

World
Watch
Research

Central African Republic:
Full Country Dossier
January 2024



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Introduction

World Watch List 2024

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	12.8	96	98	96	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	10.6	93	92	91	92	92
3	Libya	15.9	16.0	15.9	16.1	16.4	10.2	91	88	91	92	90
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.8	89	89	88	88	87
5	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	89	88	87	85
6	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.5	14.9	14.4	16.7	88	88	87	85	80
7	Pakistan	13.2	13.9	15.0	15.1	13.1	16.7	87	86	87	88	88
8	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	13.3	87	83	79	79	85
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.8	16.5	10.9	86	86	85	86	85
10	Afghanistan	15.7	15.9	15.2	16.3	16.6	4.6	84	84	98	94	93
11	India	12.2	12.6	13.3	14.8	13.2	16.5	83	82	82	83	83
12	Syria	13.4	14.3	13.9	14.3	14.2	11.1	81	80	78	81	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.7	16.6	3.3	81	80	81	78	79
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	12.8	15.1	15.6	79	76	70	67	66
15	Algeria	14.4	14.1	11.5	14.0	15.6	9.8	79	73	71	70	73
16	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.0	14.8	13.9	7.8	79	76	78	82	76
17	Myanmar	12.2	10.6	13.4	13.7	13.0	16.1	79	80	79	74	73
18	Maldives	15.6	15.5	13.6	16.0	16.4	0.9	78	77	77	77	78
19	China	13.0	10.0	12.8	14.6	16.0	11.1	78	77	76	74	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	13.8	15.6	75	71	68	67	66
21	Laos	11.6	10.6	13.2	14.3	14.0	11.3	75	68	69	71	72
22	Cuba	13.2	8.7	13.8	13.3	15.1	8.7	73	70	66	62	52
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	1.3	72	72	70	71	68
24	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.7	12.8	14.4	5.4	71	69	69	67	66
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.9	12.6	15.5	1.7	71	71	71	71	73
26	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.5	10.8	10.4	14.1	71	69	68	67	63
27	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.9	70	70	68	62	60
28	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	70	68	66	68
29	Turkmenistan	14.2	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.5	0.6	70	70	69	70	70
30	Nicaragua	12.1	7.6	13.2	13.2	14.1	9.6	70	65	56	51	41
31	Oman	14.3	14.0	10.6	13.3	14.0	3.1	69	65	66	63	62
32	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	14.4	69	66	66	65	63
33	Tunisia	12.3	13.2	10.2	12.4	13.8	6.9	69	67	66	67	64
34	Colombia	11.1	8.6	12.9	11.3	10.4	14.1	68	71	68	67	62
35	Vietnam	11.3	9.4	12.4	13.8	14.2	7.2	68	70	71	72	72
36	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	12.4	14.1	14.3	2.2	68	66	67	64	61
37	Mexico	11.5	8.5	12.5	11.1	10.6	14.1	68	67	65	64	60
38	Egypt	12.5	13.7	11.4	11.9	10.9	7.8	68	68	71	75	76
39	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.0	68	68	65	63	43
40	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.6	67	68	74	67	66
41	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.9	67	67	66	64	56
42	Indonesia	10.9	12.3	11.5	10.2	9.7	11.5	66	68	68	63	60
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.0	13.1	15.9	66	65	65	64	60
44	Brunei	15.0	14.7	10.0	10.8	14.1	1.3	66	65	64	64	63
45	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.1	66	66	63	62	57
46	Tajikistan	13.8	12.6	12.3	12.9	13.4	0.6	66	66	65	66	65
47	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.8	12.1	12.8	14.3	1.1	65	65	64	64	64
48	Jordan	12.9	14.2	10.5	12.4	12.8	2.2	65	65	66	64	64
49	Malaysia	13.0	14.1	11.5	12.2	11.1	2.4	64	66	63	63	62
50	Turkey	13.0	11.5	11.6	13.2	11.4	3.1	64	66	65	69	63

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	12.4	63	64	63	62	61
52	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	14.4	62	63	61	58	55
53	Nepal	12.1	10.4	9.5	13.2	12.3	4.4	62	61	64	66	64
54	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	64	64	63	62
55	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	1.1	61	60	59	56	56
56	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	10.6	61	58	55	53	56
57	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.7	61	62	62	62	60
58	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.2	10.8	11.5	9.7	5.9	60	57	63	62	65
59	Azerbaijan	13.2	9.9	9.6	11.9	13.6	1.7	60	59	60	56	57
60	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	9.7	10.7	12.1	0.9	60	60	59	58	60
61	Kyrgyzstan	13.2	10.3	11.3	10.5	12.2	1.3	59	59	58	58	57
62	Russian Federation	12.7	7.7	10.6	12.8	12.9	1.7	58	57	56	57	60
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	9.4	58	57	50	42	42
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	12.8	57	55	52	48	48
65	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	1.1	55	55	57	56	55
66	Honduras	7.9	4.7	12.2	7.3	9.9	12.6	55	53	48	46	39
67	Venezuela	6.0	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	10.7	53	56	51	39	42
68	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	8.9	52	49	44	43	41
69	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	7.2	52	48	43	47	45
70	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	15.9	52	51	48	47	48
71	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	52	51	46	43
72	Lebanon	11.0	10.2	7.0	6.1	6.6	7.2	48	40	11	-	35
73	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	3.7	47	44	44	43	43
74	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.6	46	46	43	43	44
75	Belarus	9.6	3.8	5.8	9.7	13.3	3.3	46	43	33	30	28
76	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	44	42	42	42
77	Ukraine	5.5	4.8	8.0	11.6	11.6	2.8	44	37	37	34	33
78	Israel	9.8	8.6	5.8	6.3	6.9	6.7	44	38	41	40	38

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2024 reporting period was 1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- 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 can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/> and on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom): <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>.

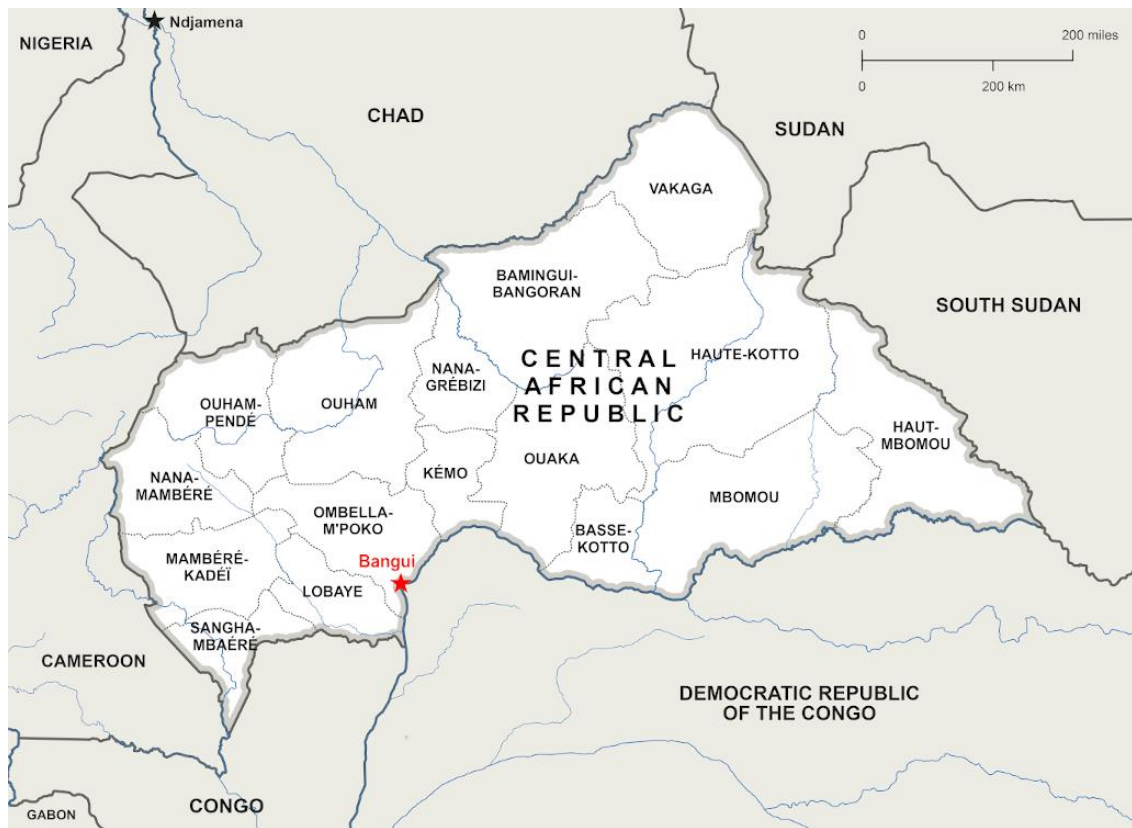
WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Central African Republic

Brief country details

Central African Republic: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
5,119,000	3,807,000	74.4

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Map of country



Central African Republic: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	70	28
WWL 2023	70	24
WWL 2022	68	31
WWL 2021	66	35
WWL 2020	68	25

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Central African Republic:	
Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Violent religious groups, Organized crime cartels or networks, Non-Christian religious leaders, Ethnic group leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family
Organized corruption and crime	Organized crime cartels or networks
Clan oppression	Ethnic group leaders

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

Most of the country is occupied by armed groups, responsible for a range of human rights abuses. Christian leaders who have publicly denounced the violence have been threatened and church buildings have been burned and ransacked. The conflict has resulted in the displacement of thousands of Christians who have been forced to live in camps and lose their homes and livelihood. Converts to Christianity also face the persecution that comes from their immediate family members. The conflict in the Central African Republic has undergone significant evolution over the past decade, marked by shifting alliances and newly formed coalitions. Notably, recent developments indicate a shift in the conflict's nature, with a decreased emphasis on religious factors and a heightened focus on power dynamics and resource control. Without this shift, the Central African Republic's score might have been higher.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

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

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

- Christian converts in Muslim-majority areas experience pressure and violence from their family and community to renounce their faith (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christians and their activities are monitored by rebel groups (ICCPR Art. 17)
- Christian female converts run the risk of being abducted and forcibly married to Muslim men (ICCPR Art. 23; CEDAW Art. 16 and ICESCR Art. 10)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- Christian groups numbering less than 1,000 members face difficulty in obtaining official recognition since the law states that "religious groups must prove they have a minimum of 1,000 members and their leaders have adequate religious education" (Source: US State Department IRFR 2022 CAR).
- Muslim armed groups have targeted Christians and Christian houses of worship for attack.
- In consequence, many Christians have been forced to flee their homes and seek safety in other regions or countries.

Specific examples of positive developments

Since July 2022, the government has been planning to establish a place of worship specifically for Eastern Orthodox Christians, including the Russian Orthodox Church, despite their relatively low numbers in the country. Some observers perceive this as an attempt to cultivate closer ties with the Russian government. The presence of the Russian-backed Wagner Group, which is actively involved in supporting government forces in the Central African Republic, may be seen as a factor influencing this decision.

External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / CAR

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/23 CAR report	AI CAR 2022	https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/west-and-central-africa/central-african-republic/report-central-african-republic/	29 June 2023
BBC News CAR profile - updated 10 April 2023	BBC CAR profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13150040	29 June 2023
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI CAR 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/CAF	29 June 2023
CIA World Factbook CAR - updated 14 June 2023	World Factbook CAR	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/central-african-republic/	29 June 2023
Crisis24 CAR report (Garda World)	Crisis24 CAR report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/central-african-republic	29 June 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit CAR profile 2023	EIU CAR profile 2023	https://country.eiu.com/central-african-republic	29 June 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2023 CAR	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	29 June 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, CAR not included	Democracy Index 2023	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2023 CAR	https://freedomhouse.org/country/central-african-republic/freedom-world/2023	29 June 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report – covering 70 countries, CAR not included	Freedom on the Net 2023	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores	
Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 – covering 170 countries	GIWPS 2021 CAR profile	https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/central-african-republic/	29 June 2023
Girls Not Brides CAR report	Girls Not Brides CAR	https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/central-african-republic/	29 June 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 - CAR country chapter	HRW 2023 CAR country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/central-african-republic	29 June 2023
Internet World Stats available in 2023	IWS 2023 CAR	https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#cf	29 June 2023
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2023 CAR	https://rsf.org/en/central-african-republic	29 June 2023
Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2022 CAR	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/caf	29 June 2023
UNDP: Human Development Report CAR	UNDP HDR CAR	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/CAF	29 June 2023
US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report CAR	IRFR 2022 CAR	https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/central-african-republic/	29 June 2023
USCIRF 2023 country reports – covering 17 CPC / 11 SWL	USCIRF 2023 CAR SWL	https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/Central%20African%20Republic%20(CAR).pdf	29 June 2023
World Bank CAR data 2021	World Bank CAR data	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=CAF	29 June 2023
World Bank CAR overview – updated 30 March 2023	World Bank CAR overview	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/centralafricanrepublic/overview#1	29 June 2023
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook CAR - April 2023	Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 CAR	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2fec5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-caf.pdf	29 June 2023

Recent history

The Central African Republic (CAR) used to be a French colony known as Ubangi-Shari, which gained independence in 1960. Since then, the country has been mired in cycles of violence. These cycles have been driven by overlapping tensions between armed groups, religious and ethnic groups, and herders and farmers. As a result, CAR has endured repeated outbreaks of conflict, population displacement, alarming food insecurity, and limited access to basic services and economic opportunities.

General François Bozizé seized power in a 2003 coup backed by neighboring Chad. The following years saw intermittent fighting between the government and various rebel groups. In 2013, a militia called Séléka (widely perceived as a coalition of Muslim fighters) took control of the capital Bangui and their leader Michel Djotodia became the first Muslim president in CAR's history. However, that same year President Djotodia resigned due to intense pressure from the international community and was replaced by Catherine Samba-Panza, who served as interim president from 2013-2014 until elections were held.

After much delay, in February 2016 the Interim Government managed to hold the election that was supposed to be a significant milestone in the country's history. Faustin-Archange Touadéra won the election and was sworn in as a president. He immediately made peace and reconciliation his priority, but clashes continued in some parts of the country involving the mainly Muslim Séléka and the self-defense groups, called Anti-Balaka. Although these latter

groups are frequently referred to as Christians, they are mostly Animists in faith and churches have strongly disassociated themselves from them. Due to the obvious religious overtones of the conflict, both Christian and Muslim civilians are victims of the violence perpetrated by the Séléka and Anti-Balaka militants.

Attempts by both UN peacekeepers and government forces failed to stop the conflict, which has continued with attacks against civilians, humanitarian workers and peacekeeping forces. In February 2019, yet another agreement - the Political Accord for Peace and Reconciliation - was signed with more than a dozen rebel groups. This gave hope that there might indeed be light at the end of the tunnel.

According to the [UN Security Council Report](#) of 31 January 2020: Since the signing of the Political Peace Agreement on 6 February 2019, "there has been a notable decrease, compared to the previous year, in military confrontations between armed groups, CAR security forces, and MINUSCA and in human rights violations linked to the conflict. However, the final report of the Panel of Experts assisting the 2127 CAR Sanctions Committee, which was presented to the committee on 2 December 2019, determined that the implementation of the peace agreement 'remained limited'."

According to the [UN Security Council Report](#) of 31 January 2020: "The return of former presidents François Bozizé and Michel Djotodia to the CAR on 15 December 2019 and 10 January, respectively, has raised concerns about their possible destabilizing effect on the already fragile political climate". Despite the danger of instability, elections went ahead on 27 December 2020. The elections were held amid outbreaks of violence as rebels belonging to the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC) sought to disrupt the process across the country by burning ballot boxes and intimidating voters. In roughly a dozen towns, including Bozizé's stronghold of Bossangoa, residents were unable to vote at all. Several opposition presidential candidates called for the results to be annulled, claiming widespread fraud. Despite this, the head of the National Elections Authority declared that incumbent President Touadéra had won re-election, gaining an absolute majority of 53.9% of the vote in the first round. The wave of violence that preceded the elections continued, having worsened since the beginning of 2021. The post-election period saw a surge in attacks by armed groups seeking to overthrow President Touadéra. In light of the rising violence, on 21 January 2021, a state of emergency was announced after CPC forces attempted to blockade the country's capital, Bangui.

According to the BTI report 2022 (covering the year 2021): "The International Criminal Court continued its investigations into alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity committed since 2012 and made its first arrest since 2018 in January 2021. The country's own Special Criminal Court also continued its investigations."

Some major developments in regard to atrocities and judicial accountability

- In March 2022, Chad handed over Maxime Mokom, a former anti-balaka military coordinator, to the International Criminal Court (ICC). Mokom had sought refuge in Chad after being involved in the CPC's failed attempt to seize Bangui in 2020.
- Throughout 2022 and 2023, the Wagner Group continued its combat operations in Chad, despite facing accusations of committing atrocities against civilians during their operations.

- In August 2022, the International Criminal Court issued a warrant for the arrest of Nouredine Adam, a former number 2 commander of the Seleka militia. He is wanted on charges of crimes against humanity.
- The ICC trial of Seleka commander Mahamat Said Abdel Kani commenced in September 2022 in The Hague. Said is facing allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Bangui in 2013. He was identified as an "immediate subordinate" to Nouredine Adam.
- In April 2022, the Special Criminal Court (SCC), which benefits from significant international assistance, initiated its first trial. The case involved three suspects from the 3R rebel group: Issa Sallet Adoum, Ousman Yaouba, and Tahir Mahamat. They were accused of perpetrating war crimes and crimes against humanity in Koundjili and Lemouna, Ouham Pende province, in May 2019.
- On 31 October 2022 the court found the three men guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity, marking a significant step in seeking justice for the atrocities committed in Chad.

Political and legal landscape

The [2016 Constitution](#) provides for freedom of religion under conditions set by law and equal protection under the law regardless of religion - and this is generally respected in practice.

Most analysts agree that family bloodlines, local ethnic politics and rebel militancy have been key in shaping politics in CAR. Several tribes have been waging war against each other, aggravated by the political and economic situation and social issues. Northern tribes are dominantly Islamic; before the coup by Bozizé in 2003 they fought each other for power but joined forces under the umbrella of Séléka prior to staging the 2013 coup. Across the country, relations have been tense among the various tribes, and conflicts between them have led to considerable loss of life over the years.

Freedom House's Global Freedom Index 2023 states:

- (Section B4): "Due to the long-lasting tribalization of politics, the country's public institutions and army are dominated by its ethnic majority, the Gbaya, to which former President Bozizé belongs. President Touadéra has also promoted members of his groups, the Mbaka-Mandja, to key senior positions and to the presidential guard."
- (Section B1): "While political parties are legally able to form and operate, party members conducting political activities risk intimidation and violence by the national police and progovernment militias in Bangui, and by armed groups and security forces outside the capital."
- (Key developments in 2022): "In August, President Faustin-Archange Touadéra announced a constitutional referendum as part of his efforts to seek a third term. In September, the Constitutional Court ruled that the creation of a drafting committee was unconstitutional; Touadéra dismissed court chief Danièle Darlan by decree in October."

According to [HRW 2024 country chapter CAR](#):

- "The country veered toward authoritarianism with crackdowns on civil society, the media, and opposition political parties ahead of a constitutional referendum designed to remove term limits for the president, Faustin-Archange Touadéra. The referendum passed in July

- with diverging accounts of voter turnout."
- "The next presidential vote is due in 2025."

Gender perspective

Under CAR’s family code, men and women have equal rights in relation to marriage, divorce and child guardianship. According to traditional law however, in cases of divorce women are expected to leave the home and leave their children under the guardianship of the father; practices vary by territory and according to the religious affiliations of communities. CAR has the second highest prevalence of child marriage globally, with 68% of girls marrying before 18 and 29% before the age of 15. The figure is also high for boys, at 28% (Girls not Brides CAR). Driving factors include poverty, lack of education and opportunities and insecurity. Whilst the minimum age of marriage is 18 years under the [Family Code 1998](#), individuals can marry under this age with parental consent. This loophole could be exploited for the purpose of religious persecution, particularly for female converts to Christianity.

Rape and domestic violence are outlawed, although gaps remain in legislation, for example in failing to recognize economic violence as a form of domestic violence. One of the characteristics of countries in crisis is that men play a significant role both in initiating and participating in conflicts. The natural flow from this is that any negotiation or settlement puts men at a better position in terms of political power. Even though it is difficult to know the role of religion in the final analysis of political power-sharing, it can be assumed that women are not on equal terms with men.

Religious landscape

Central African Republic: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	3,807,000	74.4
Muslim	711,000	13.9
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethno-religionist	548,000	10.7
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	13,200	0.3
Atheist	730	0.0
Agnostic	38,100	0.7
Other	0	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. , *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

CAR is a predominantly Christian country; although relations between Muslims and Christians appeared good on the surface in previous years, tension had been growing under the surface. In particular, converts from Islam to Christianity have always faced persecution. Male converts most commonly experience physical violence, whereas female converts risk being forcibly married to a Muslim. Christians living in Muslim-dominated areas in northern, eastern and western regions have reported discrimination and other forms of social pressure. Many Christians (and Muslims) intermix their faith with several ethno-religious practices including sorcery and witchcraft.

According to WCD 2023 estimates, Christians constitute 74.4% of the population and Muslims 13.9%. Islam has shown significant growth in the last decade - rising from 5% to almost 14% - and has been strengthened by groups settling from Chad and Sudan. Dissatisfaction at the perceived marginalization of northern Muslims was one of the root causes for the coup in March 2013 that gave rise to a deadly conflict along religious and ethnic lines. The Christian community is very concerned about the Islamic inroads being established in the country and church leaders have repeatedly pointed out that the rebellion that led to the coup had a religious agenda.

Normal church life is very difficult as meetings of Christians in many areas take place under the threat of possible attack; Ex-Séléka groups attack churches in the Muslim-dominated areas of the country and especially target churches that are more involved in openly integrating converts from the Muslim community. Anti-Balaka rebel groups also attack churches and any Christians who oppose their activities. Both of these rebel groups have involvement in criminal activities. Christians also face frequent harassment in the big cities - especially in Bangui close to the PK5 quarter - and in north-eastern areas.

Economic landscape

According to the World Bank country 2023 overview:

- After experiencing two years of virtual stagnation, the economy of the Central African Republic (CAR) is estimated to have shown zero growth in 2022. However, there is hope for improvement as projections indicate an average growth rate of 3.6 percent in the years 2023 to 2025. This positive trajectory is expected to lead to the recovery of per capita GDP, allowing it to return to its pre-COVID-19 pandemic level. These economic prospects offer a glimmer of hope for the country's financial stability and potential development in the coming years.
- The medium-term outlook for the Central African Republic (CAR) shows a modest rebound in its economy. Assuming that official fuel prices align with regular market prices and security conditions improve, real GDP growth is projected to reach 3.0 percent in 2023, and then further increase to an average of 3.8 percent between 2024 and 2025. The growth will be primarily driven by factors such as net exports, private consumption, and gross fixed investment.
- The economy will be supported by higher international timber prices, lower inflation rates, and a moderate fiscal consolidation effort. These factors collectively contribute to a positive growth trend for the CAR in the medium term.

According to the [2023 Economic Freedom Index](#):

- CAR has an economic freedom score of 43.8, positioning its economy as the 166th freest globally. This score reflects a decline of 1.9 points compared to the previous year.
- In the Sub-Saharan Africa region, CAR is ranked 43rd out of 47 countries, indicating a relatively low level of economic freedom compared to its neighboring nations. Moreover, CAR's overall score falls below both the world and regional averages

Gender perspective

CAR performed poorly on Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index, which is mainly due to poor rates of financial inclusion for women (GIWPS 2021 CAR profile) at rank #157 although this was an improvement by 22 points from the previous year. The labor force participation rate stands at 64.4% of women, compared to 79.8% of men (UNDP HDR CAR). Many women and girls are therefore economically dependent on their families, which can make them vulnerable if they convert to Christianity.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the World Factbook CAR:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Baya 28.8%, Banda 22.9%, Mandjia 9.9%, Sara 7.9%, Mboum 6%, M'Baka 7.9%, Arab-Fulani (Peul) 6%, Mbum 6%, Ngbanki 5.5%, Zande-Nzakara 3%, other Central African Republic ethnic groups 2%, non-Central African Republic ethnic groups 1%
- **Main languages:** French (official), Sangho (Lingua franca and national language), tribal languages.
- **Population growth rate:** 1.79% (2021 est.)
- **Urban population:** 42.6% of the total population (2021)
- **Rate of urbanization:** 3.32% annual rate of change (2020-2025 est.)
- **Median age:** 17.6 years
- **Expected years of schooling:** 7.6 years (6.2 years for girls, compared to 8.9 years for boys)
- **Literacy rate, adult (15 years and older):** 37.4%
- **Employment to population ratio (15 years and older):** 69.3%
- **Unemployment:** 3.7% of total labor force
- **Youth unemployment (15-24 years):** 5.7%

According to the World Bank country overview:

- **Poverty:** Despite gradual increases in private consumption, the poverty rate in the Central African Republic (CAR) is expected to remain high. The medium-term outlook for the country is susceptible to significant external and internal risks. The projection indicates that poverty will remain elevated, with approximately 69.1 percent of the population living in extreme poverty in 2022. This means that a significant portion of the population, about two-thirds, is living below the international poverty line of US\$2.15 per person per day (at 2017 purchasing power parity). The challenge of poverty reduction remains significant in the CAR, requiring sustained efforts and effective policies to raise the living standards of its citizens.

According to Central African Republic - [Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #3](#), Fiscal Year (FY) 2023, published by OCHA on 30 June 2023:

- **Estimated number of people in need of humanitarian assistance:** 3.4 million.
- **Projected number of people facing acute food insecurity from April to August 2023:** 2.4 million.
- **Number of IDPs in CAR:** 488,861.
- **Number of refugees from CAR residing in neighboring countries:** 744,210.

As reported by UNDP HDR CAR:

- **Human Development Index (2022):** CAR is one of the poorest countries in the world and one of the 10 poorest in Africa ranking 188th out of 191, with an index value of 0.404.
- **Average life expectancy at birth:** 53.3 years
- **Gender inequality:** CAR has also one of the lowest education and gender equality indicators of the world- 0.672. The gender development index (GDI) is 0.810.

Gender perspective

CAR is heavily shaped by patriarchal norms; men are widely held as the head of the household, whereas women are expected to lead in the domestic sphere. According to a [2016 Tearfund report](#), marital rape and domestic violence are not just common place, but are widely accepted. The study revealed that both men and women believed that there are times when a woman deserves to be beaten or disciplined (e.g. by refusing sex to their husband, or being deemed confrontational). Many chose not to report incidents of abuse due to stigma and out of fear of losing their children. According to a [UNDP report published on 15 July 2020](#), gender-based violence (GBV) surged when COVID-19 restrictions were introduced; despite a national strategy aimed at reducing GBV, statistics pre-COVID were already of concern.

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2023):

- **Internet users (survey date - December 2021):** 557,085, accounting for 11.2% of the population.
- **Facebook users (survey date - January 2022):** 147,200, indicating a penetration rate of 3.0%.

According to the World Bank data CAR:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 34 per 100 people with a total of 1,831,000 people (Statistics on Internet usage and mobile phone ownership by gender are lacking.)

The persistent violence in the Central African Republic (CAR) and its neighboring countries has hindered the development of technological infrastructure. As a result, the adoption of modern technology in communication, financial services, agriculture and transportation sectors is not well-advanced.

Security situation

There are more than 14 factions fighting against the government and against each other. Many armed groups have been forming alliances with others and some groups have foreign fighters who are fighting in the country to establish a Sharia state. Others are motivated by greed and power and have no mercy toward anyone opposing them. The Rwandan and Russian Wagner groups also joined the fighting which is making life for Christians more challenging. Many credible reports have showed that different fighting groups including government security forces have committed atrocities. In the middle of this, Christians cannot speak out against the injustice being committed in the country. They cannot comment on the increasingly powerful criminal gangs that are in fact facilitating the prevalence of the different armed factions. The government is only in control of the capital city, Bangui. The rest of the country is divided among different factions. These factors have also made the tracking of persecution more complex.

In February 2019, the government and 14 armed groups [signed a peace treaty](#) (AP News, 2 February 2019) but this collapsed in the run-up to the December 2020 elections. The presence and influence of Rwanda and the Wagner mercenary group are growing in the country. The Chadian army has also continued its operations in the country.

There are many factors complicating the security situation in the country, as highlighted in the [International Crisis Group's](#) June 2023 report:

- Late May: President Touadéra schedules constitutional referendum for 30 July, sparking political tensions and concerns among opposition and civil society groups.
- 1st June: Opposition leader Alexandre Ferdinand N'Guendet threatens to march on the capital and calls for the army's support to overthrow Touadéra.
- 3rd June: Opposition party Resistance and Transition Council urges citizens to rise up against Touadéra.
- 6th June: Army generals reject N'Guendet's call to overthrow the president.
- 9th June: President Touadéra appoints Evariste Ngamana as head of the referendum campaign, sidelining party's executive secretary Simplicie Mathieu Sarandji, who has spoken against constitutional reform.
- 12th June: Public prosecutor launches an investigation into N'Guendet's actions.
- 16th June: UN human rights expert in CAR warns that the referendum could lead to further human rights violations and urges authorities to prevent hate speech and violence during the vote.
- 5th June: Clashes between government forces and CPC rebels in Baoro town result in three civilians injured.
- 8th June: CPC fighters ambush government forces near Kadjama village, killing three and capturing one.
- 13th June: CPC fighters attack army and Wagner positions in Makoundji Wali village, with unknown casualties.
- 11th June: Government forces and Wagner capture a senior CPC official during an operation in Bria town, following rumors of a major attack.
- 20th June: Self-defence militia Azandé Ani Kpi Gbé clashes with Union for Peace in CAR rebels in Mboki town, resulting in an unknown number of casualties.

The International Crisis group reported in [December 2023](#):

- "Northern regions remained subject to armed violence, mainly along Chadian border. Clashes between Russian paramilitary Wagner Group and rebels of Central African Patriotic Movement (MPC) 9 Dec left 30 fighters and one Wagner officer dead in Markounda town (Ouham prefecture); violence, which took place after MPC leader Mahamat Al-Khatim in Nov signed agreement with govt allowing MPC's return to 2019 Khartoum peace deal, illustrated limits of govt's strategy of pushing warlords to announce dissolution of their groups in absence of credible way out for militiamen under their command. Drones 10 Dec dropped explosive charges on Wagner's Kaga-Bandoro base (Nana-Gribizi prefecture), killing four Wagner elements and wounding another 13; alliance of major rebel groups Coalition of Patriots for Change denied responsibility. 3R armed group 21 Dec killed 23 civilians in Nzakoundou village, Lim-Pendé prefecture; UN force 27 Dec announced deployment of peacekeepers to reinforce security in area and facilitate humanitarian access."

Numerous reports indicate that the Wagner Group has continued to commit violations of civilian rights while conducting operations against armed groups.

Gender perspective

Within this context of fragility and insecurity, women and girls (especially IDPs) are especially vulnerable to incidences of sexual and gender-based violence at the hands of armed groups ([Human Rights Watch, 21 June 2019](#)). Despite these threats, women are reportedly left out of the peace building process, causing deep frustration among female leaders ([UN, Africa Renewal](#), last accessed 30 January 2023). Men and boys are vulnerable to forced recruitment into militias, as well as to abductions and killings.

Trends analysis

1) Instability and impunity is rampant

The conflict that erupted in 2013 has created massive humanitarian suffering. It has also fundamentally changed the relationship between Christians and Muslims in the country. Despite the elections in 2015, 2016 and 2020 (which many hoped would bring a fresh chance of reconciliation), there are no state structures that can effectively restore peace and accountability. On many occasions church leaders of the main denominations have condemned the violence perpetrated by armed groups against civilians. President Touadera (elected in 2016 and re-elected in December 2020) was not able to extend government control over the whole of the country's territory. As a result, many armed groups are controlling large portions of the country. Traffickers, other organized crime cartels, and fighters from other countries are active in CAR. The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and government security forces have not been able to exert effective control beyond the capital city. In October 2021, the government "officially acknowledged that rebel militants, FACA troops, and Russian forces in the country had committed numerous human rights violations against civilians in the CAR" ([Freedom in the World 2022 CAR](#)). Nothing has been done

to effectively address the impunity that is rampant in the country. What exacerbates the impunity and widens its scope is the involvement of multiple countries in addition to Wagner. Chad's armed forces are also operating in the country, and Rwanda has been increasing its presence in the region. This complex web of foreign actors further complicates the security situation and poses challenges to addressing human rights abuses and holding perpetrators accountable.

As the instability continues in the country, the situation is becoming increasingly complex with several criminal splinter-groups emerging from the Séléka and Anti-Balaka militant groups - and in some places even joining forces. These groups both attack Christians, although for different reasons. This has put tremendous pressure on the Christian community in all areas of life. Killings and the destruction of property and churches have become common and there is nothing to change this if the status quo remains as it is. The peace treaty of February 2019, signed by the government and 14 armed groups, collapsed in the run-up to the December 2020 elections and has not been replaced.

2) The risks behind the Constitutional amendments

On 30 July 2023, a referendum was conducted, resulting in the constitutional amendment that eliminated presidential term limits. Subsequently, on 21 August 2023, the Constitutional Court of the Central African Republic validated the outcomes of the referendum, cementing changes that removed presidential term limits among other amendments, thereby significantly impacting the country's democratic governance. The decision to remove term limits has raised concerns among certain factions, viewing this amendment as a potential threat to the country's future democratic principles and advancement. This decision has raised apprehensions about the potential for additional conflict, adding to the complexity of the myriad and intersecting conflicts the country has grappled with over the past decade.

3) The changing nature of the conflict

The Central African Republic conflict has evolved significantly, witnessing a dramatic shift in the nature of the conflict dynamics. Currently, power and resource control have taken a prominent shape, a far cry from ten years ago when the landscape was markedly different. The conflict has engendered emerging alliances, deeply rooted criminal activities and corruption, signaling a substantial transformation in the conflict's fundamental aspects. Having said that, it is crucial to note that, within these shifting dynamics, elements of Islamic jihadism persist. This persistent presence underscores the multifaceted nature of the conflict.

4) The presence of foreign forces

This trend is intricately linked to the conflict itself. The country grapples with the involvement of diverse groups, including jihadist elements, the Russian Wagner Group, and the Rwandan Army. Despite a ceasefire announced by President Faustin Archange Touadéra in October 2021, ongoing conflicts involving these forces continue to profoundly impact civilian lives. Armed clashes between the national army, Russian mercenaries from the Wagner group, Rwandan troops, and factions of the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC) persist, resulting in intense fighting and grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. The fighting

has led to challenging security conditions, hampering humanitarian aid efforts and causing substantial displacement of refugees and internally displaced persons. The presence of these foreign entities significantly shapes the complex landscape of conflict within CAR, influencing the trajectory and dynamics of persecution engines within the nation.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: UN Security Council Report - <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2020-02/central-african-republic-5.php>
- Recent history: UN Security Council Report - <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2020-02/central-african-republic-5.php>
- Political and legal landscape: 2016 Constitution - https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Central_African_Republic_2016.pdf?lang=en
- Political and legal landscape: HRW 2024 Country Chapter CAR - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/central-african-republic>
- Political and legal landscape: Family Code 1998 - <https://data.unicef.org/crvs/central-african-republic/>
- Economic landscape: 2023 Economic Freedom Index: - <https://indexdotnet.azurewebsites.net/index/country/centralafricanrepublic>
- Social and cultural landscape: Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #3 - <https://reliefweb.int/report/central-african-republic/central-african-republic-complex-emergency-fact-sheet-3-fiscal-year-fy-2023>
- Social and cultural landscape: 2016 Tearfund report - <https://learn.tearfund.org/-/media/learn/resources/reports/gender-norms-violence-and-masculinity.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNDP report published on 15 July 2020, - <https://reliefweb.int/report/central-african-republic/car-violence-against-women-surg-ing-amid-covid-19-pandemic-study>
- Security situation: signed a peace treaty - <https://apnews.com/article/a250380046554b6cb0bbf6feb1510786>
- Security situation: International Crisis Group's - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/july-alerts-and-june-trends-2023#central-african-republic>
- Security situation: December 2023 - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/january-alerts-and-december-trends-2023#central-african-republic>
- Security situation: Human Rights Watch, 21 June 2019 - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/06/21/central-african-republic-wars-most-forgotten-victims>
- Security situation: UN, Africa Renewal - <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/web-features/women-seek-greater-role-rebuilding-central-african-republic>
- Trends analysis: Freedom in the World 2022 CAR - <https://freedomhouse.org/country/central-african-republic/freedom-world/2022>

WWL 2024: Church information / CAR

Christian origins

Like most African countries, CAR society was dominated by several traditional African religions practiced by different tribes. Most traditional religions in the area were dependent upon the animist tradition with practices differing from one tribe to another. The animist African tradition was more dominant in the southern and central parts of the country. Muslim traders in the northern part of the country introduced Islam to the region. Christianity became dominant in CAR after French colonists took power in the 1880s and became the religion of choice for many - possibly also due to its close association with powerful and respected colonial officials. While Roman Catholic missionaries came as early as the second half of the 19th century, Protestant missionaries (for instance, sent by US Baptists) did not start operating in the country until 1921. (Source: [World Atlas, 12 April 2018](#))

Church spectrum today

Central African Republic: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	0	0.0
Catholic	1,968,000	51.7
Protestant	912,000	24.0
Independent	927,000	24.3
Unaffiliated	24	0.0
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
Total	3,807,024	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	1,550,000	40.7
Renewalist movement	995,000	26.1

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

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

The Roman Catholic Church is by far the largest Christian denomination.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Rights violations against Christians are most severe in the northern and eastern parts of the country which are dominated by the Muslim population and where Séléka splinter-groups are operating. There are also difficulties for Christians in the eastern part of the country that borders Sudan.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: Since expatriate Christians are not involuntarily isolated in CAR, this category is not included for WWL analysis and scoring.

Historical Christian communities: This category is comprised of Roman Catholic and older Protestant churches. The Roman Catholic Church is the largest denomination in the country with the widest network of churches, clinics and schools. When the Séléka militants were in the ascendancy, cars, computers and other valuable items were looted from church-buildings and other church properties. The Catholic Church and its leadership in CAR, alongside other religious leaders, have been a strong voice calling for peace and reconciliation and have also provided places of refuge for civilians, both Muslim and Christian, fleeing attack. As a result, Catholic

churches have often been targeted for attack.

Converts to Christianity: Christians with a Muslim background experience opposition and pressure from family members to renounce Christianity if their conversion becomes known. They also have very limited opportunities to have fellowship with other Christians and worship collectively. Most Christians of Muslim background do not worship in public due to the fear of attacks by Muslim agitators. This is especially the case in the northern Muslim-dominated areas of the country.

Non-traditional Christian communities: Christians belonging to Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations (as well as those belonging to historical Christian communities) have been subject to attacks by Ex-Séléka militants. Recently, the number of people joining these Christian congregations has increased dramatically.

External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: World Atlas, 12 April 2018 - <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-religious-beliefs-of-the-central-african-republic.html>

WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / CAR

Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

Position on the World Watch List

Central African Republic: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	70	28
WWL 2023	70	24
WWL 2022	68	31
WWL 2021	66	35
WWL 2020	68	25

In the World Watch List 2024, the country maintained its score of 70 points, displaying a consistent trend in recent years where violence has been at an extreme level and pressure on average very high (10.9 points in WWL 2024), particularly in the spheres of *Community* and *Church life*. Over the past five years, the country's score has ranged from 66 to 70 points, indicating a persistent and ongoing struggle for Christians in the region.

Persecution engines

Central African Republic: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Very strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Medium
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Very weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Not at all
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Very strong

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

Islamic oppression (Very strong)

Besides the violence against Christians perpetrated particularly by the offshoots of the Séléka militia, *Islamic oppression* is also evident in the persecution of Christians by society in general in predominantly Muslim parts of the country.

Organized corruption and crime (Very strong)

This engine is particularly evident where Anti-Balaka militants attack churches and Christians. Although Anti-Balaka began as a collection of vigilante groups, they have morphed into becoming criminal gangs. Particularly in Bangui, they have often targeted Christians and church leaders, especially those who do not subscribe to their ideals or those who oppose their violent activities. While the group claims to protect Christians, it has become evident over the years that this is untrue since they attack Muslims and Christians alike.

Clan oppression (Medium)

There are two dimensions to this Persecution engine in CAR: i) Animism/ATR (religious and/or cultural) and ii) tribal fighting.

According to a country researcher:

- “Both are prevalent in CAR, while ethnic and religious motives often go together.”
- “There is pressure to participate in cultural religious practices, such as rites of passage, rituals and customs at milestones like birth, marriage and death, but also for protection (Anti-Balaka are known for this).”

- “Some ethnic minority groups are specifically targeted, for instance, Ba'aka pygmies, who are forcibly recruited for labor. Anti-Balaka forces are mainly Animists, and they attack Muslims, but often also Christians. Sometimes they force Christians into their ranks.”

Drivers of persecution

Central African Republic: Drivers of persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG			MEDIUM	VERY WEAK				VERY STRONG
Ethnic group leaders	Medium			Medium					
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong								
Religious leaders of other churches					Very weak				
Violent religious groups	Very strong								
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Medium								
One's own (extended) family	Medium								
Organized crime cartels or networks	Very strong								Very strong

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

Drivers of Islamic oppression

- **Violent religious groups (Very strong):** Muslim militant and paramilitary groups (that could be considered Ex-Séléka groups) are significant drivers of persecution. Two of them are the Popular Front for the Renaissance of Central African Republic (FPRC), and the Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC). Although many of these groups can be categorized as violent religious groups, it is also possible to view them as political parties and paramilitary organizations. These rebel groups have inflicted multiple attacks on Christian churches and private Christian property.
- **Organized crime cartels (Very strong):** Some factions of the militant groups mentioned above act as organized criminal gangs and often engage in looting and frequently target churches and church-affiliated entities.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Islamic leaders occupy all the market places, control trade and impose a huge tax on Christian businessmen and often loot the shops of Christians to reduce them to poverty. Furthermore, at a national level, figures like Michel Djotodia who was the president of the country, Nouredine Adam who was the second in command to Michel Djotodia and Ali Darassa, a Fulani ethnic Muslim leader of the Union

for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC) and Ex-Séléka leader, have led the persecution of Christians.

- **Ethnic leaders (Medium):** In the predominantly Muslim parts of the country tribal or ethnic elders also play a role in this process since they reinforce the pressure against converts to Christianity.
- **Family members (Medium), Citizens (Medium):** In the northern part of the country and areas that border Sudan, Muslim family members and communities will persecute known converts to Christianity.

Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

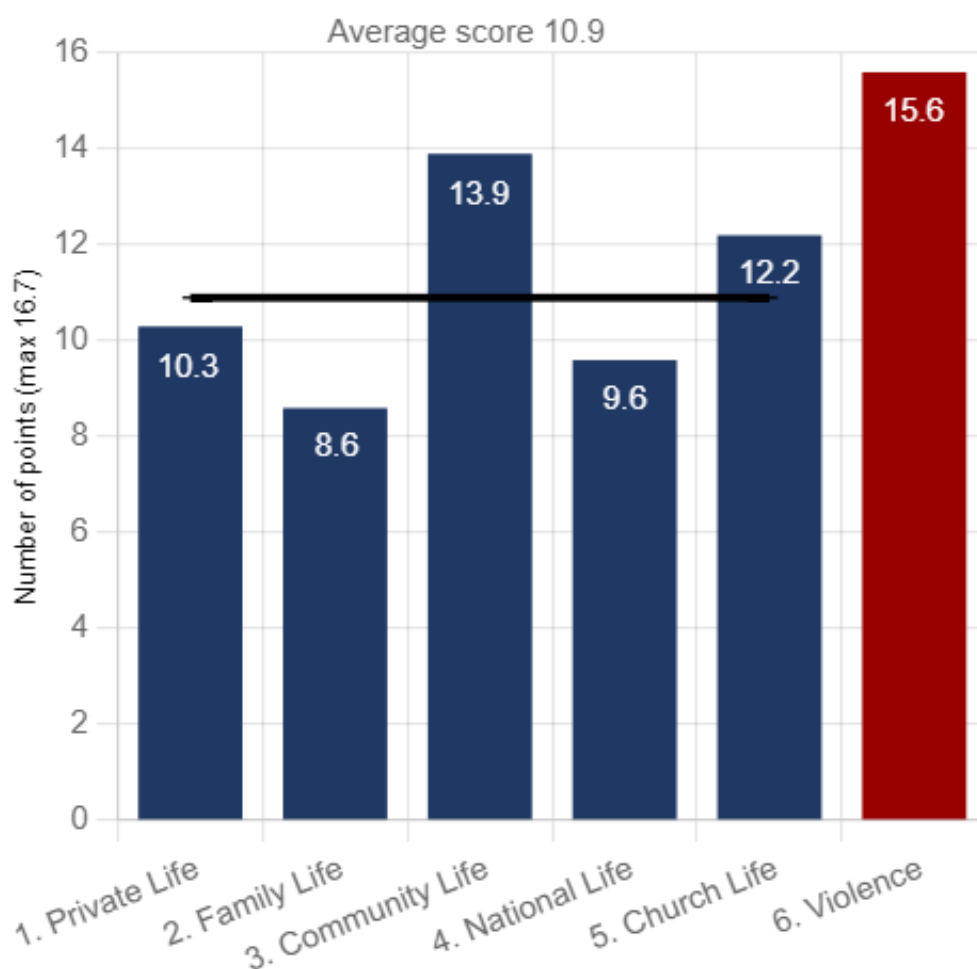
- **Organized crime cartels (Very strong):** Some factions of the militant groups mentioned above act as organized criminal gangs and often engage in looting and frequently target churches and church-affiliated entities. In addition to militants that used to belong to the Séléka, Anti-Balaka fighters also engage in such acts. The state of lawlessness and the inability of the state to impose law and order means that Christians and the wider community have little protection from the criminal acts of these groups.

Drivers of Clan oppression

- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** The main drivers of this Persecution engine are ethnic leaders and some community leaders and their members. According to a country researcher: “Tribal pressure is [present in the country] especially since Muslim leaders are from certain tribes, who target Christians for persecution, for instance, Peulh/Fulani and leaders of other movements and tribes.” Within the context of this Persecution engine, there is also an overlap between ethnic leaders and non-Christian religious leaders. Some Islamic leaders are also seen as ethnic leaders and can create an environment of hate and violence around the observance of cultural religious practices.

The Persecution pattern

WWL 2024 Persecution Pattern for Central African Republic



The WWL 2024 Persecution pattern for CAR shows:

- The score for average pressure on Christians in CAR is 10.9 points, similar to WWL 2023.
- The *Community sphere* scored highest with 13.9 points, followed by the *Church sphere* which scored 12.2 points.
- The score for violence remained at an extreme level with 15.6 points, the same as in WWL 2023.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2024 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (3.00 points)

Private possession of Christian materials poses a significant risk, particularly in areas affected by armed groups, organized crime, corruption, and ongoing injustices, posing immense pressure to protect their faith and personal possessions.

Block 1.10: Christians have been isolated from other family members or other like-minded Christians (e.g. house arrest). (3.00 points)

Christians face isolation, pressure and challenges, including house arrest, due to direct actions or complex social dynamics. They face physical threats, emotional strains, and psychological strains to maintain connections.

Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (2.75 points)

In unstable areas where armed groups fight for control, conversion to Christianity faces opposition and potential punishment, making it a sensitive issue and potentially putting individuals at risk.

Block 1.6: It has been risky for Christians to access Christian radio or TV, or Christian material on the Internet. (2.75 points)

Accessing Christian media, particularly radio, television and online, poses a significant risk for believers in regions with armed conflicts, as it may attract unwanted attention from anti-Christian groups.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.3: Christians have been hindered in celebrating a Christian wedding for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)

The turmoil and violence in certain regions have severely impacted Christians' ability to celebrate weddings and engage in faith-related practices, making it challenging for them to freely express and practice their faith.

Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (3.00 points)

Jihadists and organized crime exacerbate challenges to Christian baptisms, making them nearly impossible. This volatile environment erodes religious freedoms and traditions among Christians in certain regions.

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (2.75 points)

Christian children often face harassment and discrimination, impacting their emotional well-being and posing challenges for the younger generation; this affects the ability of parents to

raise their offspring according to their beliefs.

Block 2.10: Christian spouses and/or children of Christians have been subject to separation for prolonged periods of time by circumstances relating to persecution. (2.50 points)

Abduction, forced recruitment in militias and persecution-linked displacement lead to prolonged separation of Christian family members.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

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

An example of such harassment is what many pastors experience on account of being visible symbols of the Christian community. There have been reports of pastors being beaten, kidnapped, and murdered by Muslim rebel groups, who have additionally destroyed churches and fostered an environment of fear and distrust.

Block 3.2: 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.). (3.50 points)

Christian communities in certain regions face monitoring by locals, hampering their religious practices, community participation and business activities. It adds psychological stress, fear, and intimidation, further isolating and marginalizing Christian communities.

Block 3.6: Christians have been hindered in participating in communal institutions, forums, etc., for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)

Christians in regions impacted by Islamic oppression and Organized corruption and crime face exclusion from communal institutions and forums, limiting their influence and representation in crucial community matters. This exclusion not only impacts their religious practices but also impacts their social and civic involvement, exacerbating their isolation and precarious existence.

Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.50 points)

Christians in the Central African Republic face severe coercion to abandon their faith, resulting in assaults on religious freedom. This is especially the case for converts.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.4: Christians have been hindered in travelling for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)

Christians face travel restrictions and fear possible abduction. These restrictions, whether formal or unofficial, limit religious freedom and human rights, impacting their mobility for ministry purposes, pilgrimages and attendance at conferences.

Block 4.5: Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (local administration, government, army, etc.) for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)

Christians in the Central African Republic face discrimination from local, national, and military authorities, limiting religious freedom and causing legal disputes, restricted employment, and military participation barriers.

Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (3.25 points)

Individuals responsible for causing harm to Christians have often gone unpunished. The levels of impunity contribute to a climate of insecurity.

Block 4.7: Christians have been hindered in running their own businesses without interference for faith-related reasons (e.g. personnel policy, client admission policy). (3.00 points)

Christians face challenges in running their businesses due to faith-related discrimination, affecting their freedom of expression, assembly, and association. This crisis stifles their economic well-being and contributes to their lack of influence in broader societal structures.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (3.50 points)

The ongoing national crisis in Central Africa has significantly impacted the Church community: The extreme levels of violence and very high pressure have restricted church activities and often led to the destruction of churches. The ongoing difficulties in maintaining and establishing churches reflect the precariousness Christians face in a complex and turbulent environment.

Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (3.50 points)

The ongoing national crisis has severely impacted the Christian community. The need to keep a low-profile and avoid potential provocation limits their ability to organize activities outside church compounds.

Block 5.14: Openly selling or distributing Bibles (or other Christian materials) has been hindered. (3.50 points)

The destruction of many churches and difficulties in establishing new ones has contributed to disruptions in the distribution of religious materials, highlighting the complexities of practicing Christian faith in an unstable environment.

Block 5.18: Churches have been hindered in establishing, managing, maintaining and conducting schools, or charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural organizations, institutions and associations. (3.50 points)

In conflict-affected regions, churches struggle to set up and run schools and social institutions. This hampers their ability to provide education, social services, and community development initiatives, limiting their impact on society. The destruction of public Christian properties has curbed the Christian community's broader societal contributions.

Violence

Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:

1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced

Possible reasons for this may be:

- *Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.*
- *In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.*
- *If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives.*
- *In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.*

2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons

- *Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).*
- *In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.*
- *Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.*

3. The use of symbolic numbers

In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10, 100* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. 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 1,000* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000*, 100,000* and 1,000,000*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWL chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.*

Central African Republic: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	23	61
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	14	11
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	100 *	35
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	100 *	66
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	10 *	20
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	1000 *	100 *
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	1000 *	1000 *
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	1000 *	100 *
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	1000 *	1000
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	100 *	1000

5 Year trends

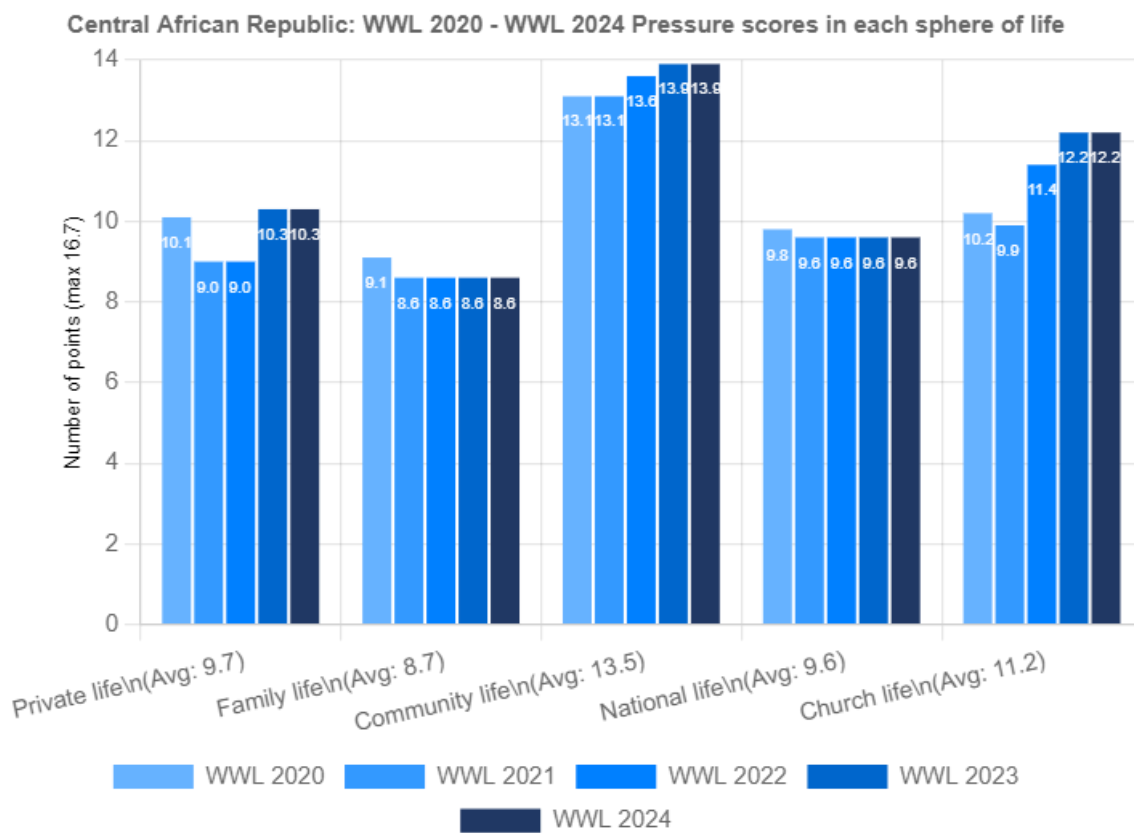
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

In the table below it can be seen that in the last five reporting periods the score for average pressure has been consistently within the range of 10.0 and 10.9 points.

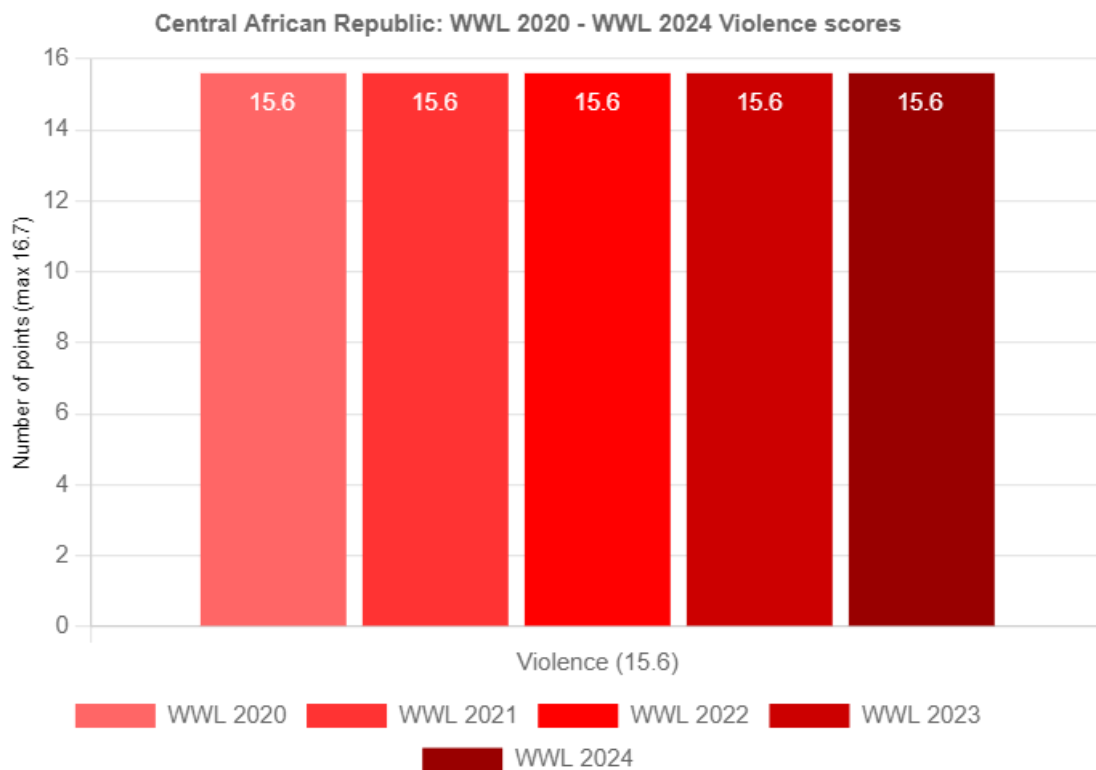
Central African Republic: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024	10.9
2023	10.9
2022	10.4
2021	10.0
2020	10.5

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



The chart above shows that the pressure on Christians in all *spheres of life* has most often been high or very high. Pressure has been highest in the *Community sphere of life*, reaching an extreme level in WWL 2023 and WWL 2024. The lowest average score over the five years occurred in the *Family sphere* with 8.7 points.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



Over the span of the past five years, there has been a consistent and concerning trend regarding the violence directed at Christians: It is stable and at an extreme level. This sustained intensity of violence against Christian communities, which has plateaued at 15.6 points, indicates just how hostile and harmful the situation for Christians has become, with little hope for change.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Trafficking; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

The many years of violence and instability in CAR has left Christian women and girls vulnerable to various forms of religious persecution, particularly, rape, abduction, trafficking, and forced marriage. Some girls who are abducted are subjected to sexual slavery; sexual abuse is a source of shame for women and girls, and they can struggle to move on from the trauma, parti-

cularly if they become pregnant. “Rape is an interminable part of the lives of Christian girls and women in the country,” a country expert asserted, observing that sexual violence against women in CAR remains a “weapon of war used by rebel groups to terrorize, traumatize and demoralize Christians in their faith [...] According to the leaders, there is not a percentage of women and girls who have experienced rape or harassment, rather it is all women and girls”. Many stay quiet about their experiences, fearing that their husbands might find out and divorce them. Pastor’s wives in particular stay silent to maintain the credibility and dignity of their church. However, false accusations against the wives of religious leaders are weaponized to attack the church community and its leaders.

The recruitment and use of children in the Central African Republic’s conflict has caused increased fear and serious trauma. The Human Rights Division has recorded 647 children who were the victims of child rights violations in 2022, noting that girls especially were subjected to horrific acts of sexual violence linked to the conflict. Further, while boys are the most affected, girls are also violently recruited into the conflict ([VOA, 3 April 2023](#)).

Conflict related insecurity has left women and girls vulnerable to forced marriage, abduction and sexual and gender based violence. Militia leaders and soldiers will forcefully marry girls without their consent. This has led parents and some men to send their daughters and wives to neighboring countries to protect them from such violent risks. However, within the context of high poverty rates, parents are sometimes enticed into giving their Christian girls in marriage in exchange for significant gifts. 68% of women in CAR between the ages of 20 and 24 were married off before they turned 18 – the second highest prevalence of child marriage in the world (Girls Not Brides CAR). In other cases, Christian girls who thought they would be free to practice their faith once married to a Muslim discover that they are instead forced to convert. Female students in particular face the risk of abduction and sexual violence while on the way to and from school. This has discouraged parents living in high-risk areas from sending their daughters to school. Girls who are abused and become pregnant are likely to drop out of school.

In CAR, women are generally more dependent on their families than men, so family-driven persecution affects them more. Because CAR is one of the poorest countries in Africa, ranking near the bottom of almost every indicator, financial need can drive Christian women with many children to agree to convert to Islam in order to survive. Converts to Christianity face further pressures from family members. They can be put under house arrest to prevent them from meeting with other Christians or forcibly married to a much older Muslim men. There are reports that sometimes a Christian mother is only allowed to attend Christian gatherings on condition that her children are sent to the mosque. Mothers have been separated from their children because of their faith.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites
Security	Abduction; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Trafficking; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

When Christian families are targeted by radical militias, Christian women in CAR face sexual assault, while men are mostly killed for their faith or detained by the militia. Others are abducted and either incorporated into the ranks of the rebel group or used as forced labor to extract gold and diamonds in the mines. There are reports of young men and children being kidnapped by Wagner mercenaries and forced to work in the mines. In January of 2023, Wagner fighters, accompanied by personnel from CAR government forces, killed at least 70 people in the mining communities of Aïgbado and Yanga before setting fire to some of the homes there. The Wagner group has killed dozens of miners across different states as the group seek to control mines across the country ([ADF, 20 September 2022](#)).

Pastors are especially targeted on account of their perceived efforts to convert members of the community, and sometimes, false accusations revolving around espionage are used as a pretext. Pastors have even been attacked during church services. Maintaining church life and leadership positions amidst the ongoing crisis creates an environment where individuals are not only responsible for spiritual guidance but also serve as visible symbols of the Christian community. As such, they become targets of harassment and persecution, reflecting the broader challenges Christians encounter in openly practicing their faith. There have been reports of pastors being beaten, kidnapped, and murdered by Muslim rebel groups, who have additionally destroyed churches and fostered an environment of fear and distrust.

Christian men also experience discrimination in the workplace. The Islamic population occupy all the marketplaces, control trade and impose large taxes on Christian businessmen or even loot the shops of Christians to keep them in poverty. Boys and men are at times forcibly recruited into rebel militant groups and they are also targeted for torture and assault. Within national military service, too, they can experience discrimination on the grounds of their faith. Forced disappearance, killing, threats and the tactical impoverishment of men is greatly affecting Christian families.

Persecution of other religious minorities

Christianity is the overall majority religion in the country but a minority in some parts of the country. This has created a complex dynamic of persecution.

As reported by the US State Department (IRFR 2022 CAR):

- "International and local observers stated that Muslim civilians were disproportionately targeted, and in some instances were killed indiscriminately, by government security and Wagner Group forces during operations in the central and northwestern areas of the country."

In the context of the ongoing conflict, religious minorities are not the main targets. However, adherents of small religious minorities do face challenges in the communities where they live.

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Islamic oppression

When war broke out in 2023, reports indicated the presence of foreign Islamic fighters supporting Ex-Séléka groups. These armed militias never left. Beyond the conflict's internal dynamics, neighboring countries' turmoil may provide additional outlets for jihadist activity. Within the ordinary Muslim population, excluding jihadist factions, the level of *Islamic oppression* primarily surfaces in scenarios where family and community put pressure on converts to give up their faith. This complex interplay of regional dynamics and internal pressures looks set to keep *Islamic oppression* as the most prevalent Persecution engine in CAR.

Organized corruption and crime

The levels of corruption and crime in the country go hand in hand with the breakdown of law and order. Thus, through the lens of this Persecution engine, the future depends on how the country can enforce its laws and how it can prosecute criminal networks and co-opted government officials. It is important to note that criminal networks are working closely with various militant groups. The government is only in control of the capital city (Bangui) and the rest of the country is under the influence of different armed groups. These groups are reportedly engaged in illegal activities, including [trafficking in arms](#), child soldiering and so forth (UN Security Council, 19 October 2022). Tackling the effects of this Persecution engine requires solving the political crises that the country has faced since 2013. Transparency International's ranking of 150 out of 180 countries illuminates the pervasive nature of corruption within the country's systems. Moreover, the [US State Department's 2023 report on human trafficking](#) sheds light on the fact that traffickers capitalize on the dire poverty prevalent across the nation. Exploiting the vulnerability of women and girls, traffickers lure them with promises of financial support for their families, subjecting them to forced marriages and subsequent exploitation in forms of domestic servitude or sex trafficking. This practice reflects not only systemic corruption but also the exploitation of the most vulnerable segments of society for personal gain. In the existing context, the prevalence of these issues is likely to persist.

Clan oppression

The perpetuation of *Clan oppression* as an active engine beyond WWL 2024 in the Central African Republic is intricately tied to the shifting nature of the war itself. The country's trajectory beyond the current crisis, exacerbated by how the government in Bangui is trying to hold on to power by amending the Constitution, significantly impacts the continuity of this persecution engine. Should the nation succeed in establishing lasting peace through initiatives focused on 'Truth, Reconciliation, and Justice,' the influence of this engine might diminish. Additionally, there exists a certain interconnection between religion and ethnicity, underscoring that the evolution of *Islamic oppression* will significantly shape the trajectory of this engine's future.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: VOA, 3 April 2023 - <https://www.voanews.com/a/un-children-in-central-african-republic-are-victims-of-appalling-abuse-brutality-7033694.html>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: ADF, 20 September 2022 - <https://adf-magazine.com/2022/09/report-wagner-kidnapping-children-to-work-in-car-mines/>
- Future outlook: trafficking in arms - <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k19/k19buqi7os>
- Future outlook: US State Department's 2023 report on human trafficking - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/central-african-republic/>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

As in earlier years, these are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Central%20African%20Republic>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>.