

World
Watch
Research

Turkey: Country Dossier

December 2019



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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	-	-	-

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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 / Turkey

Brief country details

Pop 2019	Christians	Chr%
Turkey		
82,962,000	173,000	0.2

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

World Watch List Turkey	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2020	63	36
WWL 2019	66	26
WWL 2018	62	31
WWL 2017	57	37
WWL 2016	55	45

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

Turkey:	
Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Government officials , Ethnic group leaders, One's own (extended) family, Non-Christian religious leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Violent religious groups
Religious nationalism	Government officials , Ethnic group leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Violent religious groups, Political parties, One's own (extended) family, Non-Christian religious leaders
Clan and ethnic antagonism	Ethnic group leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials

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

Brief description of persecution situation

The very strong religious nationalism in society puts a lot of pressure on Christians. The government has not targeted Christians in particular, but society's nationalism leaves almost no space for Christians to proclaim an alternative message. Converts from Islam to Christianity in particular face social opposition, although conversion from Islam to Christianity is not legally forbidden. Converts from Islam are put under pressure by their families and communities to return to Islam, and even leaving one Christian denomination for another can be problematic. Christians therefore sometimes lead a double life and hide their conversion. Although converts from Islam can legally change their religious affiliation on ID cards to Christianity, it can be a difficult and stressful process. Once discovered, a Christian with a Muslim background may be threatened with divorce and the loss of inheritance rights by family members.

The cocktail of Islam and nationalism also affects Christians who do not have a Muslim background. These are mostly from ethnic minorities (e.g. Greeks, Armenians, Syrians). They are hardly regarded as full members of Turkish society and encounter all kinds of legal and bureaucratic obstructions. Christians have no access to state employment, and experience discrimination in private employment, especially where employers have ties to the government. Since religious affiliation is still recorded on old ID cards and the electronic chip of new ID cards, it is easy to discriminate against Christian applicants.

Specific examples of persecution in the reporting period

- During the WWL 2020 reporting period, at least 23 expatriate Christians have received an entry ban or were otherwise forced to leave the country with their families. This is a huge blow for Turkish church groups, as many of them have been involved with the church for many years. It is feared that this wave of expulsions of expatriates is a prelude for more restrictions for the local Turkish church.
- Several churches reported incidents of [hate speech](#) and vandalization of property. Christmas in particular tends to be a time of intensified social hatred against the churches.
- Some Christians received death threats, while others were harassed in the street. Especially those involved in (street) evangelization are at risk.
- In May 2019, popular theologian Nihat Hatipoğlu '[converted](#)' a 13 year old Armenian boy to Islam during his live tv show, despite not having consent from the boys mother.
- In October 2019, billboard signs in Konya [displayed](#) a verse from the Quran encouraging Muslims not to befriend Christians and Jews. The signs were later removed after public outrage.
- *The following incident - a killing - occurred fractionally outside the WWL 2020 reporting period and is included here due to its seriousness; it will only be counted in WWL 2021 analysis: On 19 November 2020, South Korean evangelist Jinwook Kim [was stabbed to death](#) in Diyarbakir. A 16 year old boy has been arrested in which what has been reported as an 'attempted robbery' but many doubt if the boy acted alone. The murder reminded many Christians of the Malatya murders in 2007, in which two Turkish converts and a German Christian were tortured and killed.*

External Links - WWL 2020: Persecution summary / Turkey

- Specific examples of persecution in the reporting period: hate speech -
<https://mirrorspectator.com/2019/02/26/another-armenian-church-vandalized-with-hate-graffiti-in-turkey/>
- Specific examples of persecution in the reporting period: 'converted' -
<http://www.asianews.it/news-en/A-13-year-old-Armenian-boy-tricked-into-converting-to-Islam-on-live-TV-47021.html>
- Specific examples of persecution in the reporting period: displayed -
<https://ahvalnews.com/turkey-minorities/public-outrage-leads-akp-municipality-central-turkey-remove-posters-targeting>
- Specific examples of persecution in the reporting period: was stabbed to death -
<http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Fear-among-Christians-as-South-Korean-evangelical-pastor-murdered-in-Diyarbakir--48613.html>

WWL 2020: Keys to understanding / Turkey

Link for general background information

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17988453>.

Recent history

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

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

Since 2002 Turkey has been trying to reinvent its internal and public image. The concept of being a Western, secular country is no longer the leading principle. Instead, Islam is regarded as the element that cements Turkey's society. The need to adhere to the Western block disappeared after the USSR collapsed in 1991, when Turkey assertively turned to the Middle East. The goal of the government has since then been to make Turkey a key player in the region and a role model for other countries. But regionally and internationally, these objectives have faltered in the past few years.

Political and legal landscape

Turkey is a presidential republic under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Erdogan has made major shifts in both international and domestic politics – a shift away from Europe, away from Israel (a traditional ally), and towards the Muslim world. In August 2014, after three terms as prime minister, Erdogan was elected Turkish president.

On 15 July 2016 a coup took place but failed and the regime struck back fiercely. It accused the Islamic preacher and former ally Fethullah Gülen (in self-exile in USA) to be behind the failed coup. Tens of thousands of soldiers, policemen, judges, politicians, journalists, teachers, imams etc. were arrested on accusation of supporting Gülen and many more were fired from their jobs.

Nationalism, which already played an important role in Turkey, soared to new heights and minorities have come under renewed pressure (especially the Kurdish population).

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

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

In a major shift, the AK party lost Ankara and Istanbul in the 2019 mayoral elections, which could be interpreted as sign that the president is losing popularity. An important and positive development was the AKP's [acceptance of the re-election results](#) for the position of mayor in Istanbul in June 2019. The acceptance of the results of the re-election were (internationally) regarded as a major test for Turkish democracy. Nonetheless, the lack of freedom of press and the strong accusations against opposition parties remain an issue of major concern.

In a show of strength, Erdogan [invaded Syria](#) in October 2019 to drive Kurdish forces back from the Turkish border. Turkey views those Kurdish groups as terrorist organizations who support the PKK, the Kurdistan Workers Party, whom Turkey has been fighting against for decades.

Epitomizing the current political situation is Turkey's record regarding journalism: For four years, Turkey was the country with the highest number of journalists behind bars. This strict policy seems to have been successful: While the freedom of press [has further deteriorated](#), the number of imprisoned journalists has dropped slightly as journalists apply self-censorship.

Religious landscape

Religious Context: Turkey	Numbers	%
Christians	173,000	0.2
Muslim	81,568,000	98.3
Hindu	790	0.0
Buddhist	37,300	0.0
Ethnoreligionist	12,300	0.0
Jewish	16,400	0.0
Bahai	22,300	0.0
Atheist	63,600	0.1
Agnostic	920,000	1.1
Other	148,400	0.2

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2019). OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.

The influence of Islam in Turkey is growing. According to WCD's 2019 estimates, 98.3% of the Turkish population is Muslim, a third of whom are Alevi or Shia Muslims. Most Turks are Sunni Muslims. Only 0.2% of the population are Christian.

Turkey is currently going through a gradual change from being a strictly secular country to a country based on Islamic norms and values. When secularism prevailed, Christians in Turkey experienced many restrictions since the state interpreted secularism to mean far-reaching state controls. Under the current regime of President Erdogan, secularism has steadily diminished and the country is accepting a more pronounced Islamic influence.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Economic landscape

Turkey's economy is becoming more dependent on industry in major cities, mostly concentrated in the western provinces of the country, and less on agriculture. However, traditional agriculture is still a major pillar of the Turkish economy.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development ([OECD](#)), economic growth averaged nearly 7% over 2010 - 2017. Caused by a mixture of policy failures, including the appointment of Erdogan's son-in-law as Finance Minister, the lira [made a sharp fall](#) in August 2018, followed by a loss of household and businesses confidence. The uncertainties associated with the failed coup-attempt in July 2016 and ongoing geopolitical tensions in the region, are holding back investment and consumer spending. The economy is [projected to grow zero percent](#) in 2019.

Due to the fall in the value of the lira, exports and tourism grew during 2019, while imports decreased, resulting in a [record low current account deficit](#). For decades, a high current account deficit made Turkey heavily relying on external investments. Those investments are still needed, as high inflation and high unemployment rates among young people - male: 18.9%; female: 25.7% according to [World Bank, 2019](#) - are clouding Turkey's economic future.

Due to the increasing Islamization, it has reportedly become harder for women (both Christian and secular) who do not wear a head-covering to obtain employment. Many Christians also report that by not listing themselves as Muslims on their identity cards (or leaving it blank), they have been unable to obtain jobs in the private sector.

Social and cultural landscape

The majority of the Turkish population (75.6%) lives in urban areas and the rate of urbanization is projected to reach 2% in the period 2015 - 2020. Meanwhile, the 80 million strong population is growing by 0.49% (2018). The literacy rate is high (96.2%). Life expectancy has strongly increased over the last decades, standing at 77 years of age in 2017.

'Turkishness' as an identity is continually used as a political weapon, since being Turk is commonly understood as being a Sunni Muslim. All other religious groups experience discrimination. In addition, many Arab refugees experience social hatred as they are blamed for rising prices and unemployment.

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

Technological landscape

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

Sat-7, God TV and other Christian television and radio channels are broadcasting in Turkey. The Internet is used by Christian groups to provide Christian materials, which is often preferred to owning a hard copy of the Bible. Bible correspondence courses are particularly popular.

The Turkish government monitors all Internet use, mobile phones and landlines. Many websites are blocked in Turkey. Turkey's intelligence agencies are well equipped and it is believed that the activities of Protestant Christians in particular are monitored closely.

Security situation

After the failed coup of July 2016, developments in Turkey changed dramatically. The government took on more dictatorial powers and both nationalism and Islamization soared. The fight against the militant Kurdish minority intensified and Turkey took a much more assertive stance on the international scene, becoming militarily active in neighboring Syria and Iraq (primarily targeting Kurdish forces). The conflict with the Kurdish PKK has intensified and the country has proved vulnerable to [attacks and bombings](#) from Kurdish and other groups in recent years. The Turkish presence in Syria had led to a further building up of tensions with [Syria](#), Kurdish groups in Syria as well as with the [USA](#).

In September 2017, Turkey opened its [biggest overseas military base](#) in Mogadishu, Somalia.

Trends analysis

1. The security services are clamping down on all opposition

Although the country has seen huge economic growth since 2000, there is now a lot of uncertainty about the future. The value of the Turkish Lira has been in a downward spiral, youth [unemployment](#) remains high and the instable political situation is [detering investors](#). The state of emergency has officially ended, but the security services keep clamping down on all opposition. With new laws in place, human rights organizations are claiming that the state of emergency has now actually been [made permanent](#). At the same time, Erdogan seems to be isolating Turkey from Europe, the USA and Arab states.

2. All non-Sunni citizens face growing pressure

As a result of the new strict government policies, the level of intolerance has risen and all those not siding with Erdogan face oppression. Non-Sunni citizens (including the tiny Christian minority) are facing growing pressure, which is increasingly translating into violent incidents. Christians do not seem to be direct targets for government persecution but the general situation for Christians is deteriorating. The situation for Historical Christian communities in the southeast of Turkey is particularly worrying. A lot of their property has been taken away by the Turkish government in recent years and their ancient culture is gradually disappearing. Besides that, the arrest and prosecution of US Pastor Andrew Brunson, who was being held as a political hostage for 2 years, shows clearly that the Turkish government under Erdogan has developed into a regime without scruples. Overall, Christians will have to act carefully, especially in the public sphere.

External Links - WWL 2020: Keys to understanding / Turkey

- Link for general background information: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17988453>. - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17988453>
- Political and legal landscape: constitutional reforms - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38883556>
- Political and legal landscape: new reforms allow - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-39617700>
- Political and legal landscape: were won - https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-44562011?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.com/news/topics/c6gzmx3zld1t/turkey-election-2018&link_location=live-reporting-story
- Political and legal landscape: cracking down - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-44756374>
- Political and legal landscape: led to sanctions - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-45036378>
- Political and legal landscape: suffered quite severely - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-45142256>
- Political and legal landscape: released in October 2018 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-45841276>
- Political and legal landscape: acceptance of the re-election results - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe->

48739256?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.com/news/topics/c207p54mdq3t/turkey∓link_location=live-reporting-story

- Political and legal landscape: invaded Syria - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-49973218>
- Political and legal landscape: has further deteriorated - <https://cpj.org/reports/2019/12/journalists-jailed-china-turkey-saudi-arabia-egypt.php>
- Economic landscape: OECD - <http://www.oecd.org/turkey/turkey-economic-forecast-summary.htm>
- Economic landscape: made a sharp fall - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-45142256>
- Economic landscape: projected to grow zero percent - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/turkey/overview#3>
- Economic landscape: record low current account deficit - <https://www.ft.com/content/73efa654-a3d1-11e9-974c-ad1c6ab5efd1>
- Economic landscape: World Bank, 2019 - <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.FE.ZS?locations=TR>
- Social and cultural landscape: writes - <https://www.hudson.org/research/14970-scapegoats-of-wrath-subjects-of-benevolence-turkey-s-minorities-under-erdo-an>
- Technological landscape: reports - <https://www.export.gov/article?id=Turkey-Information-and-Communications-Technology>
- Security situation: attacks and bombings - <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2016/06/timeline-attacks-turkey-160628223800183.html>
- Security situation: Syria - https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rc=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=16&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKewjm3fevtJvkAhVEK1AKHe_zDwoQFjAPegQICBAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.washingtonpost.com%2Fworld%2Fmiddle_east%2Fsyria-slams-turkey-says-its-sending-weapons-to-rebels%2F2019%2F08%2F19%2F1bfe15f2-c25d-11e9-8bf7-cde2d9e09055_story.html&usg=AOvVaw1743fGXXxlXBrNpYuQALa
- Security situation: USA - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/07/syria-turkey-and-us-reach-deal-to-manage-tensions-over-kurds>
- Security situation: biggest overseas military base - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-turkey-military-idUSKCN1C50JH>
- Trends analysis: unemployment - <https://tradingeconomics.com/turkey/youth-unemployment-rate>
- Trends analysis: deterring investors - <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/turkey/overview>
- Trends analysis: made permanent - <http://bianet.org/english/human-rights/203384-state-of-emergency-is-made-permanent>

WWL 2020: Church information / Turkey

Christian origins

Christianity has a long history in Turkey. Due to the efforts of the Apostle Paul and his helpers, Christian congregations were founded in what is now Turkey in the earliest New Testament days. In the Bible, the Book of Revelation starts off with letters written to seven congregations in western Turkey. In the early phase, the Church often moved underground due to persecution by the Romans.

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

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

At the close of the 1st World War, many issues needed to be settled in Turkey, the most important being the position of the various ethnic minorities and their religions. In the newly formed state of Turkey, the Greek, Armenian and Syriac minorities faced heavy discrimination. Pressure built up in the years up to 1923, when the Treaty of Lausanne was concluded. Millions of people were moved. A large part of the Greek minority left Turkey and moved to Greece, weakening the position of the Greek Orthodox Church in Turkey.

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

Church spectrum today

Church networks: Turkey	Christians	%
Orthodox	82,500	47.7
Catholic	44,700	25.8
Protestant	24,700	14.3
Independent	10,500	6.1
Unaffiliated	10,400	6.0

Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
Total	172,800	99.9
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	8,000	4.6
Renewalist movement	8,500	4.9

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

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.

WWL 2020: Persecution Dynamics

Reporting period

1 November 2018 – 31 October 2019

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 63 points, Turkey ranked 36 in WWL 2020.

This is a fall of 3 points compared to WWL 2019. Although the average pressure on Christians increased, the fall in total score was caused by a sharp fall in the violence score - from 7.2 to 3.7 points. There were a lower number of attacks on church buildings during WWL 2020. Aggressive rhetoric from the government has left less space for other voices, including the Christian one. There is more suspicion towards Christians, making public outreach hard, and resulting in high levels of societal opposition. In Turkey, Islam is totally blended with fierce nationalism.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines: Turkey	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Strong
Clan and ethnic antagonism	CEA	Medium
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Very weak
Communist and post - Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Very weak
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Medium
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Very weak

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

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

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

Clan and ethnic antagonism (Medium):

This persecution engine grew stronger in the previous reporting period (WWL 2019) in the context of the Kurdish conflict. Syriac Christians in the south-eastern region particularly feel the pressure from the Syrian civil war and are caught between Kurdish clans, the government and the Kurdish militant group, PKK.

Tribal leaders use their power to push out the Syriacs from their homeland in the southeast. However, this only affects rural Christian populations. Most Christians in Turkey live in large cities and are not strongly affected by *Clan and ethnic antagonism*. In addition, tribal law and customs still play an important role in especially the eastern provinces of Turkey. Converts might face more pressure there, as conversion to Christianity is not only seen as betrayal of Islam, but also of the family and clan. Last, but not least, Turkey's history is marked by the focus on ethnicity and religion. This focus led first to the genocide on Armenians, Syriacs and Greek-Orthodox Christians starting during the 1st World War and extending into the 1920's, and has since instigated the further marginalization of minority groups.

Dictatorial paranoia (Medium):

Since the failed coup of July 2016, President Erdogan's government has dropped its mask of supporting democracy and is openly restricting freedom throughout Turkish society. The media have been curtailed, and all forms of opposition are persecuted. In addition, Erdogan has [declared](#) that "democracy and free press are incompatible", which is not surprising given the many journalists that are imprisoned. Although Turkish Christians are not directly targeted by the government at the moment, the regime has openly declared Sunni Islam to be the religious norm in the country, thus clearly marginalizing Christianity.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of Persecution: Turkey	IO	RN	CEA	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG	STRONG	MEDIUM				MEDIUM	
Government officials	Strong	Strong					Medium	
Ethnic group leaders	Strong	Strong	Strong					
Non-Christian religious leaders	Medium	Medium						
Violent religious groups	Medium	Medium						
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Medium	Strong	Medium					
One's own (extended) family	Strong	Medium	Medium					
Political parties	Weak	Medium						

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

Drivers of Islamic oppression and Religious nationalism:

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

Drivers of Clan and ethnic antagonism:

- **Ethnic group leaders (Strong):** In the more rural areas, conservative norms and values are upheld by ethnic leaders. In the southeast, it would seem that Kurdish chiefs are trying to force the historical Syriac community out of the traditionally Christian territory. The Kurdish PKK is also trying to purposely drag the Syriacs into their conflict with the Turkish government for nationalistic reasons.
- **Citizens and (extended) family members (Medium):** Family ties can be strict within Turkey and society regards a true Turk to be a Sunni Muslim. Christians, even those coming from historical Christian communities, are seen as foreigners and a conversion from Islam to Christianity is often regarded as a shame for the honor of the family.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia:

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

Geographical hotspots of persecution

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

Converts from Islam to Christianity prefer urban areas over rural areas, as social control is less strict in urban areas.

Christian communities and how they are affected

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

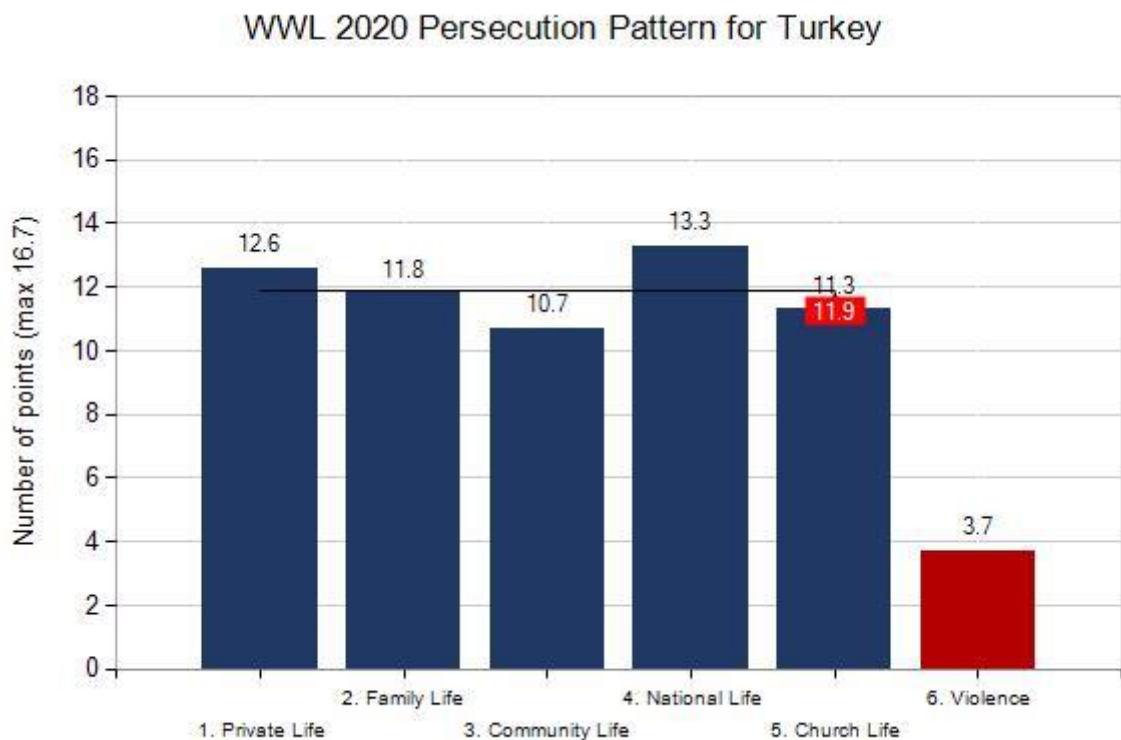
Historical Christian communities: These include the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox and Greek Orthodox churches (the only churches "recognized" in the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923), and the Assyrian, Syriac Orthodox and Syriac Catholic churches, all of which are monitored regularly and subjected to controls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

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

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

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

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2020 Persecution pattern for Turkey shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (11.9), rising from 11.7 in WWL 2019. The reason for this increase is the overall rise in pressure, in particular in the *Family, Community and National spheres of life*. This is directly related to the growing animosity against Christians (caused both by nationalistic feelings and growing societal opposition against Christians).
- Although all *spheres of life* show very high levels of pressure, pressure is highest in the *Private and National spheres of life*. The score for *Private life* reflects both the difficulty for converts to openly practice their faith among their family members as well as the growing pressure on all Christians to be careful how and with whom they speak about their faith in a climate that is hostile towards Christianity. The very high score for *National life* indicates not only the difficulty Christians experience but also that of Christian organizations operating in Turkey. Media reporting on Christians is also very biased and Christians regularly experience discrimination when engaging with the authorities.

- The score for violence went down from 7.2 in WWL 2019 to 3.7 in WWL 2020. No killings were reported during the WWL 2020 reporting period and the number of attacks on church buildings was lower than in WWL 2019. This kept the score for violence down, despite the forced deportation of at least 23 expatriates and their families, who were working with various church groups.

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:

- **Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another (Block 1.1 / Score: 3.5 points):** Conversion is not prohibited by law. However, there are likely to be social and familial implications for conversion from Islam to Christianity or from one Christian denomination to another. Although the level and nature of oppression from families would vary considerably depending on the background of the family, conversion to Christianity is widely considered unacceptable.
- **It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.) (Block 1.4 / Score: 3.5 points):** Public expressions of faith in writing can result in some level of persecution, either in writing or in other forms. Especially converts from Islam to Christianity sometimes can lose their jobs, face harassment by family and friends, or receive threats after being public about their new faith.
- **It has been risky for Christians to discuss their faith with those other than immediate family members (extended family, others) (Block 1.8 / Score: 3.50 points):** Levels of social hostility towards Christianity are high in Turkey and conversion to Christianity is widely considered unacceptable. Discussing one's Christian faith with fellow citizens can lead to harassment and social exclusion.
- **It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols (Block 1.5 / Score: 3.25 points):** Harassment of Christians is common in Turkey and displaying Christians symbols can lead to (physical) violence.

Christians sometimes lead a double life and hide their conversion, which means hiding their praying, reading of the Bible and access to Christian websites. This kind of oppression is viewed as "normal" and it is hardly reported or documented unless there is physical violence. Those who hide their Christian identity are often too afraid of meeting other Christians.

Family sphere:

- **Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith (Block 2.9 / Score: 3.75 points):** Several instances of children of Christians being bullied have been reported over the years. Children of Christians, and especially of converts, are often harassed either because of society's religious intolerance or because of nationalist zeal.
- **Christian children have been pressured to attend anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education (Block 2.8 / Score: 3.5 points):** If the ID card reads Muslim, children of converts are obliged to attend courses on Islam at school. Although it has recently become easier to get an exemption from Islamic classes, many converts have not changed their religious registration because of the social stigma for them and their children. In addition, the Turkish curriculum is in general influenced by Turkish nationalism and the idea that Christianity is something alien to Turkish society.
- **Christian couples have been hindered in adopting children or serving as foster parents because of their faith (Block 2.6 / Score: 3.5 points):** Adoption is not a common practice in Turkey, but Christians are even more likely to be unable to adopt a child. In 2013, Erdogan stated that Turkish children adopted by Christian (and gay) couples in foreign countries should be retrieved and brought back to Turkey. Hence, it is nearly impossible for Christians to adopt a Muslim child.
- **Christian parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs (Block 2.7 / Score: 3 points):** The hostile environment makes it difficult for Christian parents to raise their children in a Christian way, especially if there is also pressure from the (extended) family.

Although converts from Islam can legally change their religious affiliation on ID cards to Christianity, it can be a difficult and stressful process. Unless converts have changed the religious affiliation on their cards, any children will automatically be registered as Sunni Muslims. Once a conversion to Christianity becomes known, converts can face the threat of divorce and lose their inheritance rights. They can also experience difficulties in organizing a Christian wedding or burial (where a convert's last wishes are not respected and the burial is carried out according to Islamic rites). Applications for Christian cemeteries have been denied in some parts of the country. Where this has happened, Christians can only be buried according to Christian rites in sections reserved for all non-Muslims or be buried in a historically Christian cemetery.

Spouses of converts occasionally experience pressure to divorce.

Community sphere:

- **Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons (Block 3.10 / Score: 4 points):** Christians have no access to state employment and experience discrimination in private employment, especially where employers have ties to the government.

- **Christians have faced disadvantages in their education at any level for faith-related reasons (e.g. restrictions of access to education) (Block 3.9 / Score: 3.75 points):** There are compulsory Islamic classes in the schooling system, although non-Muslim children can opt out. However, there have been reports of societal and teacher discrimination against those who opt out. Christian schoolchildren are regularly discriminated against in classes, by both teachers and other students. There are Christians who study at Turkish universities but they are barred from reaching higher positions or professorships at university level. In addition, hundreds of new [Imam Hatip schools](#) have been opened in recent months, raising the total number of these Islamic education schools to over 5000. Hatip schools are playing a more and more important role within the Turkish educational system and are inaccessible for Christians.
- **Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.) (Block 3.1 / Score: 3.75 points):** Name calling, receiving death threats and other types of harassment are commonly experienced by many Christians in Turkey.
- **Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.) (Block 3.2 / Score: 3.5 points):** Individual Christians are being watched by both the government as well as society. Turkish Christians now that all their communication is monitored by the government and infiltration is not uncommon. Even newspapers are a threat here, as some media have been publishing negative articles (including names and pictures) about several Christians.

National sphere:

- **The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits the freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Block 4.1 / Score: 4 points):** The Turkish Constitution is very restrictive in its approach towards the rights of religious minorities. Although the Constitution does not technically limit the freedom of religion, it clearly promotes 'Turkishness' above all other ideologies.
- **Christians have been barred from public office and has promotion been hindered for faith-related reasons (Block 4.6 / Score: 4 points):** Access to public sector jobs, the state's security apparatus and law enforcement is denied to Christians, as is promotion in the army, despite obligatory military service. Although one's religious affiliation is no longer displayed on the [new ID cards](#), it is still registered on the chip in the card.
- **Media reporting has been incorrect or biased against Christians (Block 4.10 / Score: 4 points):** Local media and columnists in particular have been biased against Christians. There have been several reports of intolerance and prejudice against Christians.
- **Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public (Block 4.8 / Score: 3.75 points):** Christians have to be very careful when expressing themselves in public. Social prejudice makes it difficult to speak out and the Turkish government does not accept criticism.

Converts (particularly those who are church leaders in the southeast or in rural areas elsewhere) are sometimes given disrespectful treatment by police and security forces because of their open Christian identity. Christians face difficulties in obtaining permits for building churches or for getting place-of-worship status. The rise of nationalism in the country caused issues for non-Muslim business owners, as nepotism is reportedly widespread under the ruling AKP party. There are concerns about the impartiality of the judiciary in court cases that involve Christian minorities, especially after the government ousted more than 4000 members of the judiciary due to alleged ties to the Gülen-movement.

Church sphere:

- ***It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government (Block 5.2 / Score: 4 points):*** It is impossible to register as a new religious community. Although there is an option for churches to register as an "association", this is also a difficult process and some applications have been denied. Establishing foundations with the aim of supporting a new religious community is also prohibited.
- ***Christian communities have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings or in claiming historical religious premises and places of worship which had been taken from them earlier (Block 5.3 / Score: 4 points):*** It is very difficult to get official permits for repairing or renovating church buildings. Many church buildings, seminaries or schools that have in the past been confiscated, have not been returned. Building new church buildings is almost impossible.
- ***Churches have been hindered in establishing, managing, maintaining and conducting schools, or charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural organizations, institutions and associations (Block: 5.18 / Score: 3.75 points):*** It remains very difficult to formally establish and run any kind of association with a clear Christian profile. All activities in this area are monitored and Christians struggle even more as they are in most cases supported by foreign churches, which is viewed with suspicion.
- ***Christians have been hindered in training their own religious leaders (Block 5.10 / Score: 4 points):*** The training of Christian leaders legally is impossible. The seminaries of the historical Christian communities were closed down in the 1970s and have remained closed ever since, despite a campaign from the Greek Orthodox Church to reopen their seminary in Halki. Only unofficial training can take place. Many church leaders are sent abroad for their training.

The Turkish secret service (MIT) closely watches Christian groups and their activities, although the security services are also (visibly) protecting churches during services, especially after threats had been made by the Islamic State group.

Activities outside designated church facilities are generally regarded as evangelism and will be opposed by both local officials and the community. This has especially become difficult after the attempted coup and the following state of emergency, in which all alleged suspicious behavior can lead to arrests. Openly integrating converts into existing churches is made difficult, mainly by the community.

Changes in leadership of the Greek Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic churches must be given government approval, even though these are leaders of religious communities which do not exist in law and whose personal positions are not recognized in law. Christian materials are available in the Turkish language, but their distribution remains sensitive as it is automatically linked to evangelism.

It is difficult for church leaders to obtain a visa. Many foreign religious workers are either denied a visa or their residence permit is simply not renewed.

Violence

The following table is based on reported cases as much as possible. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures. In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10, 100 or 1000) is given. (A symbolic number of 10 could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100 could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1000 could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain.) In cases where it is clear that (many) more Christians are affected, but a concrete number could be given according to the number of incidents reported, the number given has to be understood as being an absolutely minimum figure.

Turkey	Reporting period	Christians killed	Christians attacked	Christians arrested	Churches attacked	Christian-owned houses and shops attacked
WWL 2020	01 Nov 2018 - 31 Oct 2019	0	5	0	4	1
WWL 2019	01 Nov 2017 - 31 Oct 2018	0	6	3	10	0
WWL 2018	01 Nov 2016 - 31 Oct 2017	3	2	4	10	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.

For the WWL 2020 reporting period:

- **Christians killed:** No Christians were killed for their faith (however, there was a murder of a Christian evangelist just outside the WWL 2020 reporting period in November 2019).
- **Christians attacked:** Several Christians have faced harassment and bullying.

- **Christians arrested:** No Christians have been detained, but at least 23 expatriate Christians received entry bans or were otherwise forced to leave the country with their families.
- **Churches attacked:** One church has been raided by the police, while other churches have been vandalized. One monastery reported an arson attack which destroyed 800 olive trees.
- **Christian homes/shops attacked:** There were reports of fields belonging to Syriac Christians in southeastern Turkey being set on fire.

5 Year trends

The three charts below show the situation for Christians in Turkey over the last five reporting periods.

Chart 1:

The first chart below shows average pressure. The overall level of pressure on Christians has risen from a high level to a very high level in the last three reporting periods. This reflects the growing pressure on Christians in general due to the changing political climate.

WWL 2016 - WWL 2020 Persecution Pattern history: Turkey	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2020	11.9
2019	11.7
2018	10.7
2017	9.8
2016	9.9

Chart 2:

The chart below shows that the level of pressure in the all *spheres of life*, except *Church life*, have been growing steadily over the last five years. There have also been notable increases in pressure in the *Family* and *National spheres of life*.

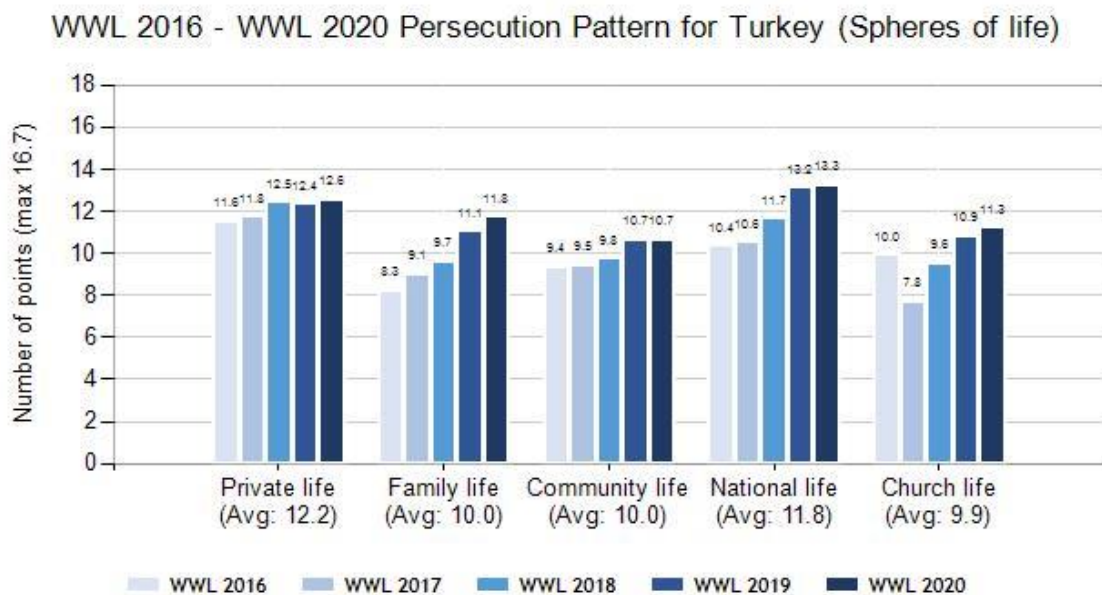
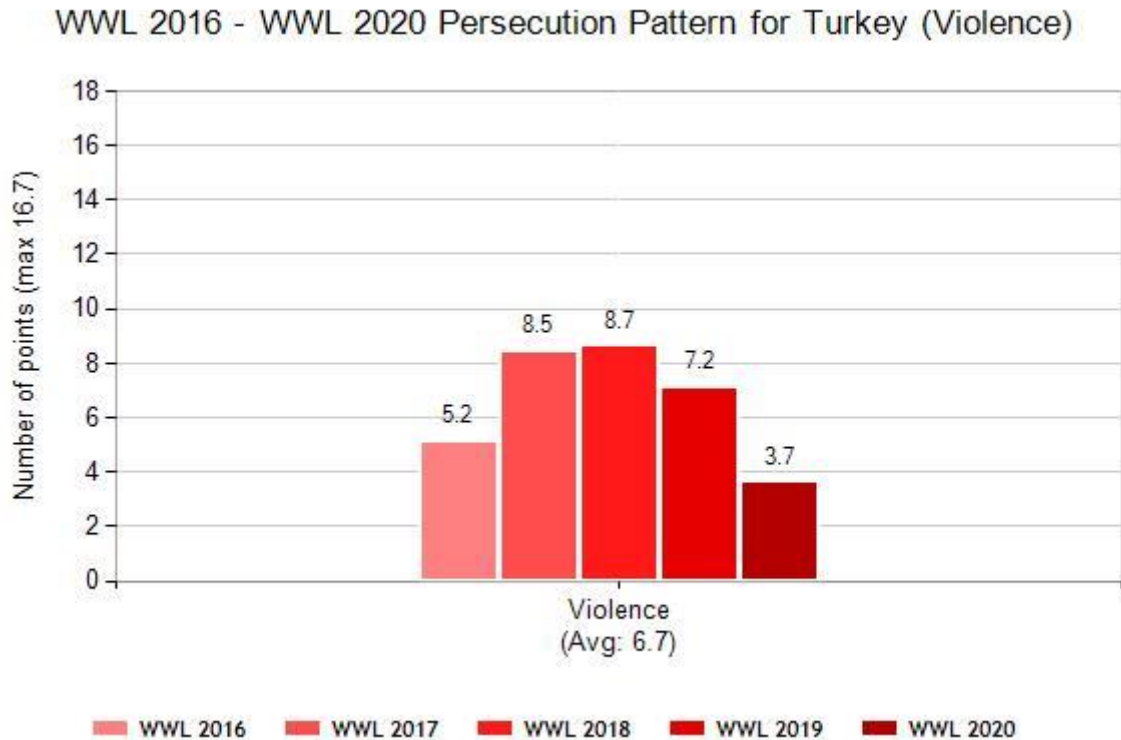


Chart 3:

The chart below shows that the score for violence against Christians in Turkey peaked in the WWL 2017 and 2018 reporting periods at a very high level. Since WWL 2019 the violence score has decreased considerably. In the WWL 2020 reporting period, this was mainly due to fewer attacks on church properties being reported.



Gender profile of persecution

Female Pressure Points:

- ***Denied access to social community/networks***
- ***Economic harassment via work/job/business***
- ***Forced out of home/expulsion***
- ***Incarceration by family***
- ***Violence – physical***
- ***Violence – psychological***
- ***Violence – verbal***

Although the Turkish legal system is generally not prejudicial as regards religious freedom, and it also gives equal rights to men and women, the prevailing culture and the implementation of such laws are often the cause of persecution. Conversion to Christianity is probably more difficult for women, especially in rural areas, as they are more vulnerable to persecution in an Islamic society in which they have an inferior position and are subject to family control. Given the current revival of Islam, women are likely to face increasing pressure to meet Islamic expectations of dress and conduct.

In general, women are expected to bring honor to their families by their career choices, their relationships and their marriage choices. The persecution of women and girls affects their families, inspiring anger, fear and anxiety in other family members.

Becoming a Christian or marrying a Christian are threats to the expectations of bringing honor to their family. Female converts are sometimes rejected by their families or banned from going out to meet with other Christians in the eastern provinces, or by villagers who have moved to the city.

Male Pressure Points:

- ***Denied inheritance or possessions***
- ***Denied inheritance or possessions***
- ***Discrimination/Harassment via education***
- ***Economic harassment via work/job/business***
- ***Forced out of home/expulsion***
- ***Military/militia conscription/service against conscience***
- ***Violence – Death***
- ***Violence – Physical***
- ***Violence – Psychological***
- ***Violence – Verbal***

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

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

Persecution of other religious minorities

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

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

According to the US Department of State's [International Religious Freedom Report for Turkey 2018](#) (p.1): "The government continued to limit the rights of non-Muslim minorities, especially those not recognized under the government's interpretation of the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, which includes only Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Christians, Jews, and Greek Orthodox Christians. The government continued to treat Alevi Islam as a heterodox Muslim "sect" and not to recognize Alevi houses of worship (cemevis), despite a Supreme Court of Appeals ruling in November that cemevis are places of worship. The government did not recognize the right to conscientious objection to military service. Religious minorities reported bureaucratic and administrative impediments to religious freedom remained, including the prevention of governing board elections for religious foundations, which manage many activities of religious communities."

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

Future outlook for the church

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

- **Islamic oppression / Religious nationalism:** There has been a rise in the use of hate-speech in the press (often local press) directed against churches and foreign Christian church workers. This has led to municipalities and local officials trying to close churches. The general atmosphere remains tense. Christian refugees are experiencing increasing restrictions from the authorities and are being threatened with deportation. It is not likely that the situation will improve. The country's Islamization is continuing and the pressure on the Christian community has increased massively ever since the coup attempt in 2016 - and is still growing.
- **Clan and ethnic antagonism:** The Christian population is tiny, consisting only of 0.2% of the population. Taking into consideration the fact that just a century ago Christians made up 20% of the country's population, the [fear of total extinction](#) is not unrealistic, in particular for the ancient Historical Christian communities. The overall atmosphere against Christians is hostile, with Christianity being seen as something foreign. As long as "Armenian" is used as a slur, instead of being spoken of as a respected and legitimate minority, it is unlikely that the attitude towards Christians will change.

- **Dictatorial paranoia:** The arrest and detention of Andrew Brunson during WWL 2019 resulted in many foreign families leaving the country and in fewer new workers considering taking up positions in Turkey. Furthermore, the government has expelled at least 23 foreign Christian workers and their families during WWL 2020. There is a fear that the Turkish government will target the indigenous Turkish Christians after all expatriate Christians have been driven out. In addition, although Erdogan ended the state of emergency in July 2018 after a two year period, thanks to his new presidential powers, he does not need the state of emergency laws in order to control the country with an iron fist.

External Links - WWL 2020: Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines: declared - <https://ahvalnews.com/press-freedom/media-and-democracy-not-compatible-says-erdogan>
- Drivers of persecution: referendum - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/10/turkish-referendum-all-you-need-to-know>
- Drivers of persecution: seized control over churches - <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/07/legal-limbo-turkeys-syriac-christian-properties-still-unresolved>
- Christian communities and how they are affected: converts from other countries - <http://www.222ministries.com/articles/view/104>
- Pressure in the 5 spheres of life : Imam Hatip schools - <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/turkey-erdogan-education/>
- Pressure in the 5 spheres of life : new ID cards - <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/religion-be-left-new-identification-cards-turkey-326099214>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: International Religious Freedom Report for Turkey 2018 - <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/TURKEY-2018-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: the Appeals Court ruled - <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/12/turkey-court-recognizes-alevi-houses-of-worship.html>
- Future outlook for the church: fear of total extinction - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-religion-turkey-christians-factbox/factbox-christians-in-turkey-idUSTRE50L08O20090122>

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 Turkey.

World Watch Monitor news articles

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

Recent country developments

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