is the ideological key for understanding the Maldives. While the surprise presidential victory of opposition politician Ibrahim Solih in September 2018 did not change anything concerning this goal, it definitely changed the way the government communicates.

## Political and legal landscape

Politics in the Maldives always carries religious undertones; it would seem that Islam has to be defended or promoted in every possible way. As politics are often family business, rifts, changing coalitions and surprise moves are quite normal. Especially in recent years it has not been unusual for a minister to lose his job for a variety of reasons, including alleged treason. This points to another issue which Maldivian politics is facing - the paranoia of its leaders, no matter who is ruling. Staying in power seems to be a high priority and every means is used to do that. This was shown again in the presidential election campaign, which was fought as a battle against all opposition - real or perceived. The small Christian minority has virtually no room to breathe under such pressure.

The Maldives has been a land in turmoil in recent years (excluding the islands used as tourist resorts). Civil liberties are increasingly restricted, including media and social media, as shown by the [killing](#) of well-known blogger Yameen Rasheed in April 2017 in the capital Malé. Given that the government's goal of protecting Islam remains unchanged, it is plain that the situation for religious minorities, especially Christians, remains difficult. This was illustrated by the seizure of more than 100 books with ["irreligious contents"](#) from a book fair end of August 2019, including Christian books.

Whether the new leader, Ibrahim Solih, who was elected with a huge margin in September 2018, is able to bring any substantial change to the Maldives, remains to be seen. On 16 August 2018, Human Rights Watch [published a report](#) entitled "An all-out assault on democracy – Crushing dissent in the Maldives". It outlines recent developments in politics and human rights. The report serves to outline what uphill struggles Solih will have to face. However, it was an encouraging step that the Constitutional Court - despite its judges being chosen by his predecessor and competitor Abdullah Yameen - [unanimously rejected](#) the latter's challenge of the election result.



The fact that the new government in August 2019 chose [two female judges](#) to serve at the Supreme Court is another sign that the country might be slowly changing, as is the clear statement by an [investigation commission](#) into the murder of journalist Ahmed Rilwan in 2014, reporting that he had been killed by Islamic militants.

It is unlikely that President Solih will be able or willing to bring extensive changes to the Maldives. However, he set several small signs of a changing approach to serve his country. One such a signal was given when he [joined the protest march](#) by the families of the two bloggers killed for their liberal views, in April 2019. Apparently, voters appreciate this approach. His MDP party won the elections in April 2019 by a [two-thirds majority in parliament](#), with a voter turnout of 80%. Solih was quoted as saying: The fact that ‘our campaign was issue-oriented and not based on hatred and narrow divisions is a win for our young democracy. That our government did not hinder those candidates with whom we did not agree is a big win for the country.’ By this, he was referring to the [religiously charged rhetoric](#) of the leader of the opposition Jumhooree Party (JP), Gasim Ibrahim, who stirred up controversy by claiming that the MDP was planning to allow the building of temples and churches in the strictly Muslim country.

## Religious landscape

The country is officially 100% Sunni Muslim and each Maldivian citizen wanting to turn away from it will lose his or her citizenship. Among the many expatriate workers, there are Christians (as well as Hindus), but if they dare to meet at all, they have to be very cautious and inconspicuous.

The language of the Maldives is Dhivehi: The complete Bible in this language is not yet available.

In the 12th century, Sunni Muslim traders brought Islam to the Maldives which had been a Buddhist country for centuries. The one-time strong Sufi tradition is declining as the influence of Saudi Wahhabism grows, despite a cooling of relations to Saudi Arabia in 2017 when the government announced a massive Saudi investment in Maldives prematurely, thus angering the Saudi king.

## Economic landscape

The newly appointed head of the immigration office [announced](#) in January 2019 that out of an estimated 144,000 migrant workers, approximately 63,000 were illegal residents, most of them employed in the tourist sector. In June 2019, the Economic Development Minister, Fayyaz Ismail, even revealed that the real number of labor migrants, legal and illegal, [stands at 250.000](#), and more would be needed. In relation to the number of inhabitants of the Maldives, an estimated 452,000 people in 2019, this is a surprisingly high number. Given these figures, it is not surprising that human trafficking [the illegal supply of migrant workers] is the second most lucrative economic sector after tourism, according to official government figures from 2011.

The [return of Islamic militants](#) from abroad, especially Syria, who are often regarded as heroes in Maldivian society, may endanger the tourist business and it is arguably one of the biggest challenges the Maldives is facing.

The [arrest of the former president](#), Abdulla Yameen, for his involvement in one of the biggest cases of corruption the country has ever seen, highlights another big challenge the economy of the Maldives is facing, in the [Corruption Perception Index](#), the Maldives is ranked as 124th of 180 countries.

## Social and cultural landscape

Maldivian society is Islamic and - according to UNDP figures - very young, with a median age of 27.9 years. The Maldives are facing serious social problems, such as drug addiction, cases of sexual abuse and high divorce rates without being able to find solutions. Reportedly, drug addiction is also a problem among some of the few Christians in the country.

An unpublished 2009 study on violence against children - possibly not published due to its grim findings – states that one in seven children of secondary school age in the country has been sexually abused at some time in their lives. It also discovered that the rate of sexual abuse for girls is almost twice as high (20%) compared to that of boys (11%). Girls are particularly at risk in the capital, Malé. The study also discovered that 47% of Maldivian children under the age of 18 have undergone physical or emotional punishment at home, school or in the community. It is also more common among students attending secondary school in the atolls, with one in four reporting they had been hit by adults or other children during the past year. The figure for Malé was 14%. More recent reports are not available but the problem is officially recognized. The Ministry for Family and Children, for instance, [reported](#) higher child abuse numbers in November 2017 and the mayor of the capital Malé decried the increasing crime in his city.

The Maldives has the highest divorce rate in the world, with a nine out of ten ratio – some Maldivians have allegedly “tied the knot” sixty times! Following Islamic custom, a husband can divorce his wife by simply saying “I divorce you!” three times. The high divorce rate is blamed on the nature of the husbands’ work in the shipping and tourism industries. They are required to be away from home for an extended period of time. This results in a lack of trust and in financial difficulty for many women.

## Technological landscape

According to the figures from UNDP, the internet penetration rate for the Maldives stands at 59.1% (other statistics give 75.3%), whereas the mobile subscription rate is a stunning 189.9, and may thus be one of the highest in the world. The Maldives are challenged by their geographical situation, consisting of atolls spread over a wide area in the Indian Ocean. It should also be kept in mind that there is a wide gap between resort islands for tourists (with unhindered internet access and all the technological niceties of global life) and residential islands where the Maldivians live. Therefore, all such statistics should be viewed with caution. Freedom House does not rate the country on its "Freedom on the Net 2019" report.

## Security situation

One country observer referred to the Maldives as “[a Paradise lost to terrorism](#)”. This may be an exaggeration but the Maldives do have one of the highest per capita rate of Islamic militants fighting abroad. The challenge will be to re-integrate them when they return from fighting in Syria. Connected with this, [two additional challenges](#) arise: One is that it is completely unclear what to expect from widows and children of ‘shahids’ (Islamic militants killed in Iraq and Syria) returning to the Maldives. The authorities do not know how to deal with them. The other challenge is that Islamic militants who have returned have been acquitted in court due to lack of proof that they were actually involved in fighting after 2015, the time when a law penalizing fighting in a foreign war came into force. Those men are free and are regarded by many Maldivians as being true Islamic heroes. In September 2019, the government placed [17 organizations](#) on a list under the Anti-Terrorism Act.

## Trends analysis

Even with the help of recently returned former President Mohammed Nasheed, who has been [elected as Speaker of the parliament](#) with 67 out of 87 votes in May 2019, it may prove difficult for the new government to steer the Maldives into clearer and quieter waters. However, as far as it could, the government sent encouraging signs, the first even directly after the election, when in a unanimous vote in November 2018, the new parliament of the Maldives decided to [rejoin the Commonwealth](#) of Nations. This is one of the strongest visible signs of a reduction in the influence of the Persecution engine *Dictatorial paranoia* so far.

However, neither the legal nor the societal situation has changed, so that neither expatriate nor the very few local Christians can expect any relief in the short term, although new restrictions on hate-speech give some relief to anyone seen as being different or even deviating (see under *Islamic oppression* below). However, the seizure of Christian books from a book-fair in August 2019, the revocation of the Maldivian Democratic Network’s [legal existence](#) (despite its apologies for ‘insensitive language’) and international protests (following pressure from Islamic parties over a report published in 2015) casts serious doubts on that. As far as the "protection of Islam" is concerned, it is fair to say that the new government will play the same old tunes all over again.

## External Links - WWL 2020: Keys to understanding

- Link for general background information: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12651486>. - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12651486>
- Recent history: Mohamed Nasheed - [http://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/mohamed-nasheed-talks-about-the-island-president-keeping-fragile-democracy-afloat/2012/04/12/gIQUzvCFT\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/mohamed-nasheed-talks-about-the-island-president-keeping-fragile-democracy-afloat/2012/04/12/gIQUzvCFT_story.html)
- Political and legal landscape: killing - [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/23/world/asia/yameen-rasheed-dead-maldives-blogger-dead.html?ref=todayspaper&utm\\_source=Pew+Research+Center&utm\\_campaign=52f02e25af-](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/23/world/asia/yameen-rasheed-dead-maldives-blogger-dead.html?ref=todayspaper&utm_source=Pew+Research+Center&utm_campaign=52f02e25af-)

EMAIL\_CAMPAIGN\_2017\_04\_24&utm\_medium=email&utm\_term=0\_3e953b9b70-52f02e25af-399904105&\_r=0

- Political and legal landscape: "irreligious contents" - <https://maldivesindependent.com/society/customs-seizes-more-than-100-books-with-irreligious-content-147706>
- Political and legal landscape: published a report - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/08/16/maldives-opposition-media-under-attack>
- Political and legal landscape: unanimously rejected - <https://maldivesindependent.com/politics/maldives-top-court-rejects-presidents-petition-for-fresh-polls-142183>
- Political and legal landscape: two female judges - <https://maldivesindependent.com/politics/adhaalath-party-urges-respect-for-differing-views-on-religious-disputes-147535>
- Political and legal landscape: investigation commission - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-maldives-rights-journalist/commission-says-maldives-journalist-was-murdered-by-islamist-militants-idUSKCN1VN0EA>
- Political and legal landscape: joined the protest march - <https://maldivesindependent.com/feature-comment/dont-let-go-president-marches-with-family-of-murdered-blogger-144983>
- Political and legal landscape: two-thirds majority in parliament - <https://maldivesindependent.com/politics/elections-commission-set-to-announce-results-144781>
- Political and legal landscape: religiously charged rhetoric - <https://maldivesindependent.com/politics/religious-rhetoric-incites-violence-presidential-commission-warns-144591>
- Economic landscape: announced - <https://maldivesindependent.com/society/number-of-illegal-migrants-estimated-at-63000-143502>
- Economic landscape: stands at 250.000 - <https://en.sun.mv/54227>
- Economic landscape: return of Islamic militants - [https://jamestown.org/program/the-maldives-faces-dual-challenge-of-terrorist-returnees-and-extremist-hate-campaigns/?mc\\_cid=217d9039a5&mc\\_eid=b8f233d4ea](https://jamestown.org/program/the-maldives-faces-dual-challenge-of-terrorist-returnees-and-extremist-hate-campaigns/?mc_cid=217d9039a5&mc_eid=b8f233d4ea)
- Economic landscape: arrest of the former president - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-maldives-corruption/maldives-court-orders-arrest-of-former-president-over-alleged-corruption-idUSKCN1Q713P?feedType=RSS&feedName=worldNews>
- Economic landscape: Corruption Perception Index - <https://www.transparency.org/country/MDV>
- Social and cultural landscape: reported - <http://maldivesindependent.com/crime-2/rise-in-child-abuse-reports-134234>
- Security situation: "a Paradise lost to terrorism" - [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=45009&tx\\_ttnews\[backPid\]=26&cHash=58349b6fb2aac945e6e3fc34f8bff85d](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=45009&tx_ttnews[backPid]=26&cHash=58349b6fb2aac945e6e3fc34f8bff85d)

- Security situation: two additional challenges - [https://jamestown.org/program/the-maldives-faces-dual-challenge-of-terrorist-returnees-and-extremist-hate-campaigns/?mc\\_cid=217d9039a5&mc\\_eid=b8f233d4ea](https://jamestown.org/program/the-maldives-faces-dual-challenge-of-terrorist-returnees-and-extremist-hate-campaigns/?mc_cid=217d9039a5&mc_eid=b8f233d4ea)
- Security situation: 17 organizations - <https://www.satp.org/south-asia-intelligence-review-Volume-18-No-23#assessment2>
- Trends analysis: elected as Speaker of the parliament - <https://maldivesindependent.com/politics/new-majlis-gets-to-work-with-nasheed-as-speaker-145661>
- Trends analysis: rejoin the Commonwealth - <https://maldivesindependent.com/politics/maldives-parliament-endorses-decision-to-rejoin-commonwealth-143069>
- Trends analysis: legal existence - <https://maldivesindependent.com/politics/maldives-suspends-ngo-for-slandering-islam-148485>

## WWL 2020: Church information / Maldives

### Christian origins

This is officially a 100% Sunni Muslim country. In the interest of security no information about the Christian presence can be published in this section.

### Church spectrum today

Due to security issues, no WCD breakdown can be published.

# WWL 2020: Persecution Dynamics / Maldives

## Reporting period

1 November 2018 – 31 October 2019

## Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 78 points, the Maldives ranked 14 in WWL 2020, the same score and rank as in WWL 2019.

In WWL 2020, the level of pressure on Christians remained more or less unchanged, reflected in the very high score. Converts have literally no space at all to live out their Christian faith and expatriate Christians (often migrant workers) lack possibilities for worshipping together without fearing arrest and deportation. Consequently, the Maldives is one of the few countries where the *Church sphere* continues to receive almost maximum points. The new government, which took over in mid-November 2018 has made no tangible improvements as regards freedom of religion so far and have even sent out a strong signal about their Islamic credentials by closing the NGO "Maldives Democratic Network" in October 2019.

## Persecution engines

Persecution engines: Maldives	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Very strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Clan and ethnic antagonism	CEA	Not at all
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	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	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 (Very strong):

The Islamic government still sees itself as the protector of Islam and watches over a set of laws that prohibits a Maldivian from leaving Islam and converting to another religion. To be Maldivian is equated with being a Muslim, leaving no room for any deviation, and a convert will face harsh consequences including losing citizenship. Officially there are no Maldivian Christians, only expatriate Christians. However, a change was observed last year when it came to dealing with what critics brand "apostates". The traditional approach of Islamization was illustrated in the WWL 2019 reporting period when the Ministry of Islamic Affairs published a policy paper in April 2018 dealing (among other topics) with the question of [apostates](#). Of course, the government states in this paper that it can never tolerate apostasy.

Around the same time, the Minister of Defense stated in all due clarity that he will [never allow freedom of religion](#) in the Maldives since it is a "country with moderate Islamic values". The new government set a clear sign by making the [police meet](#) with people responsible for branding others "apostate" in social media blogs and advised them not to repeat such statements. If this reflects a change in attitude or just in tone remains to be seen. For the time being, the difficult situation of the Christian minority in the Maldives continues.

#### **Dictatorial paranoia (Medium):**

While campaigning for re-election in 2018, President Yameen claimed that international pressure and opposition forces were attempting to make the Maldives less than [100% Islamic](#). His defeat and arrest on corruption charges makes his political comeback rather unlikely. While it seems that President Solih has a different approach and may even have a genuine wish to implement more democracy and freedoms - thus indicating that *Dictatorial paranoia* is on the decline - this is not true for all freedoms. Freedom of religion continues to be restricted since "protection of religion" is purely understood to mean the protection of Islam. The protection against destroying "religious unity" is also worrying, as this wording indicates that the authorities will oppose any perceived deviation from their understanding of Islam. All these laws and rhetoric not only show that Islam will be protected at all costs, but also reflects how *Islamic oppression* is blended with *Dictatorial paranoia*, because Islam is being used as a justification for limiting political freedom.

#### **Organized corruption and crime (Weak):**

Corruption is rampant from the highest levels of government on down. Almost anything can be accomplished through sufficient bribes, favors and/or threats. Contracts and other agreements can be broken at whim and government officials hire street-gang youth to do dirty work for them (e.g. roughing people up, committing property crimes against designated targets, selling contraband to raise cash). Many street gangs are controlled by government leaders (at all levels), and especially target anyone who speaks out against the government or against strict Islam. In a rare [exposure](#), a presidential commission investigating the chain of abductions, murders and intimidation of liberal bloggers and intellectuals, stated in March 2019 that the "attacks were masterminded by one group and were motivated by religious, militant elements, with gang involvement". While the full report is still awaiting publication, the commission's chairman, Husnu Suood, stated in an interview that there was '[gang involvement](#)'. It is common knowledge that certain gangs are in alliance with politicians, parties and security forces and are used for the violent intimidation of dissidents. Radical Islamic groups that want to ferret out Christians and atheists also have connections and influence with gangs and corrupt police networks. Some criminals (individual or in a gang) act for their own benefit, but without specific intent to promote anarchy.



## Drivers of persecution

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

### Drivers of Islamic oppression:

- Government officials (Very strong):** The government of the Maldives insists that the country has to be run according to conservative Islamic tenets and that all citizens have to be Muslim ("100% Islam"). This is a fundamental issue which the new government, coming to power in a surprise election result, is not going to try to change. Therefore religious freedom does not exist, except in a very limited way for expatriate Christians who are so strictly monitored and intimidated that they hardly dare to meet even behind closed doors.
- Non-Christian religious leaders (Very strong):** Radical Islamic preachers and clerics, whether homegrown or coming from the Middle East, exert strong socio-religious control over their followers and are also influencing others with their radical views of Islam, making it impossible for Christians - especially converts - to show their faith due to the fear of monitoring and of being handed over to the authorities.

- **Extended family and normal citizens (Very strong):** Family and community are drivers of persecution for converts as well, if they are discovered. The closely-knit society and the fact that Malé is one of the cities in the world with the highest density of population makes these drivers strongly felt, just as the fact that less populated atolls are places which are not easy to leave and hence, social control is high as well.
- **Political parties (Strong):** Political parties like the already mentioned Jumhoree Party try to gain political support by making allegations about the threat of Christianization and the dangers other religions will bring to the Maldives.
- **Violent religious groups (Medium):** It is not clear if jihadists returning from fighting with Islamic State group affiliates abroad have already become organized and formed groups, but their presence is a growing threat.
- **Organized crime cartels (Medium):** Whereas most gangs are not particularly interested in religious questions and are far more focused on making money and being able to exert power through brutality, some are motivated by religion, too.

#### Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia:

- **Government officials (Very strong):** Politics in the Maldives has a history of being dominated by strongmen, who have clung to power by all means. Whether the newly elected president will break with this tradition remains to be seen. Civil servants and authorities will stick to what they know and the opposition will use every option to call the new government "un-Islamic" and a threat to the very identity of the country. Therefore, all the ingredients for more *Dictatorial paranoia* are in place - at the expense of minorities and anyone seen as deviating from the norm.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Islamic leaders may not necessarily be interested in one political party or in one particular politician staying in power, but they are definitely interested in preserving the status quo. If this means supporting the authoritarian measures of a leader or party, they will do it.
- **Political parties (Strong):** Leaders of political parties in the Maldives have a long history of clinging desperately to power. It remains to be seen if President Solih and the MDP can break this mold.
- **Organized crime cartels (Medium):** As already stated above, in order to protect their illicit activities, gangs will support the power brokers they need. The Maldives has a long history of ties between gangs, politics and religion.

#### Drivers of Organized corruption and crime:

- **Government officials and political parties (Medium):** Officials from the old (i.e. pre-November 2018) government and various political parties allegedly made use of gangs as they saw the need for it and all sides benefitted from this connection.
- **Organized crime cartels (Medium):** Radical Muslims have been known to link up with gangs and use them to ferret out Christians and atheists or anyone suspected of non-Muslim activity. It remains to be seen how the situation with a new government will cause gangs to adapt their operations.

## Geographical hotspots of persecution

Persecution takes place outside of those islands reserved for international tourists.

## Christian communities and how they are affected

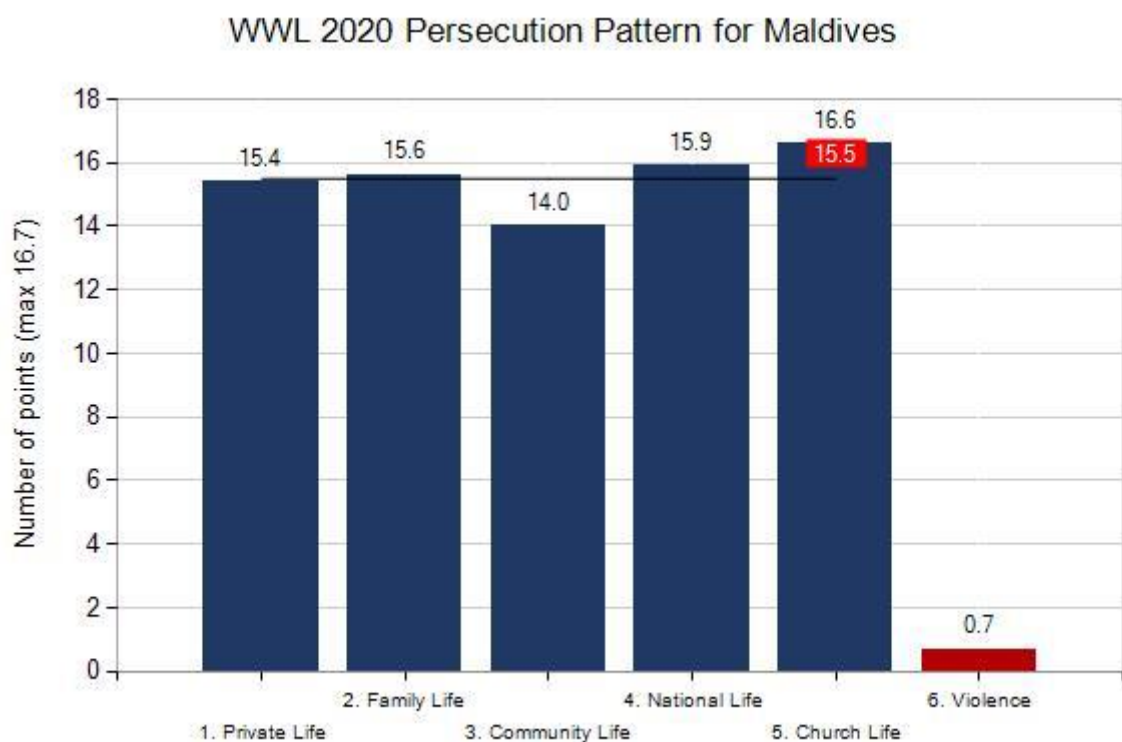
**Communities of expatriate Christians:** Expatriate Christians often come from India, Sri Lanka or Bangladesh. These communities are monitored closely, but most of them have the freedom to meet provided they stay strictly amongst themselves. Expatriate Christians do not have any contact with indigenous converts from Islam.

**Historical Christian communities:** There are no historical churches in the Maldives.

**Converts to Christianity:** Christians with a Muslim background face by far the highest persecution as - officially - they do not exist in the country. It is understood that every Maldivian must be Muslim and anyone leaving Islam will lose his or her citizenship.

**Non-traditional Christian communities:** These do not exist in the Maldives.

## The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2020 Persecution pattern for the Maldives shows:

- Pressure on Christians in the Maldives remained extremely high in all *spheres of life*, causing the average pressure to be at an extreme level. It rose from a score of 15.4 in WWL 2019 to 15.5 in WWL 2020

- Pressure is strongest in the *Church sphere*, where it almost reached the maximum score, reflecting that in practice no meetings are possible and even most expatriate Christians prefer not to organize meetings out of fear of repercussions. Scores in the *National, Family* and *Private spheres* are also at an extreme level. Pressure on converts is especially acute in the *Private* and *Family spheres*. All politicians relentlessly claim that they are keeping the Maldives 100% Muslim, leaving effectively no space for any deviation. As the incidents reported in this country dossier show, the new government, inaugurated in November 2018, has not deviated from that goal.
- The score for violence against Christians dropped to 0.7, again confirming that persecution has never been very violent in the Maldives, but also reflecting that it is difficult to receive reports on incidents.

## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, details are shown from four of the highest scoring block questions, with those items scoring highest listed first. 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 0 – 4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

### Private sphere:

- ***It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials (Block 1.3 / Score: 4 points):*** Any Maldivian displaying a lifestyle different from what the government considers Islamic will be punished. Converts to Christianity always have to exercise the utmost care to hide their faith as much as possible. Bibles and other Christian materials have to be hidden carefully and can only be read with much caution as their families will never accept their conversion and the possession of such literature could result in imprisonment. Even for migrant Christians it is dangerous to keep Christian materials in their possession (especially if these are in the native Dhivehi language or in large quantities) as the authorities may suspect they are being used to evangelize the local population. In fact, when entering the country, all travelers are required to declare any non-Muslim materials they are bringing in with them.
- ***It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (Block 1.4 / Score: 4 points):*** Given that all Maldivians have to be Muslims and given the ease with which bloggers and other social media users have been accused of being "apostates", it is highly risky for converts to reveal their faith in any form. And even the Christians among the migrant workers cannot reveal, let alone share, their faith safely in any way.
- ***It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols (Block 1.5 / Score: 4 points):*** The authorities and local community are constantly looking out for images and symbols perceived as anti-Islamic. For example, in September 2018, sculptures from a newly built underwater art gallery, built by a resort, had to be destroyed as they were considered as 'idols' and therefore anti-Islamic. Any converts or Christians in general showing anti-Islamic symbols will quickly find themselves in trouble.

- ***It has been risky for Christians to discuss their faith with those other than immediate family members (Block 1.8 / Score: 4 points):*** Christianity is outlawed, so no Christian will risk speaking about their faith with another Maldivian. As quoted by the US State Department's IRF Report 2018 on page 4: "The law states, 'Non-Muslims living in or visiting the country are prohibited from openly expressing their religious beliefs, holding public congregations to conduct religious activities, or involving Maldivians in such activities.' By law, those expressing religious beliefs other than Islam face imprisonment of up to five years or house arrest, fines ranging from 5,000 to 20,000 rufiyaa (\$320 to \$1,300), and deportation."

*The law prohibits expatriate Christians from sharing about their faith to others, and their job contracts even stipulate this condition. Meeting with other Christians is a major challenge in these circumstances since, on the one the hand it is dangerous for the individual, and on the other hand it may disclose the whereabouts of and endanger a Christian meeting. There have been cases where even spouses only discovered after years that both of them were active Christians, as they had hidden their faith from one another out of fear. Private meetings are theoretically allowed for expatriates, but participants need to be very careful not to raise suspicion. As intimidation has increased, most Christians decide not to meet at all.*

*In November 2016, [religious scholars](#) said that "those who want religious freedom in Maldives should go and live in other countries that grant it. Hence, those who want to practice other religions are free to leave the country. Only non-Muslims have the right to practice whatever religion they want to. If a Muslim leaves Islam that is blasphemy. If they do not repent, they should be killed."*

#### **Family sphere:**

- ***Christian baptisms have been hindered (Block 2.4 / Score: 4 points):*** Since Christianity is forbidden in the country, baptisms cannot take place and would have to be done outside of the Maldives - and even then in secret, so that the conversion is not made known.
- ***Burials of Christians have been hindered or coercively performed with non-Christian rites (Block 2.5 / Score: 4 points):*** Expatriate Christians would usually be buried in their country of origin. But if they choose to be buried in the Maldives, it cannot be done according to Christian rites. For converts, a Christian burial is out of question.
- ***Christian children have been pressed to attend anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education (Block 2.8 / Score: 4 points):*** The Constitution states in Article 36 (c): "Education shall strive to inculcate obedience to Islam, love for Islam...". Children of converts are forced to study Islamic teachings. Although children of expatriate Christians are exempt from attending Islamic classes, Islam permeates the whole of school life and lessons, so that children of expatriate Christians prefer to attend international schools, if they can afford it.

- ***Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith (Block 2.9 / Score: 4 points):*** The Maldivian Democracy Network, a local human rights group, stated in a 2015 report that Islamic textbooks used in schools cultivate anti-semitism and xenophobia, and glorify *jihad* or war against those who allegedly "obstruct" Islam. The prevailing social climate was shown in January 2018, when parents raised their concerns about "blasphemous" content in secondary school textbooks. Screenshots of grade eight textbooks featuring explanations about Roman gods when explaining the names of the planets began circulating on social media and led to a prompt reaction by the government. Both examples show how much pressure children of Christians feel every day - even more so children of converts.

*Article 9 (d) of the Constitution states that a non-Muslim may not become a citizen of the Maldives. Accordingly, if Maldivians are found to have converted to Christianity, they could be stripped of their citizenship as well as punished under the laws of Sharia. As every Maldivian is automatically understood to be a Muslim, registration is out of the question for converts. Similarly, expatriate Christians are not allowed to hold any religious activities in public (including Christian weddings). Converts often decide not to share their new-won faith with their children out of fear that these may inadvertently tell others. Once converts are discovered, they can be put under pressure to divorce (if married) and lose both custody of their children and inheritance rights, and are likely to be isolated from their families. Under such circumstances, it is hard to imagine how any Christian family life can take place.*

#### **Community sphere:**

- ***Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (Block 3.1 / Score: 4 points):*** Social control in the Maldives is extremely strong as the population density is one of the highest in the world, especially in the capital Malé. Maldivian society has become more strictly Islamic over the years. There has been a change in how Maldivian women dress: In earlier years, it was uncommon to see women wearing a black burka, but now (through Arabian influence) wearing the burka has become quite common. This affects Christians as well. In one famous example in 2018, a Muslim woman complained in a video on social media that she did not want to wear a veil. She was identified and had to leave her island and go into hiding because she received countless threats, including death-threats. During Ramadan, even migrant workers are not allowed to eat or drink at daytime and the newspapers publish how many people are taken into custody or fined during Ramadan for violations.
- ***Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (Block 3.2 / Score: 4 points):*** As stated above, social control in the Maldives is extremely strong. Maldivians suspected of being Christian have been reported to the police. Expatriate Christians are not permitted to openly practice their faith and neither expatriate Christians nor Christians with a Muslim background have any real privacy.

- **Christians have been put under pressure to take part in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events (Block 3.5 / Score: 4 points):** All nationals are considered Muslims and are expected to take part in Islamic rituals and community events. This includes attendance at the local mosque as well. Any native Christian who is caught not attending will be questioned. Expatriate Christians enjoy more freedom, but there are times when they too are required to blend in, for example during Ramadan, by not eating and drinking in public.
- **Christians have faced disadvantages in their education at any level for faith-related reasons (Block 3.9 / Score: 4 points):** Children of converts are shunned and harassed at school, if the conversion is discovered. They may also be forced to leave the school and may have no other option but to attend a school abroad, if they want to continue their studies (and their parents can afford it). This is an option many expatriate Christians choose for their children to avoid the everyday pressure on Christians.

*Colleagues at work apply constant pressure on expatriate Christians to make them convert to Islam. They try to prove to migrant workers that Jesus is not the Savior and even use money or promises of promotion at times. Converts try to blend in with the majority of people around them in their efforts to hide their faith.*

#### **National sphere:**

- **The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Block 4.1 / Score: 4 points):** The Constitution and other laws and policies restrict religious freedom. The Constitution designates Sunni Islam as the official state religion, referring to the country as "100% Muslim", and government regulations are based on Islamic law. The Maldives take no little pride in this. Among other regulations, one states: "It is illegal to propagate any other religion than Islam." Penalties for violating this regulation range from house-arrest to imprisonment of up to five years, depending on the gravity of the offense. If the offenders are foreigners, they will usually be deported.
- **Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public (Block 4.8 / Score: 4 points):** Any opinions that seem contrary to Islam (even voices of Islamic moderation) are subject to harsh criticism and even violence. Especially with the "Defamation Law" in place, which includes clauses against anti-Islamic comments, Christians' freedom of speech is restricted even more than before. Violations can result in six months in prison.
- **Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered or forbidden (Block 4.9 / Score: 4 points):** There are no Christian civil society organizations allowed in the country, let alone political parties. Expatriates are not allowed to be active in politics and cannot run Christian NGOs.

- **Christians have been subject to smear campaigns or hate-speech (Block 4.11 / Score: 4 points):** Anything conveyed about Christians will almost always be negative and critical. But the negative descriptions are generally aimed in a corporate way at Christian outsiders, not directed at individuals within the Maldivian society, because all nationals are assumed to be Muslim. Expatriate Christians become targets of smear campaigns or hate-speech if they are perceived to be spreading their faith. Slandering someone as a suspected or known Christian, or sabotaging their home or business (for example), not only elicits no punishment but is seen as a patriotic duty.

*It goes without saying that it is not possible to display Christian symbols at churches or meeting places since there are no churches in the Maldives in the first place. If a convert has to stand trial - a rare occasion - he or she cannot expect any fairness at all, and not just because the Maldivian legal system is famous for its corruptness and inefficiency.*

#### **Church sphere:**

- **Activities of churches have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed (Block 5.1 / Score: 4 points):** The law prohibits the establishment of places of worship for non-Islamic religious groups. The law states “non-Muslims living in or visiting the country are prohibited from openly expressing their religious beliefs, holding public congregations to conduct religious activities or involving Maldivians in such activities.” The law states that those expressing religious beliefs other than Islam face imprisonment of up to five years or house arrest, fines ranging of up to \$1,300 and deportation. For converts, it is out of the question to have an official gathering place.
- **Work among youth has been restricted (Block 5.6 / Score: 4 points):** No Christian work among youth is allowed at all. Expatriate Christians strictly limit themselves to educating their own children in matters of Christian faith.
- **Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored (Block 5.8 / Score: 4 points):** Expatriate Christians are monitored and so are their meetings, preaching and teaching. Especially in the capital city, Malé, there are CCTV cameras everywhere - including where Christians are known to gather. Maldives consists of small atolls, so everything is known and monitored.
- **Churches have been hindered in importing Christian materials (Block 5.13 / Score: 4 points):** Importing Christian materials is illegal. Any national caught bringing Christian material into the Maldives will be detained and jailed. Expatriates are generally allowed very limited quantities of Christian literature for their personal use. If they bring in more, it will be confiscated and they may be detained or deported. Even a single Bible brought in by an expatriate can be confiscated if the authorities choose to follow the letter of the law precisely.



The Maldives scores maximum points in the Church sphere. It is illegal for Maldivians to become Christians, let alone to gather as a church. There have been incidents where public gatherings of expatriate Christians were raided. The government [banned Christmas celebrations](#) in guesthouses on inhabited islands in December 2015, claiming that the practice is contrary to Islam and Maldivian culture. The Local Government Authority (LGA) – back then chaired by Home Minister Umar Naseer – sent a letter to the presidents of island and atoll councils (as well as to the mayors of Malé and Addu cities) asking them to inform guesthouse owners not to conduct any celebratory activities for tourists at Christmas. The letter noted that the current period is the peak season for the tourist industry and that it had come to the LGA's attention that "tourists are carrying out activities to celebrate Christmas in the Maldives". It remains to be seen how the new government (i.e. since November 2018) influences or even changes this approach. Training Christian leaders is out of the question and Christian communities are not allowed to receive foreign Christian workers for ministry work.

## Violence

For security reasons, no details about violent incidents involving Christians can be published.

## 5 Year trends

### Chart 1:

The table below shows that the average score for pressure on Christians has slowly increased over the last five WWL reporting periods and is at an extreme level.

WWL 2016 - WWL 2020 Persecution Pattern history: Maldives	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2020	15.5
2019	15.4
2018	15.3
2017	15.1
2016	15.0

### Chart 2:

The chart below shows the levels of pressure on Christians in individual *spheres of life* over the last five WWL reporting periods. The scores have not altered much over the years and have remained at very high and extreme levels. In *National Life*, the scores reflect the strong *Dictatorial paranoia*, whereas the other spheres reflect more the increasing *Islamic oppression*, although the motives are difficult to separate in practice. The (almost) maximum scores in *Church sphere* since WWL 2018 stand out, reflecting the fact that church life has become almost impossible.

WWL 2016 - WWL 2020 Persecution Pattern for Maldives (Spheres of life)

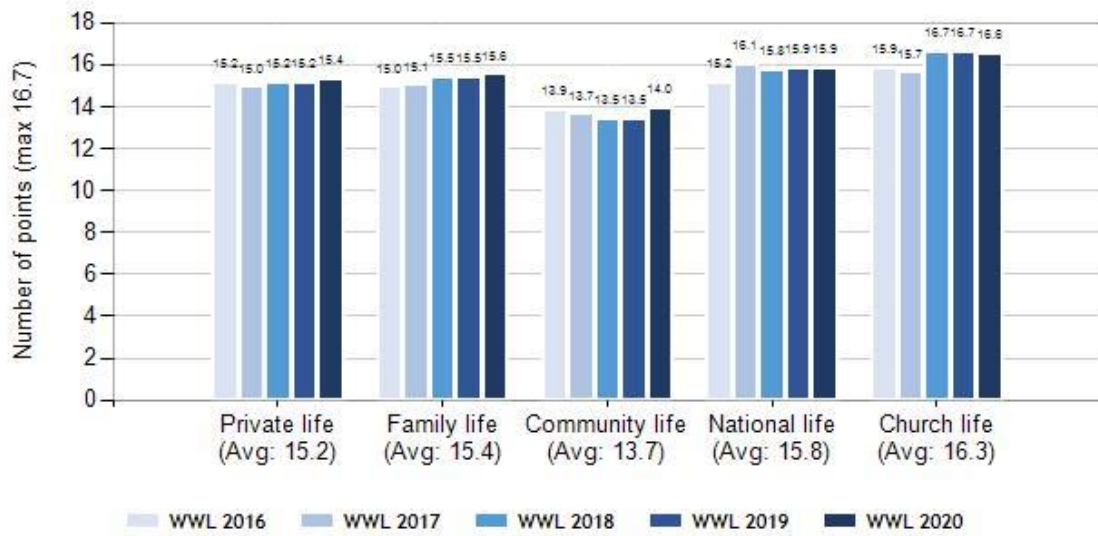
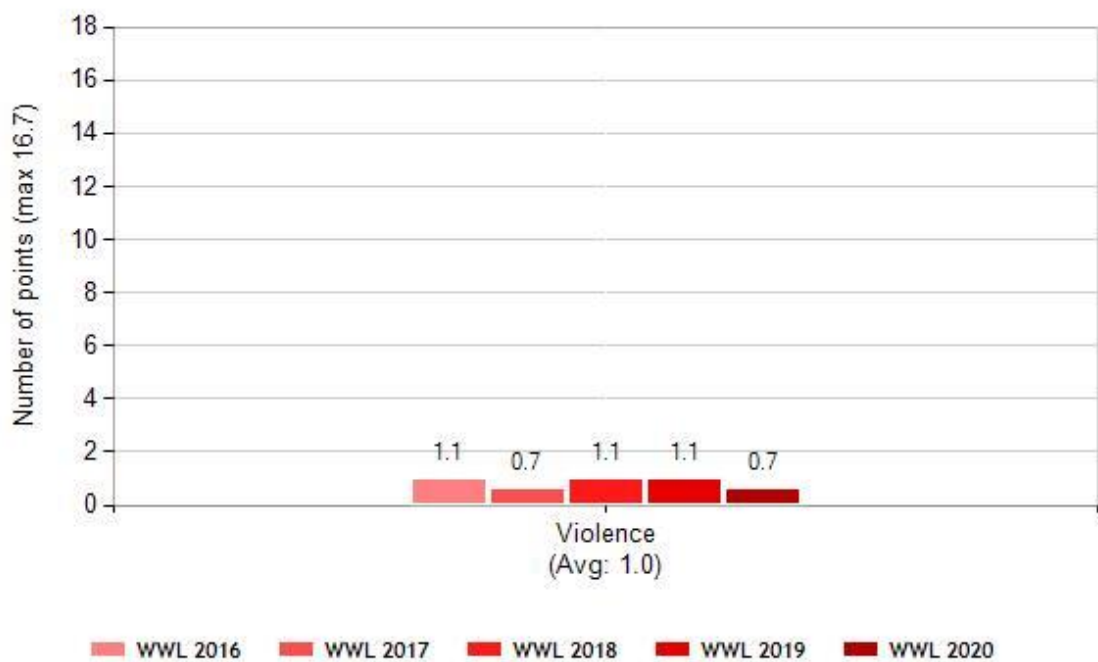


Chart 3:

As can be seen in the chart below, persecution has never been very violent in the Maldives.

WWL 2016 - WWL 2020 Persecution Pattern for Maldives (Violence)



## Gender profile of persecution

### Female Pressure Points:

- ***Abduction***
- ***Enforced dress code***
- ***Forced marriage***
- ***Incarceration by family***
- ***Violence – physical***
- ***Violence – psychological***
- ***Violence – sexual***
- ***Violence – verbal***

Given the extremely strict interpretation of Islam in the Maldives, Christian men and women must be secret believers. If a Christian woman or girl is discovered to be a Christian, every effort will be made to bring them back to Islam through forced marriage, threats or other forms of violence. Furthermore, vigilante mobs have been known to abduct Maldivian citizens suspected of being irreligious or non-Muslim, blindfold them, take them to remote places and hold vigilante trials.

Despite the closely-knit social control on the islands, abuse, rape and sexual harassment are surprisingly common in a culture that generally excuses gender-based violence within the home; a study by the Asian Development Bank Department of Gender, Family Development and Social Security published in 2014 found (p. 13) that “[one in three](#) women aged 15–49 has experienced domestic violence, and that 70% of women believe that there are circumstances where men are justified in beating their wives”. Secret-believing Christian women are affected by this as well. Furthermore, persecution indirectly affects families as it does not allow families to grow in faith together and build 'immunity' against societal illnesses.

Additionally, since the environment is repressive, Christian women and girls have no choice but to abide by traditional dress codes.

### Male Pressure Points:

- ***Incarceration by government***
- ***Violence – physical***
- ***Violence – psychological***
- ***Violence – verbal***

Being a Christian in the Maldives is so dangerous for both men and women that husbands, wives and children may not even know of each other's faith. This means that Christians also lack a good role model of what a Christian marriage is like, as they cannot be a part of any Christian community. If a man is found to be a secret Christian believer, he is likely to face bodily harm, harassment, threats and government imprisonment.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

There are no recognized religious minorities of any kind in the Maldives. All nationals are required to be Muslim by law. Anyone giving evidence of support for any religion or philosophy besides Islam (e.g. Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, [atheism](#)) will be persecuted in the same way as Christians and most of them prefer to go into exile rather than face imprisonment or even death.

## Future outlook for the church

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

- **Islamic oppression:** The Maldives have one of the highest [per capita rates of Islamic militants fighting abroad](#). The government is well aware of this threat, but prefers to [heavily fine](#) media daring to publicize any such internal state details, as happened in June 2017. Additionally, the government is emphasizing its defense of being 100% Muslim. The fact that President Yameen chose the Chancellor of the Islamic University as his [running mate](#) for the presidential elections confirms that he saw the protection of the country's religious purity as top priority. But even now, after the election in September 2018 which he lost, protecting and defending Islam will remain the top priority of the government, as could be seen in the quick banning of the NGO Maldivian Democracy Network (see above). Although the country relies heavily on international tourism, attempts to promote the unique attractiveness of the tourist resorts increasingly clashes with the country's staunch emphasis on a strict interpretation of Islam. In such an atmosphere, expatriate Christians need to continue to be very cautious and local Christians will have to keep hiding their faith carefully.
- **Dictatorial paranoia:** Outgoing President Abdullah Yameen had kept the Maldives in a permanent state of suspense and in a final effort to keep in power, even called a state of emergency. With the election of opposition forces into power, the high levels of paranoia may be gone. However, the country has a long track record of dictatorship and of politicians clinging to power, so minorities and others cannot expect any improvement in the freedom of religion in the near future.
- **Organized corruption and crime:** The island's younger generation continues to feel increasingly "disenfranchised and excluded" and "disconnected from the fabric of society", as indicated by a [World Bank report](#) released in October 2014. Rising globalization, Internet use and economic expansion have "exposed young women and men to the outside world and new ideas and values, making them acutely aware of what they can aspire to", reads the report. "Yet, both female and male youth face the shackles of the limited island economy, lack empowerment and community engagement, and contend with rigid norms of behaviour and increasingly conservative values, as well as an inadequate education and training system that ill prepares them for the labor market." The report argues that these issues mean that many young Maldivians are being "denied passage into adulthood". These social issues translate into a growing radicalization, as seen in the numbers of Maldivians who joined the fighting in Iraq and Syria, which fuels *Islamic oppression*. Others join the country's gangs, which are well connected with Maldivian power-brokers and politicians and are used as thugs against perceived enemies and dangers. As long as the younger generation lacks future perspectives, nothing will change in this respect.

## External Links - WWL 2020: Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines: apostates - <http://maldivesindependent.com/society/apostates-jihadists-and-extremists-face-tough-new-punishments-137396>
- Persecution engines: never allow freedom of religion - <http://maldivesindependent.com/society/will-not-allow-religious-freedom-in-maldives-says-defence-minister-137455>
- Persecution engines: police meet - <https://maldivesindependent.com/crime-2/three-questioned-in-hate-speech-probe-143460>
- Persecution engines: 100% Islamic - <https://maldivesindependent.com/politics/islam-infrastructure-and-foreign-pressure-maldives-president-on-campaign-trail-139123>
- Persecution engines: exposure - <https://maldivesindependent.com/crime-2/extremist-group-masterminded-murders-and-abduction-144412>
- Persecution engines: gang involvement - <https://cpj.org/blog/2019/03/maldives-commission-justice-rilwan-rasheed-blogger-murder.php>
- Pressure in the 5 spheres of life : religious scholars - <http://www.miadhu.mv/article/en/6233>
- Pressure in the 5 spheres of life : banned Christmas celebrations - <http://maldivesindependent.com/business/maldives-bans-christmas-celebrations-at-guesthouses-120958>
- Gender profile of persecution: one in three - <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/149329/maldives-gender-equality.pdf>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: atheism - <https://freethoughtreport.com/countries/asia-southern-asia/maldives/>
- Future outlook for the church: per capita rates of Islamic militants fighting abroad - <https://www.nrc.no/perspectives/2017/where-jihadists-are-heroes/>
- Future outlook for the church: heavily fine - <http://maldivesindependent.com/politics/cable-tv-provider-fined-half-a-million-for-airing-al-jazeera-corruption-expose-131202>
- Future outlook for the church: running mate - <https://maldivesindependent.com/politics/maldives-clerics-back-presidents-vp-pick-139262>
- Future outlook for the church: World Bank report - <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/460551468263693729/pdf/939490WPOP15300th0Report0with0cover.pdf>

## Additional reports and articles

### WWR in-depth reports

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

At the time of publication there were no items specifically for the Maldives.

### World Watch Monitor news articles

Articles are available at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/maldives>

### Recent country developments

Up-to-date articles are available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Maldives>  
(password: freedom).