

World
Watch
Research

Vietnam: Country Dossier

December 2019



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research@od.org

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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 / Vietnam

Brief country details

Pop 2019	Christians	Chr%
Vietnam		
97,429,000	8,737,000	9.0

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

World Watch List Vietnam	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2020	72	21
WWL 2019	70	20
WWL 2018	69	18
WWL 2017	71	17
WWL 2016	66	20

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

Vietnam: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Communist and post - Communist oppression	Government officials , Political parties, Ethnic group leaders
Clan and ethnic antagonism	One's own (extended) family, Ethnic group leaders
Dictatorial paranoia	Political parties, Government officials , Ethnic group leaders

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

Brief description of persecution situation

Historical Christian communities like Roman Catholics enjoy a certain amount of freedom unless they become politically active which can lead to imprisonment. Where Catholic congregations own large plots of land (e.g. surrounding convents, schools or hospitals) these are sometimes confiscated by the State for development purposes. Both non-traditional Protestants and converts from indigenous religions are persecuted intensively, especially in the remote areas of central and northern Vietnam. Most belong to the country's ethnic minorities, like the Hmong, and face social exclusion, discrimination and attacks. Their homes are sometimes destroyed and they are then forced to leave their villages. In several cases, Christians fled abroad and claimed asylum, e.g. in neighboring Cambodia, but were sent back due to Vietnamese pressure.

Specific examples of persecution in the reporting period

- In January 2019, the authorities [demolished](#) homes owned by Catholics and a war veterans' home, run by the Catholic Church close to Ho Chi Minh City. In December 2018 and in March 2019, the authorities raided house churches in several provinces and ordered pastors and congregants not to meet again. In several other incidents, Catholic parishes and monasteries in Hanoi, Hue and Ho-Chi-Minh were attacked and came under pressure to accept demolition and the expropriation of their land, partly at the hands of government-hired thugs.
- Ethnic minority Christian children are discriminated against in schools and do not get the same attention as others; also their medical needs are often neglected. Some are not even allowed to attend school because of their Christian faith. In one case, when tribal students in the central highlands converted to Christianity, their college principal threatened them with expulsion. Teachers also try to discourage Christian students by saying that no one would employ them as Christians after they graduate anyway, so it would be better for them to give up their faith altogether.

External Links - WWL 2020: Persecution summary

- Specific examples of persecution in the reporting period: demolished - https://www.reuters.com/article/us-vietnam-landrights-protests/vietnam-demolitions-pit-catholic-church-against-authorities-idUSKCN1PB16N?utm_source=Pew+Research+Center&utm_campaign=2405e5189f-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_01_17_03_06&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_3e953b9b70-2405e5189f-399904105

WWL 2020: Keys to understanding / Vietnam

Link for general background information

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-16567315>.

Recent history

Vietnam became a unified state at the end of the US-Vietnam War in 1975 and has remained one of the few remaining Communist states to this day. All power lies with the Communist Party and only since 2010 have the executive and decision-makers in the politburo started a dialogue with the National Assembly, which has been elected, but not under free and fair conditions. Due to Vietnam's large population and geographical position, the economy is developing fast. Political development is slow in comparison.

More important than the National Assembly are the decisions the Communist Party will be taking in the future. New leadership was chosen in January 2016 during the 12th Party Congress, leaving the most important and influential post of Secretary-General unchanged. This was a clear sign of continuity and it is therefore to be expected that the government's comparatively liberal economic approach will be held in bounds by strict political control. Civil rights or freedom of religion will remain elusive, especially with the new law on religion being enforced.

A "rising star" in the Communist Party was [surprisingly demoted](#) for corruption in May 2017, showing that the Party will fight off any perceived danger. Other members of the Communist Party have been sentenced to long prison terms for corruption and it is not clear if this is more about the Party's efforts to eradicate corruption or rather due to political in-fighting. After the death of the country's president at the age of 61 in September 2018, the General-Secretary of the Communist Party, Nguyen Phu Trong, was appointed to take over the presidency, which shows that the [consolidation of Communist ideology](#) will remain a priority in the years to come.

Political and legal landscape

As one country observer puts it, three groups can be distinguished in Vietnamese politics: Regime conservatives, modernizers and those just seeking to make a profit. These key blocs exist within the ruling party, within the structures of the state, as well as within society and the economic system. Party leaders regularly acknowledge that corruption and rampant abuse of power have held Vietnam back. Citizens commonly complain about corruption among officials, governmental inefficiency and opaque bureaucratic procedures. The Vietnamese media have played a prominent role in exposing corruption scandals. Since the country lacks civil society groups able to act as watchdogs, the exposure of corruption and abuse by officials has largely been in the hands of a small number of newspaper journalists. The authorities act very harshly against all deviations from the Communist party line. This means that Human Rights or environmental activists – many of them Christians – often have to face being harassed, beaten, detained and sentenced. It fitted this pattern when the Vietnamese authorities [raided and closed](#) a meeting of registered local NGOs in Hanoi in December 2018.

An additional challenge is the growing tension with Vietnam's big neighbor, China. The major stumbling block is China's actions in the South China Sea as well as Vietnam's policy of setting up Special Economic Zones, in which China is active. China is claiming the whole South China Sea as its possession, ignoring all other claims states may have, some of which are backed by international law. China not only attacked Vietnamese vessels in waters it claims for itself, it has also started to build military structures on reefs and rocks to support its claim. This led to violent reactions against Chinese companies in Vietnam and after an international ruling rejecting China's claim, Vietnam reportedly started to deploy [modern short-range missiles](#) on small islands in the South China Sea capable of reaching Chinese military structures. Although the conflict has been calmed down, the conflict is still simmering in the background, as [confrontations](#) between Vietnamese and Chinese ships in Vietnam's EEZ (exclusive economic zone) in July 2019 showed. In November 2019, as reported by the Diplomat (an Asia-Pacific news magazine), a high-ranking member of the government "made headlines with a suggestion that Vietnam may consider alternative measures in managing the South China Sea disputes it is embroiled in, including [international arbitration](#) which the Philippines had previously pursued against China."

Despite all tensions, at least as far as ideology is concerned, Vietnam follows China closely in emphasizing Communism and also in controlling society (see "Technological landscape").

How far claims of a potential ["succession crisis"](#) within the Communist party are true and any details concerning this will have to wait until the decisive Party Congress takes place in 2021. Speculation about succession has been further fuelled by rumors that President and VCP chief Trong has [serious health issues](#).

Religious landscape

The religious affiliation of Vietnam's citizens is a matter of much debate. Whereas the World Christian Database (see table below) estimates that half of the population follow Buddhism and just 10% ethnic religions, the last official census of 2009 found that ethnic religions are followed by more than 44% and Buddhism by more than 38%. According to the UK Home Office in 2014, [only around 12%](#) of the population of Vietnam identified themselves as Buddhist and more than 73% either follow ethnic religions or no religion at all. Whichever figures best reflect reality, both show that Buddhism and ethnic religions do overlap and the latter have a stronger influence than numbers may tell. Christians are tolerated as long as they do not challenge the existing order. As many of the Protestant Christians belong to ethnic minorities, which historically fought on the American side in the Vietnam War, they are quick to be seen as being troublemakers. To a lesser extent, this is true for the far larger group of Catholic Christians as well, since they have a colonial background and are seen as being connected to a foreign power, the Vatican. Thus Christians are always on the radar of the local or national authorities. Just over 81% of all Christians are Catholics according to WCD 2019.

Religious Context: Vietnam	Numbers	%
Christians	8,737,000	9.0
Muslim	170,000	0.2
Hindu	57,100	0.1
Buddhist	48,735,000	50.0
Ethno-religionist	10,022,000	10.3
Jewish	350	0.0
Bahai	427,000	0.4
Atheist	5,962,000	6.1
Agnostic	11,768,000	12.1
Other	11,550,370	11.9

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlò 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.

According to the last census in 2009, 57.5% of the population reported to be Buddhist, 34.7% reported to follow an ethnic religion. Christians accounted for 6.2%. However, it is likely that due to the strong bias against Christians, in an official census many people chose not to reveal their religious affiliation. This is especially true for Protestants as many of them come from the ethnic minorities (who were anyway only partially included in the census).

Economic landscape

Vietnam continues to follow its *doi moi* policy (literal translation: renovation) which was introduced in 1986 and aims at reforming and improving the economic sector. It delivered excellent results in doubling the GDP within the last decade as well as in poverty reduction and in increasing employment rates. Economically, Vietnam is doing well but this policy comes at a price. Many of the Communist leaders, whether in politics or the army, have become rich and this has led the country's ideology into a crisis. Communism, especially in the cities, is more a matter of rhetoric than real life, and young people have started to ask questions. To counter-act this erosion of credibility, Communist ideology is being emphasized even more strongly and the authorities act harshly against all who deviate from the norm - especially human rights activists. A growing number of them, many of them Christians, have been harassed, beaten, detained and sentenced or expelled from the country, two of them in June 2018 to Germany.

The iron grip of the regime has stabilized the economy and many well-educated Vietnamese are returning to the country to [start up businesses](#). Given that the still unfolding trade war between China and the USA is already diverting investment to other states - especially those belonging to the intergovernmental Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) - at least in the short term, Vietnam could reap an unexpected windfall. On the other hand, it is possible that Vietnam might become the [next target](#) of the US trade war.

Further, although the leadership quashed all protests against the policy of setting up special economic zones and giving them in long term leases to China [under strict conditions](#), the law actually implementing this policy (originally scheduled to come into force in May 2019) has been postponed indefinitely.

Social and cultural landscape

With ethnic minorities comprising between 13% and 16.5% of the population, depending on the sources used, Vietnam is among the more ethnically heterogeneous societies in the Asian-Pacific region. Communist ideology succeeded in smothering many ethnic, religious and social differences, but these differences have surfaced again and find their expression predominantly in local protests. Civic protest movements are mostly limited to the local level, are spontaneously organized, and are directed against ethnic and general socio-economic discrimination, but they have not been able to challenge the political regime. Typical topics are protests against land-grabbing or ecological disasters and how local and national authorities are dealing with it. Of course, this does not mean that the government does not feel challenged, especially since some tribal groups are still aiming to set up their own autonomous state.

As already indicated above, the healthy economy has led to comparably low unemployment rates. According to the UNDP, the numbers stand at 2.1% for the overall rate and 7.9% for youth unemployment. However, still 40.9% are employed in the agricultural sector and the child labor rate (13.1%) and the vulnerable employment rate (55.9%) are high, which shows that economic growth does not come without challenges. The poverty rate (as the Working poor rate at PPP 3.10 USD per day) stands at 7.9%.

Technological landscape

Vietnam struggles to keep online dissent in check, as the country is among the top ten in having the highest number of Facebook members - a reported [58 million](#). But it will strive to crackdown heavily on blogs showing deviating thought as shown by the [sentencing](#) of the Catholic blogger known as "Mother Mushroom" to 10 years imprisonment in June 2017. Her appeal was rejected in [December 2017](#) and she was deported to the USA in October 2018. A [new law on online privacy](#) limits freedom significantly. The fact that private user-data has to be submitted to authorities clearly shows how important control for the government is. Vietnam's [June 2018 law on cyber security](#) forces internet companies such as Facebook and Google to store their users' data in Vietnam itself and open offices there, leaving the very active Christian (especially Catholic) community barely any freedom.

While the internet penetration rate according to the UNDP stands at a comparably moderate 46.5%, the mobile subscription rate is 127.5 per 100 people. It is especially noteworthy that one of the largest telecommunication companies of the country, Viettel, is military-owned, so it is not really surprising that content limitations are so strong. Additionally, in December 2017, the army announced that it has set up a cyber unit called ["Force 47"](#), consisting of propaganda specialists targeted with countering what the regime sees as wrong or harmful news in the internet. The force allegedly has up to 10,000 members of staff. Consequently, Freedom House in its "Freedom on the Net Report" 2019 qualified Vietnam as ["Not free"](#).

Security situation

In general, Vietnam enjoys a very stable security situation. Apart from skirmishes with China in the South China Sea, where Vietnam arguably has the strongest territorial claim in the region, the areas with the highest potential for unrest are the mountainous provinces in the central and northwestern highlands where most of the ethnic minorities are living. Although there are no longer any active fighting insurgency groups in existence, the authorities are still keeping very tight control over these regions.

Trends analysis

1) The Communist Party remains dominant but some hope to see the country open up further

Communists regard the Church as a dangerous group easily capable of mobilizing masses of people. Modernizers within leadership circles would like to see the principles of “doi moi” (i.e. the introduction of at least partly private economy to induce growth) translated to several parts of national life and politics and one observer even called the “M-L-H” (Marx-Lenin-Ho Chi Minh) ideology a religious dogma. No one dares to openly doubt the dominance of the Communist Party but some would like to see a further opening up of the country - a wish that was countered by the General-Secretary of the Communist Party being appointed as president of the country. Apart from conservatives and modernizers, a third group simply accepts the status quo and is eager to extract as much benefit as possible from the economic development for their own purposes. Christians or other minorities getting in their way will face arbitrary treatment or even outright persecution.

The protection of Communist dominance as top priority was made clear once more by two legal changes: 1) A revision of the penal code published on 20 June 2017, in which all lawyers are now required to inform the authorities if their clients are [threatening national security](#); 2) The introduction of new laws on internet control (see Technological landscape above). Everything and everybody has to submit to the survival of the Communist Party and its ideology; therefore the authorities will continue to watch Christians with suspicion and – if deemed necessary – act against them.

2) Trade agreements continue to ignore human rights concerns

The economic *doi moi* policy has not spilled over into the social and political spheres of society and is not expected to do so in the foreseeable future. On the contrary, the authorities are increasingly relying on Communist rhetoric and ideology and act against dissidents and all movements perceived as threatening to its rule. Dreams of an open civil society in Vietnam with public debates on political, economic, social and religious issues (as common in a democratic society) are still far off. As the European Union (EU) has gone ahead and [signed a Free Trade Agreement](#) with Vietnam in May 2019, despite all human rights concerns (and of course including human rights clauses in the agreement), shows that economic considerations trump all others and will be seen as a confirmation by the Communist leadership.

Hanoi was the stage for the second US-North Korea summit in February 2019, showing that the government is confident in demonstrating its successes and maybe even in serving as a role model in how to improve relations with the former arch-enemy USA. Although it is true that Vietnam is a modern and thriving country, especially in the bustling cities, international media missed the opportunity to report on [the somewhat shadier sides](#).

External Links - WWL 2020: Keys to understanding

- Link for general background information: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-16567315>. - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-16567315>
- Recent history: surprisingly demoted - <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/demotion-05102017143505.html>
- Recent history: consolidation of Communist ideology - <https://thediplomat.com/2018/10/meet-vietnams-new-president-the-communist-party-chief/>
- Political and legal landscape: raided and closed - <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/vietnamese-authorities-break-up-civil-society-conference-12202018171124.html>
- Political and legal landscape: modern short-range missiles - <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-southchinasea-vietnam-idUSKCN10K2NE?feedType=RSS&feedName=worldNews>
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WWL 2020: Church information / Vietnam

Christian origins

Christianity first came to Vietnam in the 16th and 17th centuries and was introduced by Dutch and Portuguese traders. When France became the colonial power of Indochina (1859-1954), French missionaries arrived to strengthen the Roman Catholic Church which is still prominently represented by large cathedrals in major cities. Protestantism arrived in 1911 with the coming of the Christian and Missionary Alliance and was later strengthened by various Western missionaries. Some Montagnard churches were even founded during the Vietnam War by radio broadcasts.

Church spectrum today

Church networks: Vietnam	Christians	%
Orthodox	0	0.0
Catholic	7,085,000	81.1
Protestant	1,558,000	17.8
Independent	571,000	6.5
Unaffiliated	17,700	0.2
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-494,000	-5.7
Total	8,737,700	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	1,632,000	18.7
Renewalist movement	786,000	9.0

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 / Vietnam

Reporting period

1 November 2018 – 31 October 2019

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 72 points, Vietnam ranked 21 in WWL 2020, compared to 70 points and rank 20 in WWL 2019.

The score for violence increased by 0.7 points and is therefore stable; however, the pressure in almost all spheres of life increased slightly. The new regulations on religion, implemented from 1 January 2018 onwards, have not changed anything substantially, except adding another source of uncertainty (although on paper they looked like an improvement). Tighter regulations on online communication helped in restricting and limiting the space Christians enjoy even further. Pressure and violence against Christians belonging to the ethnic minorities continued unchanged and receiving reports from these regions remained a challenge.

The [39 Vietnamese migrants](#), who were found suffocated and frozen to death outside London at the end of October 2019, were mainly Catholic Christians coming from Nghe An and neighboring provinces. This incident highlights the pressure the authorities are putting on Christians in this region, even though this particular group seem to have migrated mainly for economic reasons.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines: Vietnam	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Not at all
Religious nationalism	RN	Very weak
Clan and ethnic antagonism	CEA	Medium
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Very weak
Communist and post - Communist oppression	CPCO	Very strong
Secular intolerance	SI	Weak
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.

Communist and post-Communist oppression (Very strong), blended with Dictatorial paranoia (Medium):

Vietnam – or as the official name reads: the “Socialist Republic of Vietnam” – is one of the five remaining countries in the world which is still ruled by a Communist party. Vietnamese Communism is more than just cosmetic as one country observer noted when stating that Marxist-Leninist-Ho Chi Minh-ideology is “quasi-religious”. The government monitors Christian activity and exercises a high level of pressure on all Christians.

The Catholic Church is by far the largest Christian community in the country, but government authorities have a shaky relationship with it as Roman Catholics are tied to a foreign power, the Vatican, and are additionally often seen as a remnant from French colonial days. Stereotypes such as "Catholics are French and Protestants are American" still prevail, especially in rural areas. The expropriation of church-owned land and the fact that especially Catholics are active in highlighting social injustices underline the checkered relationship Communist leaders have with the Catholic Church. The government is particularly suspicious of the ethnic minorities who live in the central and northern highlands (who are also known as "[Montagnards](#)"). Many of them are Protestant Christians, whose growth in numbers has reportedly continued. It should be noted that all non-Catholic Christians in Vietnam self-identify as Evangelicals, many of whom are Pentecostal or Charismatic.

It is estimated that two-thirds of all Protestants are members of ethnic minorities, including minority groups in the northwestern highlands (H'mong, Dzao, Thai, and others) and in the central highlands (Ede, Jarai, Sedang, and M'ngong, among others). In a speech in February 2012 summarizing the government's religious policy goals, Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc encouraged stronger monitoring on matters related to land and property rights and urged continued government "management" of Protestantism in order to limit its extraordinary growth. Overall, the deputy prime minister stressed the need to avoid religious "hot spots" forming and to counter "enemy forces" that use religion to "destroy our nation". These counter-measures may involve the use of violence, either explicitly by police raids or implicitly by (silently) approving of violence against religious communities and venues (including the use of violent criminal groups).

Although the new law on religion, which came into force on 1 January 2018, brought some improvements on paper, its implementation so far did not bring any relief on the ground. As the predominant goal of the Communist authorities is to keep all groups and organizations in check in order to preserve their power, no great changes can be expected. Running Christian churches and registering them will be at least as cumbersome as it is now. Also, testifying about one's faith will remain dangerous, especially for Christians among the ethnic minorities who remain under the close watch of the authorities.

Clan and ethnic antagonism (Medium):

If new Christian believers of a tribal background are discovered by co-villagers or village leaders, where ethnic religions are still strong, they are forced to keep following the age-old norms and values of their community. In order to maintain the tribe's culture, tribal leaders will often exclude Christians from the community, seeing them as traitors of their culture and identity. The community itself will often react violently against new Christian converts as well and expel them from their villages. The authorities cooperate with local tribal leaders to the disadvantage of those converts.

Drivers of persecution

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

- **Government officials and political parties (Very strong):** The government persecutes the Christian minority at national, regional and local level. The Communist Party often does this by implementing ideology strictly and by promoting those who hold Communism in esteem.

Laws are passed and then implemented at the grassroots level, often undergoing misinterpretation in even stricter implementation. If violence is needed, the government prefers to hire local thugs, which are not directly connected to them, but locally known as "Red Flag groups".

- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** Occasionally, ethnic group leaders, citizens and even one's own family can become additional drivers of persecution, however, this is usually connected with *Clan and ethnic antagonism*, not *Communist oppression*.

Drivers of Clan and ethnic antagonism:

- **Extended family (Strong):** Non-Christian relatives of Christians drive persecution by cutting family ties and denying inheritance; in some cases this means forcing a Christian spouse to divorce and withholding rights of child custody. All this is usually threatened first in an effort to bring the convert back to the family fold, but if this fails, he or she can be expelled from the family and the village. Villagers persecute Christians – also by conniving with local authorities – giving Christians beatings, expelling them from their village, or disrupting Christian fellowship by throwing stones at their place of worship.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** As they are protecting their tribe's culture, ethnic group leaders see converts to Christianity as traitors to their tribal identity and usually cut them off from resources or expel them from their villages altogether, destroying their fields etc. in an effort to bring converts back to their ancient faith.

Geographical hotspots of persecution

Persecution against Christians among the ethnic minorities is especially strong in the central and northwestern highlands in the following provinces: Bac Giang, Bac Ninh, Bin Phuoc, Dak Lak, Dak Nong, Dien Bien, Gia Lai, Ha Giang, Ha Nam, Hoa Binh, Kon Tum, Lai Chau, Lam Dong, Lao Cai, Nghe An, Ninh Thuan, Phu Yen, Quang Binh, Quang Ngai, Son La, Thanh Hoa, Tra Vinh and Yen Bai.

Christian communities and how they are affected

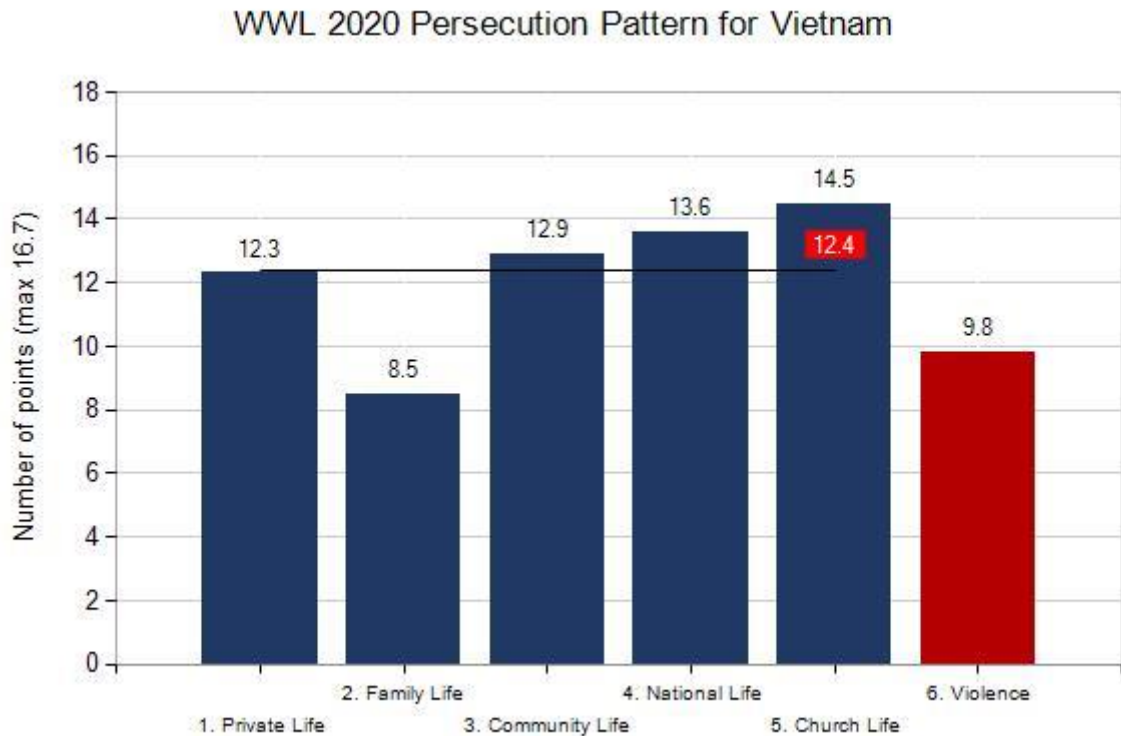
Communities of expatriate Christians: As they cannot mix with local churches, expatriate Christians are involuntarily isolated. This category includes foreign workers from Taiwan, Korea and the Philippines, who face pressure by being monitored.

Historical Christian communities: These are especially the Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical Church of Vietnam. Whereas the former managed to open a Catholic university in 2016, problems with land-grabbing by authorities increased and the arrest of Catholic activists show that historical Christian communities continue to face severe problems.

Converts to Christianity: Converts come either from a Buddhist or Ethnic-animist background and face the strongest persecution, not only from the authorities, but also from their families, friends and neighbors. Since most of them belong to ethnic minorities, the Communist authorities are particularly suspicious of them.

Non-traditional Christian communities: This category mainly consists of Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations. Baptists, Mennonites, Churches of Christ and many others gather in house-churches. They are closely monitored and are also facing discrimination at various levels of society.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2020 Persecution pattern for Vietnam shows:

- Pressure on Christians in Vietnam remained very high in almost all *spheres of life*, causing the average pressure to increase to 12.7 points in WWL 2020 from 12.3 in the two previous reporting periods.
- Pressure is strongest in the *Church sphere* (extreme level), followed by the *National* and *Community spheres*. Pressure on converts is especially acute in the *Private* and *Family spheres*, but all Christians face strong pressure in the *National* and *Church spheres*. This pressure is fueled by increasing levels of Communist rhetoric, the new religion law and its cumbersome requirements and a continuing suspicion towards converts as well as to all ethnic and religious minorities.
- Violence against Christians rose from 9.1 points in WWL 2019 to 9.8 in WWL 2020. There was one killing reported and several churches were attacked. The government also continued its policy of arresting outspoken Christian dissidents.

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 risky for Christians to discuss their faith with those other than immediate family members (Block 1.8 / Score: 3.25 points):*** In rural areas, discussing faith is dangerous because it can be seen as stirring up the community. Thus, talking about faith may lead to imprisonment or violence. In the city, there is slightly more freedom, but it may still mean being called in by the police and questioned.
- ***It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians (Block 1.9 / Score: 3.25 points):*** As all meetings need to be notified beforehand to the authorities, the latter have a free hand in deciding when and how to cause trouble for Christians (e.g. for not meeting reporting standards and thus breaking the law). Meeting with other Christians is therefore risky even for members of registered churches.
- ***It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols (Block 1.5 / Score: 3 points):*** In tribal communities, some neighbors would not want any "foreign" symbols in their village as this may offend the spirits guarding their community. Expatriate Christians (for example working as teachers or NGO/community workers) in rural areas also refrain from putting up Christian symbols as this may also offend the people from their community.
- ***Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable (Block 1.1 / Score: 3 points):*** Whereas conversions have not been banned by law, they have been strongly opposed. Christianity is seen as a threat to family members who follow ancestral worship since they fear that nobody would take care of them in the after-life. In some cases, family members evicted converts and ostracized Christian relatives. Christianity is seen as a threat in strongly Communist families as well.

Since families in Vietnam, especially those in rural areas, usually live with three generations under one roof, Christian converts have to be particularly careful about how to practice their faith and to whom to share it with. Converts also have to be cautious when keeping Christian materials. Under these circumstances, meetings with other Christians can become very difficult and in many cases, family members will hinder the new converts from having fellowship with other Christians. This is true not only for converts from a Buddhist or Animist background but also for Christians from families with strong connections to the Communist Party. Speaking out about faith is often seen as opposition to the Communist party. Christian bloggers arguing for more social justice and freedom of religion in the country were quickly apprehended by the authorities, sentenced, imprisoned or deported.

Family sphere:

- **Christian children have been pressed to attend anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education (Block 2.8 / Score: 4 points):** Christian children are taught Communism at school, and at home Christian families are often put under pressure to join in ancestral worship. In the central highlands grown-up children of pastors were being put under pressure to make their parents stop preaching and teaching, threatening them with losing their job if unable to convince their parents to cease such ministry.
- **Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith (Block 2.9 / Score: 3.75 points):** Christian children are sometimes prevented from attending school because of their faith or that of their parents. Ethnic minority Christian children are sometimes denied scholarships which are open to poor ethnic minority children, because of their faith. They receive harsher treatment from teachers and are easy targets for being bullied as well.
- **Burials of Christians have been hindered or coercively performed with non-Christian rites (Block 2.5 / Score: 2.75 points):** Burials had to be performed according to traditional rites, especially by Christians from the ethnic minorities. Ancestral worship is seen as important, even more so in rural areas, and there is a major fear of angering the spirits.
- **Christians have lost their inheritance rights because of their conversion to Christianity or to another church denomination (Block 2.13 / Score: 2.75 points):** This is one of the more common consequences converts to Christianity face when they leave their ancestral faith. Additionally, converts who are married may be threatened with divorce and it is common for families to disown, evict and cut off support from family members that convert to Christianity.

There have been reports that Christians from minority tribes were denied birth certificates and that in other cases government officials forced them to change their surnames into "Ho" (after Revolutionary Communist leader Ho Chi Minh). There were many reports of Christians asking local officials to certify their documents for education, school and employment. But when the local authorities discovered they were Christian, they refused to certify the documents - especially if in the past the Christians had not obeyed warnings to stop attending Christian meetings. In registered churches and in the cities, baptisms are usually not hindered, although most churches prefer to do them inside in order to not raise too much attention. But for Christians of an animistic background, baptisms are rarely possible due to pressure from family, society and the authorities.

Community sphere:

- **Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (Block 3.2 / Score: 4 points):** Local communities frequently assist in the monitoring of Christian activities and the authorities encourage the use of neighborhood watch systems. Local authorities encourage the community to restrict Christian groups as these are seen as foreign and dangerous. Online activities are also heavily monitored, as are the phonedlines of some church leaders.

- **Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons (Block 3.10 / Score: 4 points):** The workplace is one of the most common places to be discriminated against. This is not limited to public employers, but normal for private employers as well. Christians applying for jobs and those due for promotion often experience exclusion and limitations. Christians may be invited for job interviews, but when the potential employer learns about their religious background, the chances are high that they will not be taken on.
- **Christians have been interrogated or compelled to report to the local police for faith-related reasons (Block 3.13 / Score: 3.75 points):** It is very common that pastors and church leaders are called in by the police and interrogated. In northern Vietnam, the police threatened church members with cancelling their health benefits if they continued to meet as a church. In villages, Christians are normally summoned by the village elders to report on their activities. Local community members also question them. If they notice anything suspicious they report it to the police or village leaders.
- **Christians have faced disadvantages in their education at any level for faith-related reasons (Block 3.9 / Score: 3.5 points):** In schools, students are required to show reverence to a photo of Ho Chi Minh. Cases have been reported where school principals threatened converts with expulsion. Christian students are frequently told to forget about pursuing further education, arguing that, as Christians, no one is likely to hire them after their graduation.

There are many reports that Christians, especially from the ethnic minorities, are denied government benefits, whether in the form of disaster relief, agricultural micro-finance loans or student grants.

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):** Vietnam follows its Communist ideology strictly and reveres the state founder Ho Chi Minh, or "Uncle Ho" as he is fondly referred to, but this is not comparable to the reverence shown to leaders in North Korea. All beliefs other than Communist ideology are opposed, and religion is curbed by laws known under the heading "Decree 92". The new comprehensive "Law on Religion and Belief" came into effect on 1 January 2018.

Analyzing this law, the US State Department's 2018 IRF Country report states: "The new law reduces the waiting period for a religious group, and its affiliate group or groups, to obtain recognition from 23 years to five years, reduces the number of religion-related procedures requiring advance approval from authorities, aims to clarify the process by which religious organizations can obtain registration for their activities and recognition, and for the first time specifies the right of legal status for recognized religious groups and their affiliates. The law also specifies that religious groups be allowed to conduct educational, health, social protection, charitable, and humanitarian activities in accordance with the relevant laws, but does not specify which law controls in instances in which the law may contradict other laws, or where other laws do not have clear provisions, such as the Law on Education."

Although there are a few sections in which the new law could be considered to be an improvement for Christians, the practical implementation so far shows no relief for churches. The regulations on registration in particular continue to create great bureaucratic difficulties for churches.

- **Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (local administration, government, army, etc.) for faith-related reasons (Block 4.5 / Score: 4 points):** Christians are widely seen as anti-nationalist and working against the government and its Communist goals and ideology. Therefore they have to be controlled and discriminated against. Members of the Communist party are not allowed to profess a religion. As the US State Department's 2018 IRF Country report noted on page 11: "Members of the military were not permitted to read the Bible or practice religious rites at any time while on active duty; they had to take personal leave to conduct such activities, religious freedom experts reported."
- **Christians have been subject to smear campaigns or hate speech (Block 4.11 / Score: 4 points):** Media reporting on Christians is biased and slander against them is frequent. For example, Christians are portrayed as acting as a tool for reinstating colonial ideology, either the French Catholic variety or US Protestantism. Christian activists have also been subjected to smear-campaigns in the local media (concerning human rights or environmental issues) and accused of disruptive and anti-government activities as well.
- **Christians accused in court have been deprived of equal treatment (Block 4.15 / Score: 4 points):** While perpetrators against Christians are almost never brought to trial, local authorities often hire thugs for acts of violence against Christians, which are never brought to justice. Those Christians who have had to go to court have not received a fair trial. An example of this is the stream of Catholic bloggers being given prison sentences, or the protests caused by the Formosa case where a Taiwanese steel plant caused an environmental disaster and (mainly Catholic) fishermen and activists started protests against the government cover-up. When they tried to get justice, the authorities clamped down on them.

The national ID cards (as well as family records) include a section on religious affiliation. Converts find it hard to have their affiliation changed and, those who have tried, have frequently ended up with the entry "non-religious" or have been denied documents altogether. Movements of Christian leaders are monitored and access to villages in the northern and central part of Vietnam is restricted.

Church sphere:

- **Activities of churches have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed (Block 5.1 / Score: 4 points):** Churches are closely monitored and occasionally meetings are hindered or disturbed. According to law, churches need to register activities with the authorities. For churches in rural areas, the monitoring is even stronger, including neighbors and village leaders also checking on the church.

- ***It has been difficult to get registration or legal status (Block 5.2 / Score: 4 points):*** Church registration demands a tremendous amount of administrative work and there is no guarantee of actually getting the permit in the end. This is just one way the government controls the growth of the Church and keeps it under Communist rule. Even churches affiliated to registered churches find it difficult to be recognized by the government and the local authorities. According to the US State Department's 2018 IRF Country report (page 14), two Protestant churches succeeded in getting registration in 2018: "On September 11, the CRA granted a 'certificate of registration for religious activities' to Vietnam Full Gospel Denomination at a ceremony in Ho Chi Minh City. On December 14, the CRA granted a 'certificate of registration for religious activities' to the Vietnam United Gospel Outreach Church, also in Ho Chi Minh."
- ***Churches have been hindered in importing Christian materials (Block 5.13 / Score: 4 points):*** All published material needs to be approved by the government. As imports are highly restricted, materials have to be (re-)printed in Vietnam. Translated material needs to be reviewed; approval depends on how sensitive and dangerous the authorities consider the content to be. Just to give one example: The production of a Hmong language Bible is likely to face far more hindrances than a Vietnamese language Bible.
- ***Churches, Christian organizations, institutions or groups have been prevented from using mass media to present their faith (Block 5.16 / Score: 3.75 points):*** The government has full control over all major media. Social media companies are required to store data on local servers in the country and the new Internet law is seen as being highly restrictive for churches too (see "Technological landscape"). There are some foreign religious programs available on cable TV, but they are broadcast without subtitles (which is not the case for other foreign programs).

The issue of church building permits is handled by the authorities in a highly restrictive way. Land-grabbing by the authorities also continues and especially Roman Catholic churches face problems in keeping possession of their property as several incidents in May, July and December 2018 showed. The Catholic Church owns various large plots of land (churches, schools and hospitals), especially in the larger cities, and there has been more than one clash, when authorities made repeated attempts to take this land away, allegedly for development purposes. The new law requires each church to create a dossier proving that they are registered as an approved Christian group, have the right to gather and that the land is owned by the church. This is then sent to the authorities for approval. It is an extremely lengthy process and the authorities can easily deny permits by claiming that the land is not meant for religious purposes, or the land is residential, or that the church is not a registered group.

In addition, every October registered churches have to submit a list of topics of their sermons for the complete coming year. There have also been reports that youth gatherings were raided.

The publication and distribution of Christian materials is possible, but highly restricted. Any illegal material is confiscated by the police. It is also very difficult to obtain permission for setting up courses for training.

As the US State Department's 2018 IRF Country report noted on page 20: "The government continued to restrict the number of students permitted to enroll in Catholic and Protestant seminaries. The churches' leadership said the numbers allowed were inadequate to meet demand. ECVN leaders said 23 students graduated from their Bible school in the last five years. The government continued to permit them to recruit new students every two years."

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.

Vietnam	Reporting period	Christians killed	Christians attacked	Christians arrested	Churches attacked	Christian-owned houses and shops attacked
WWL 2020	01 Nov 2018 - 31 Oct 2019	1	107	194	10	128
WWL 2019	01 Nov 2017 - 31 Oct 2018	0	108	186	18	24
WWL 2018	01 Nov 2016 - 31 Oct 2017	1	1086	25	6	11

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:** One Hmong Christian died in a hospital, after being held in police custody. For security reasons, no further details can be given.
- **Christians attacked:** Over 100 Christians were attacked, sometimes in connection with police raids on churches and church compounds - see below.

- **Christians arrested:** Besides the [widely reported](#) cases of dissidents arrested, there were reports of more than 30 Hmong Christians being detained. For security reasons, no details can be published.
- **Churches attacked:** In January 2019, the authorities [demolished](#) homes owned by Catholics and a war veterans’ home, run by the Catholic Church close to Ho Chi Minh City. In December 2018 and in March 2019, the authorities raided house churches in several provinces and ordered pastors and congregants not to meet again.
- **Christian homes/shops attacked:** At the same incident in January 2019, the authorities also destroyed more than 100 homes of Catholic Christians living in the church compound.

5 Year trends

Chart 1:

The first chart below shows how the average level of pressure on Christians has been at a very high level over the last five reporting periods and has gradually increased from 11.4 points in WWL 2016 to 12.4 points in WWL 2020.

WWL 2016 - WWL 2020 Persecution Pattern history: Vietnam	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2020	12.4
2019	12.3
2018	12.3
2017	11.9
2016	11.4

Chart 2:

The chart below shows that the pressure on Christians in all spheres of life has consistently been at a very high level (except in *Family life*) over the last five reporting periods. The pressure in *Church life* increased each year, reflecting the additional insecurity and restrictions; the pressure in *National life* has more or less levelled off at a very high level (although lower than in the period WWL 2016-WWL 2018), due to the newly implemented law on religion. Similarly, the very high pressure in *Community life* rose further, as pressure increased on ethnic minority Christians in particular.

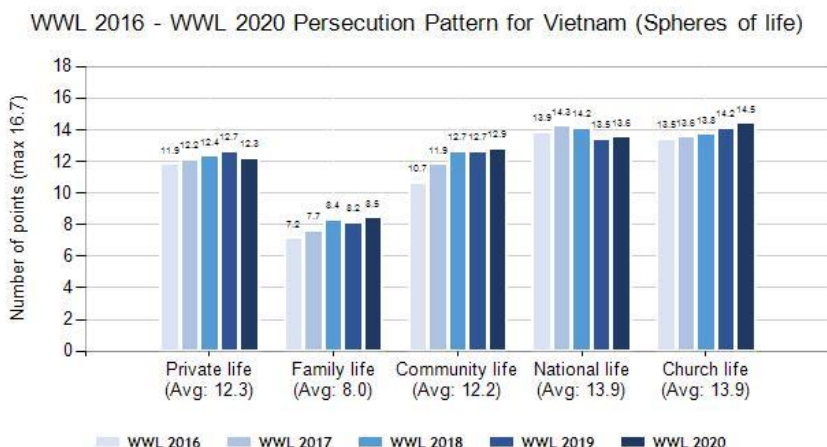
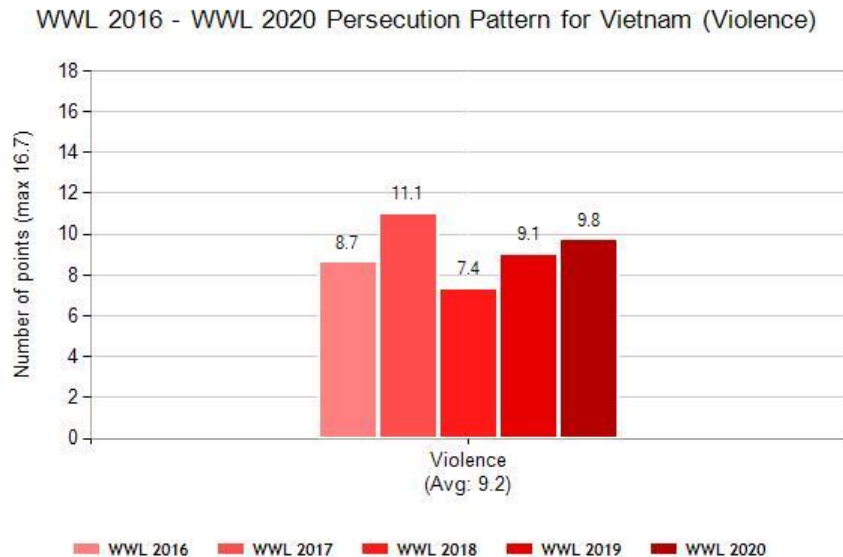


Chart 3:

Persecution in Vietnam has always been violent. The chart below shows the very high scores over all 5 years, with a peak in WWL 2017. Killings are rare exceptions; the Communist government's preferred means are prison sentences or deportation.



Gender profile of persecution

Female Pressure Points:

- ***Forced divorce***
- ***Forced marriage***
- ***Violence – psychological***
- ***Violence – sexual***

Gender equality has been a topic given much attention in Vietnam. Unlike so many countries where women are at a significant economic disadvantage, there is [71% percent female workforce participation](#) in Vietnam; nevertheless, women bear an unequal share of domestic work in the home. As in much of Communist Asia, women are traditionally expected to care for their parents, which requires a significant investment of time and energy. Despite socialist ideals of equality, [Confucian values](#) remain, embodied in sayings such as “1 boy is something, 10 girls is nothing.” Christian women in Vietnam face several forms of pressure and violence. Some Christian women, particularly converts and those in tribal cultures, are [forced to marry non-Christians](#) by their families. Youth leaders commonly report that following marriage, young converts will stop attending church. Indeed, these marriages cause some women to give up their Christian faith. Within marriages, women also face oppression and threats of divorce from their husbands. This reinforces the feeling that they are unequal, creating fear and despondency.

As women and girls are socially in a weaker position than men, girls and young women are [more at risk of sexual abuse](#). Sources report that young women are at particular risk when in police custody and in rural areas. Instances of rape have also been reported. It is, however, difficult to establish the number of victims of sexual harassment and assault; due to the particularly sensitive nature of the violation and the ensuing shame it causes, victims usually refrain from reporting instances of abuse.

Male Pressure Points:

- ***Abduction***
- ***Economic harassment via work/job/business***
- ***False charges***
- ***Incarceration by government***
- ***Violence – physical***
- ***Violence – psychological***

Although men generally have [higher positions than women](#) at the workplace, Christian men also face discrimination and harassment at work, with some losing their jobs altogether because of their faith. As men are the primary breadwinners in Vietnam, this paralyzes the whole family economically and weakens their place within society. If they are church leaders, their congregations are weakened and may even face closure.

Christian men in Vietnam are targets for arrests (on faith-related grounds) and abduction, causing many to flee their villages. According to a [2019 Amnesty International report](#), 128 prisoners of conscience are currently in prison, including several Catholic activists who were speaking out for religious freedom. One such activist was reportedly arrested for ‘producing, disseminating or spreading information and documents aimed at undermining Vietnam.’ Generally, once in custody, Christian detainees suffer harsh treatment, physical beatings and are put under pressure to renounce their Christian faith. According to one report, a detainee was poisoned by police before being physically beaten. His family, upon visiting him, found him chained to the hospital bed he had been placed in.

Persecution of other religious minorities

Being Communist, the government acts against all religions, including Buddhists, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao Buddhists and Muslims. This starts with harassment and may end up in detention or expulsion from their homes, villages or country. Particularly members of the country’s ethnic minorities are on the authorities’ radar. As is typical for all Communist governments, the Vietnamese authorities seek to keep all religious groups under control. As long as they are organized under government-controlled councils and thus meet with the government’s knowledge, the latter will leave them alone, except for controlling what is preached. Independent groups, however, come under serious pressure from the government, especially their leaders. This can lead to serious health issues and even end up with the imprisonment of [unruly monks](#) from one of the many Buddhist sects.

As described by the [Human Rights Watch 2019](#) report: "In February 2018, authorities tried and convicted five independent Hoa Hao Buddhist practitioners including Bui Van Trung and his son Bui Van Tham, and sentenced them to between three and six years in prison for criticizing the government and staging a public protest against religious repression. In June, men in civilian clothes broke into the house of Cao Dai religious activist Hua Phi in Lam Dong province, where they beat him and cut off his beard. In September, under police pressure, 91-year-old prominent religious leader Venerable Thich Quang Do was forced to leave Thanh Minh Zen Monastery in Ho Chi Minh City to return to his hometown in Thai Binh province."

Future outlook for the church

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

- **Communist and post-Communist oppression:** It is no surprise that the new "Law on Religion and Belief" does not bring any tangible positive change. The registration and running of Christian churches will be at least as cumbersome as it is now, and speaking about one's faith in public is likely to remain dangerous. Civil rights and freedom of religion will remain elusive and *Communist oppression* will continue to be heavily felt by Christians for the time-being. This pressure may even increase if relations with Vietnam's big neighbor China are warming up again. Repression against Christians will also continue because the [dynamics of oppression](#) whereby civil servants seek to please their superiors by adding pressure on Christians.
- **Clan and ethnic antagonism:** Many Vietnamese follow age-old traditions of worshipping ancestors and spirits. Whoever decides not to join in these traditions puts themselves outside of the family and community and will therefore be put under strong pressure to belong again. As family bonds are still strong, especially in the rural areas, this pressure will not cease for Christians coming from this background.

External Links - WWL 2020: Persecution Dynamics

- Position on World Watch List (WWL): 39 Vietnamese migrants - <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/poverty-ambition-drive-vietnams-underground-labor-10302019171553.html>
- Persecution engines: "Montagnards" - <https://www.rfa.org/english/commentaries/vietnam-montagnards-10232018155849.html>
- Violence: widely reported - <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ASA4103032019ENGLISH.pdf>
- Violence: demolished - https://www.reuters.com/article/us-vietnam-landrights-protests/vietnam-demolitions-pit-catholic-church-against-authorities-idUSKCN1PB16N?utm_source=Pew+Research+Center&utm_campaign=2405e5189f-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_01_17_03_06&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_3e953b9b70-2405e5189f-399904105
- Gender profile of persecution: 71% percent female workforce participation - <http://https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/men-still-have-edge-communist-vietnams-gender-equal-system?amp>
- Gender profile of persecution: Confucian values - <https://www.insideasiatours.com/blog/2017/10/18/women-in-vietnam/>

- Gender profile of persecution: forced to marry non-Christians -
https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/report_SituationalanalysisCEFMVietnamLaosMyanmarandCambodia-FINAL.docx-2.pdf%20
- Gender profile of persecution: more at risk of sexual abuse -
<https://www.unicef.org/vietnam/stories/shame-and-pain-vietnam-starts-grapple-child-abuse-epidemic>
- Gender profile of persecution: higher positions than women -
<https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/men-still-have-edge-communist-vietnams-gender-equal-system?amp>
- Gender profile of persecution: 2019 Amnesty International report -
<https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ASA4103032019ENGLISH.pdf>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: unruly monks -
<https://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/hermit-sentence-01232018153825.html>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Human Rights Watch 2019 -
<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/vietnam>
- Future outlook for the church: dynamics of oppression -
<https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/why-is-repression-rising-in-vietnam/>

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 Vietnam.

World Watch Monitor news articles

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

Recent country developments

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