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## Tajikistan: Full Country Dossier

January 2023



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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# Introduction

## World Watch List 2023

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	94	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.7	92	91	92	92	91
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	88	87	85	86
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.2	89	88	88	87	86
5	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.1	16.3	9.1	88	91	92	90	87
6	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.6	14.8	14.4	16.7	88	87	85	80	80
7	Pakistan	13.4	13.8	14.8	14.8	12.9	16.7	86	87	88	88	87
8	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.8	15.8	16.5	10.7	86	85	86	85	85
9	Afghanistan	15.4	15.7	15.4	16.1	16.6	4.6	84	98	94	93	94
10	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	9.4	83	79	79	85	87
11	India	12.3	13.1	13.0	14.8	13.3	15.7	82	82	83	83	83
12	Syria	13.2	14.1	13.6	14.1	14.1	11.3	80	78	81	82	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.9	15.8	16.7	2.4	80	81	78	79	77
14	Myanmar	12.5	11.6	13.9	13.9	12.9	15.4	80	79	74	73	71
15	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.8	16.0	16.4	0.2	77	77	77	78	78
16	China	12.9	10.0	12.7	14.5	15.6	11.1	77	76	74	70	65
17	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	10.3	15.1	15.0	76	70	67	66	68
18	Iraq	14.1	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	4.6	76	78	82	76	79
19	Algeria	14.1	14.1	11.5	13.7	15.1	4.8	73	71	70	73	70
20	Mauritania	14.5	14.2	13.3	14.1	14.2	1.3	72	70	71	68	67
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	13.9	12.7	15.6	1.5	71	71	71	73	74
22	Colombia	11.8	8.9	13.1	11.3	10.4	15.4	71	68	67	62	58
23	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.5	9.6	13.8	15.6	71	68	67	66	48
24	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	68	66	68	70
25	Vietnam	11.8	9.6	12.8	14.6	14.4	6.9	70	71	72	72	70
26	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	14.1	15.7	0.6	70	69	70	70	69
27	Cuba	13.1	8.3	13.1	13.2	14.9	7.0	70	66	62	52	49
28	Niger	9.4	9.5	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.4	70	68	62	60	52
29	Morocco	13.2	13.8	10.9	12.2	14.5	4.8	69	69	67	66	63
30	Bangladesh	12.6	10.7	12.8	11.3	10.6	10.7	69	68	67	63	58
31	Laos	11.7	10.2	13.3	14.2	14.0	5.0	68	69	71	72	71
32	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.6	68	65	63	43	43
33	Indonesia	11.3	12.0	11.6	11.1	9.2	12.8	68	68	63	60	65
34	Qatar	14.2	14.1	10.5	13.2	14.4	1.5	68	74	67	66	62
35	Egypt	12.7	13.5	11.6	12.1	10.8	7.0	68	71	75	76	76
36	Tunisia	12.0	12.8	10.4	12.0	13.5	6.5	67	66	67	64	63
37	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.6	67	66	64	56	55
38	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	11.0	10.5	13.9	67	65	64	60	61
39	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.4	12.1	10.6	66	66	65	63	65
40	Bhutan	13.2	12.3	11.6	13.9	14.2	1.1	66	67	64	61	64
41	Turkey	12.8	11.5	11.8	13.0	11.5	5.7	66	65	69	63	66
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.5	66	63	62	57	56
43	Malaysia	12.8	14.3	11.4	12.2	11.1	3.9	66	63	63	62	60
44	Tajikistan	13.8	12.2	12.3	12.8	13.4	1.1	66	65	66	65	65
45	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.9	65	65	64	60	54
46	Brunei	14.8	14.6	10.1	10.9	14.4	0.4	65	64	64	63	63
47	Oman	14.0	14.1	10.3	13.3	12.9	0.6	65	66	63	62	59
48	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.6	11.9	12.7	14.2	1.1	65	64	64	64	63
49	Jordan	13.0	14.0	10.5	12.3	12.7	2.0	65	66	64	64	65
50	Nicaragua	10.8	5.9	11.9	12.8	13.6	9.4	65	56	51	41	41

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.3	64	63	62	61	61
52	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	64	63	62	60
53	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.6	63	61	58	55	52
54	UAE	13.4	13.4	9.9	11.2	12.8	1.1	62	62	62	60	58
55	Nepal	12.0	9.8	9.4	13.0	12.6	4.4	61	64	66	64	64
56	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	0.6	60	59	56	56	56
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.3	9.7	10.3	12.0	2.0	60	59	58	60	57
58	Azerbaijan	13.2	10.0	9.5	12.0	13.6	0.6	59	60	56	57	57
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.2	11.0	10.4	12.0	2.0	59	58	58	57	56
60	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	7.6	58	55	53	56	48
61	Russian Federation	12.3	7.9	10.3	11.8	12.8	2.0	57	56	57	60	60
62	Sri Lanka	12.8	9.1	10.6	11.3	9.5	3.9	57	63	62	65	58
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	8.9	57	50	42	42	41
64	Venezuela	6.0	4.6	11.7	10.2	11.4	11.7	56	51	39	42	41
65	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	11.1	55	52	48	48	43
66	Bahrain	12.7	13.3	8.7	10.7	8.8	0.9	55	57	56	55	55
67	Honduras	7.1	5.0	11.9	7.6	9.8	11.9	53	48	46	39	38
68	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	51	46	43	42
69	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	9.2	14.8	51	48	47	48	47
70	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	5.4	49	44	43	41	42
71	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	3.0	48	43	47	45	46
72	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.0	46	43	43	44	44
73	El Salvador	7.7	4.2	10.6	7.4	9.1	6.7	46	45	42	38	30
74	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	42	42	42	43
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	1.1	44	44	43	43	43
76	Belarus	9.5	3.8	4.8	9.4	12.1	3.3	43	33	30	28	35

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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 2023 reporting period was 01 October 2021 - 30 September 2022.
- 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 2023 Situation in brief / Tajikistan

## Brief country details

Tajikistan: Population (UN estimate for 2022)	Christians	Chr%
9,957,000	64,100	0.6

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

## Map of country



Tajikistan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	66	44
WWL 2022	65	45
WWL 2021	66	33
WWL 2020	65	31
WWL 2019	65	29

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

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

### Brief description of the persecution situation

The government puts heavy pressure on all 'deviating' groups by tightening existing laws and by enforcing them strictly. Indigenous Christians with a Muslim background bear the brunt of rights violations both at the hands of the state and from family, friends and community. Russian Orthodox churches experience the least problems from the government as they do not usually attempt to make contact with the Tajik population. The youth law in particular has left Christians (and other religious minorities) in legal limbo as it is not clear what is still allowed.

### Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Tajikistan 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)

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

- Christian converts are ostracized and faced with opposition and violence by their families and communities (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christian children are not allowed to participate in church activities (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Ownership of religious literature is severely restricted beyond international permitted limitations (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)

- Christian female converts are forced to marry non-Christian men and pressured to renounce their faith (ICCPR Art. 23; CEDAW Art. 16 and ICESCR Art. 10)

## Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

For security reasons no detailed information can be given.

**January 2022:** A church was shut down by the authorities.

**May 2022:** Eurasia Review reported on 3 July 2022 that the State Committee for Religious Affairs had summoned Protestant church leaders for a meeting in Dushanbe in May 2022. There they were told that the authorities would not be registering any new churches and were warned that minors cannot be allowed to take part in church activities or attend church-run camps.

## Specific examples of positive developments

**March 2022:** A meeting for young Catholics from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan took place in Samarkand (Uzbekistan). From 21-24 March 2022, 46 young people participated, of whom 15 were Tajiks. (Source: [Agenzia Fides, 2 April 2022](#))

## 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>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: not be registering - [https://www.eurasiareview.com/03072022-tajikistan-we-will-no-longer-register-any-new-churches/?utm\\_source=ADF+International&utm\\_campaign=6ff61b96e2-AA\\_20220704&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_7732cae558-6ff61b96e2-94770718&mc\\_cid=6ff61b96e2&mc\\_eid=45d4025d67](https://www.eurasiareview.com/03072022-tajikistan-we-will-no-longer-register-any-new-churches/?utm_source=ADF+International&utm_campaign=6ff61b96e2-AA_20220704&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_7732cae558-6ff61b96e2-94770718&mc_cid=6ff61b96e2&mc_eid=45d4025d67)
- Specific examples of positive developments: Agenzia Fides, 2 April 2022 - [http://www.fides.org/en/news/71942-ASIA\\_UZBEKISTAN\\_What\\_does\\_God\\_want\\_from\\_the\\_young\\_people\\_of\\_Uzbekistan\\_and\\_Tajikistan](http://www.fides.org/en/news/71942-ASIA_UZBEKISTAN_What_does_God_want_from_the_young_people_of_Uzbekistan_and_Tajikistan)



# WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Tajikistan

## Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2021/22 country report – covering 154 countries	AI country report 2021/22 (pp. 358-359)	<a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf">https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf</a>	21 June 2022
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16201032">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16201032</a>	21 June 2022
Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI report 2022	<a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/TJK">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/TJK</a>	21 June 2022
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	<a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/tajikistan/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/tajikistan/</a>	21 June 2022
Crisis24 country report (Garda World) – covering 193 countries	Crisis24 country report	<a href="https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/tajikistan">https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/tajikistan</a>	21 June 2022
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2021 – covering 167 countries	EIU 2021 (p.44)	<a href="https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf">https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf</a>	21 June 2022
FFP's Fragile States Index 2021 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2021	<a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>	21 June 2022
Freedom House's 2022 Democracy index – covering 29 countries	Democracy Index 2022	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/tajikistan/nations-transit/2022">https://freedomhouse.org/country/tajikistan/nations-transit/2022</a>	21 June 2022
Freedom House's 2022 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2022	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/tajikistan/freedom-world/2022">https://freedomhouse.org/country/tajikistan/freedom-world/2022</a>	21 June 2022
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 report – covering 70 countries, Tajikistan not included	Freedom on the Net 2022	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores</a>	
Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 (country chapter) – covering 100+ countries	HRW 2022 country chapter	<a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/tajikistan">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/tajikistan</a>	21 June 2022
Internet World Stats 2022	IWS 2022	<a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#tj">https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#tj</a>	21 June 2022
RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2022	<a href="https://rsf.org/en/tajikistan">https://rsf.org/en/tajikistan</a>	21 June 2022
Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2021	<a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/tajikistan">https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/tajikistan</a>	21 June 2022
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators (country profile) – covering 189 countries	HDI profile	<a href="https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/TJK">https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/TJK</a>	21 June 2022
US State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom (country profile)	IRFR 2021	<a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/tajikistan/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/tajikistan/</a>	21 June 2022
USCIRF 2022 country reports – covering 15 CPC / 12 SWL	USCIRF 2021	<a href="https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2022-04/2022%20Tajikistan.pdf">https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2022-04/2022%20Tajikistan.pdf</a>	21 June 2022
World Bank country overview – covering 178 countries	World Bank overview 2022	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/tajikistan/overview">https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/tajikistan/overview</a>	21 June 2022
World Bank country profile data – covering 222 countries	World Bank profile (2020 data)	<a href="https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=TJK">https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=TJK</a>	21 June 2022
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 – covering 147 countries (divided per region)	Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 (pp. 38-39)	<a href="https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/d5f32ef28464d01f195827b7e020a3e8-0500022021/related/mpo-eca.pdf">https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/d5f32ef28464d01f195827b7e020a3e8-0500022021/related/mpo-eca.pdf</a>	21 June 2022

## Recent history

Tajikistan gained independence during the break-up of the Soviet Union on 9 September 1991 and promptly fell into a state of civil war from 1992–1997 fought between old-guard forces and Islamists loosely organized as the United Tajik Opposition (UTO). Other armed groups that flourished in the chaos simply reflected the breakdown of central authority rather than loyalty to a political faction. By 1997, the Tajik government and the UTO successfully negotiated a power-sharing peace accord and implemented it by 2000.

Prior to the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001, the civil war in Afghanistan effected border areas and threatened to destabilize Tajikistan's fragile and hard-won peace. In 1999 and 2000, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan used Tajikistan as a platform for attacks against the government of Uzbekistan. At the same time, Taliban advances in northern Afghanistan (prior to the renewed take-over in August 2021) threatened to inundate Tajikistan with thousands of refugees. A constant flow of illegal narcotics continues to transit Tajikistan from Afghanistan on its way to Russian and European markets.

In 2010, there were concerns among Tajik officials that radical Islamic militancy in the east of the country was on the rise. Fighting against militants erupted again in July 2012, and again in 2015 when Russia sent in troops to assist. The government has begun to repatriate Tajiks who went abroad to fight for the Islamic State group (IS) and other militant groups.

On 13 March 2019, there was a border conflict with Kyrgyzstan in which a small number of villagers were killed (Source: [Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty - RFE-RL, 14 March 2019](#)). Talks were held between the Tajik and Kyrgyz presidents in July 2019, but only a few days later a new wave of violence erupted. New talks between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan were held in January 2020 (Source: [RFE-RL, 14 January 2020](#)). But, again, fresh violence broke out in May and June 2020. The relationship between the two neighbors remains strained.

In 2021 and 2022 Tajikistan was involved in two serious conflicts in the region. There were regular skirmishes along the Tajik-Kyrgyz border, and there was the change of government in neighboring Afghanistan. For more detail, see below: *Security situation*.

**COVID-19:** The COVID-19 crisis led to great economic and social problems in Tajikistan. The government of President Rahmon appeared to downplay the impact of the pandemic. However, by the end of June 2022, only 125 COVID-related deaths were officially registered. (Source: [Reuters coronavirus tracker](#), accessed 15 July 2022)

## Political and legal landscape

Tajikistan is a presidential republic, whereby the president is both head of state and head of government. Legislative power is vested in both the executive branch and the two chambers of parliament. Emomali Rahmon has held the office of president since 1992. President Rahmon, a former collective farm chairman, secured another seven-year term with more than 80% of the vote following presidential elections held in late 2013. Parliament is dominated by Rahmon's National Democratic Party of Tajikistan. The only legal faith-based opposition party in post-Soviet Central Asia, the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), was banned in August 2015.

A law regulating religious affairs was implemented in August 2011 prohibiting all religious youthwork to citizens under 18 years of age. This had a huge impact on church activities since it is estimated that about 50% of all Christians are in this age category. In a speech on 19 March 2015, President Rahmon said his country must "be mainly focused on the development of secularism and national and secular thinking". The emphasis on secularism was aimed at the IRPT and Islamic militants fighting both in the Middle East and in Central Asia. In January 2016 the country's constitution was amended to enable President Rahmon to establish a presidential dynasty. (Source: [RFE-RL, 22 January 2016](#)).

On 1 March 2020 parliamentary elections were held in Tajikistan. As expected, President Rahmon's ruling People's Democratic Party won. It secured 47 seats in the 63-seat Majlisi Namoyandagon (Assembly of Representatives). This meant that President Rahmon and his allies retained control over parliament with its pro-presidential allies (Source: [RFE/RL, 2 March 2020](#)).

On 10 January 2018, [amendments to the law on religion](#) entered into force (World Watch Monitor, 21 February 2018). These amendments:

- allow the state to restrict manifestations of freedom of religion or belief on a wide range of grounds not permitted under international human rights obligations;
- increase religious organizations' requirements to report all their activities to the state;
- require state approval for the appointment of all imams;

- increase state control both on religious education at home, and on those travelling abroad for such education.

In the presidential elections on 11 October 2020, President Rahmon received over 90% of the votes. He has been in power since 1994. His government has two foundational aspects: Subjection to Moscow and repression of internal dissent. His son Rustam is destined to succeed him. (Source: [Asia News, 13 October 2020](#))

On 6 October 2021 Tajikistan introduced new punitive measures against the "underground" religious education of children. Deputies of the Madzhilis Namoyandagon, the lower house of parliament, approved some amendments to the penal code, according to which deprivation of liberty for up to three years is foreseen in the case of illegal religious education, including lessons given via the Internet. (Source: [Asia News, 8 October 2021](#))

According to US State Department (IRFR 2021):

- The [Constitution](#) of 1994 (amended in 1999 and 2003) "provides for the right, individually or jointly with others, to adhere to any religion or to no religion, and to participate in religious customs and ceremonies. The constitution states that 'the citizen shall have the right to participate in the creation of political parties, including parties of democratic, religious and atheistic character' and 'religious organizations shall be separate from the state and shall not interfere in state affairs'."
- "The law ... prohibits persons younger than the age of 18 from participating in public religious activities. The government Committee on Religion, Regulation of Traditions, Celebrations, and Ceremonies (CRA) maintains a broad mandate that includes approving registration of religious associations, construction of houses of worship, participation of children in religious education, and the dissemination of religious literature."
- "Individuals outside government continued to state they were reluctant to discuss issues such as societal respect for religious diversity, including abuses or discrimination based on religious belief, due to fear of government harassment. Civil society representatives said discussion of religion in general, especially relations among members of different religious groups, remained a subject they avoided."

According to USCIRF 2022:

- "Tajikistan's legal environment for freedom of religion or belief sharply declined after the adoption of several highly restrictive laws in 2009. The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Unions set onerous registration requirements; criminalized unregistered religious activity, private religious education, and proselytism; set strict limits on the number and size of mosques; allowed state interference in the appointment of imams and the content of sermons; required official permission for religious organizations to provide religious instruction and communicate with foreign coreligionists; and imposed state controls on the content, publication, and import of religious materials. In 2011 and 2012, administrative and penal code amendments set new penalties, including large fines and prison terms, for religion-related charges such as organizing or participating in "unapproved" religious meetings. A 2011 law on parental responsibility banned minors from any organized religious activity except funerals. Since 2014, the state has paid imams' salaries and re-

quired them to wear state-issued religious garments, and the content of sermons is commonly dictated by the government.”

According to HRW 2022 country chapter:

- "In October 2021, the Tajik parliament started consideration of amendments to the criminal code on tightening penalties for illegal religious education, including online education, with imprisonment of up to three years. Previously this was punishable with an administrative fine of up to 72,000 somoni (approximately US\$6,000) or a prison term of up to three years for a repeat offence."

### Gender perspective

The legal landscape remains restrictive towards women and girls. Many couples marry through *nikeh* ceremonies (an Islamic religious marriage) without registering the marriage with civil registry offices. Thus, many do not benefit from the protective provisions set out in the Family Code (OECD, 2019). Child marriages, forced marriages and polygamy remain ongoing practices, despite being illegal (Girls Not Brides, 2022; CEDAW, 2018). Under the civil code both men and women have equal divorce rights, although divorces by *talaq* occur under unregistered Islamic marriages (OECD, 2019). In relation to domestic violence, the 2013 Law on the Protection of Domestic Violence (No. 954) was viewed as a positive turning point in providing protection for victims, particularly as it addressed physical, psychological, social and economic forms of violence. It fails to specifically criminalize domestic violence, however. Obtaining justice is notoriously difficult for victims, causing many to remain silent (OECD, 2019; CEDAW, 2018).

Military service is mandatory for men for two years (World Population Review, accessed 31 August 2022). Within this context, Christian men may experience physical and mental persecution as conscientious objectors if they refuse to serve in the armed forces on account of their faith (OCHR, March 2022).

### Religious landscape

Tajikistan: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	64,100	0.6
Muslim	9,748,000	97.9
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	4,300	0.0
Ethno-religionist	6,900	0.1
Jewish	300	0.0
Bahai	4,400	0.0

Atheist	19,700	0.2
Agnostic	107,000	1.1
Other	2,600	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

Tajik culture has been dominated by Islam – mainly Sunni - ever since Arab traders brought the religion to the country in the 7th century. Under the Soviet Union (1917-1991) Communist ideology promoted atheism, but since 1991 Tajikistan has seen a marked increase in religious practice. Since 2009, the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam is the official religion in Tajikistan. Tajikistan is the only former Soviet state with an official religion.

Tajikistan has the highest percentage of Muslims in Central Asia: According to the World Christian Database (WCD 2022) 97.9% of the population is Muslim. However, it would be wrong to call Tajikistan a Muslim country. 70 years of atheism during the Soviet era have left a deep influence and the government (the heirs of the atheist Soviets) is staunchly secular and keeps Islam firmly under strict control. The population merely follows Islamic culture rather than strict Islamic teachings. However, Tajikistan has had experience with radical Islamic groups like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and *Hizb-ut-Tahrir*, and hundreds of Tajiks have joined these groups, as well as going off to fight for the Islamic State group (IS) in Syria and Iraq.

According to WCD, the second largest religious category in Tajikistan is non-religious/agnostic (1.3%). They can be found primarily in the capital Dushanbe and other major cities. This is the result of 70 years of forced atheism by the government of the USSR from 1917 to 1991.

Christians are a very small group; they make up only 0.6% of the population. The overwhelming majority (over 76%) of them are Russian Orthodox (i.e. ethnic Russians). As in many other countries in Central Asia, Christian numbers are shrinking due to the emigration of Russians. This is not compensated by the increase in numbers of converts to Christianity, who number about 3,000. Converts experience huge pressure from family, friends and the local community to return to the faith of their ancestors, believing that a true Tajik can only be Muslim. Female converts are vulnerable to isolation and being forcibly married to a Muslim, whereas male converts are more likely to experience physical violence and discrimination in the workplace.

No religious activities beyond state-run and controlled institutions are allowed and Protestants in particular (who are regarded as "extremists", unlike Orthodox Christians) are persecuted to a significant extent. Church services are often disrupted and Christians face harassment and arrests for holding private prayer meetings or possessing 'illegal' religious material. Registering non-Orthodox, non-Catholic Christian groups is effectively impossible, making all religious activities carried out by these groups technically illegal. Even technically 'legal' religious groups (Baptists, for example) face similar persecution.

One of the major problems for Christians in Tajikistan (and in other countries in Central Asia) is the fact that there is little cooperation and much division between the various denominations, which all plays into the hands of the government.

## Economic landscape

According to the World Bank data profile:

- **GDP (current US\$) (billions):** 8.75 (in 2021)
- **GDP growth (annual %):** 9.2% (in 2021)

Tajikistan is the poorest country in Central Asia and became a member of the World Trade Organization in March 2013. However, its economy continues to face major challenges, including dependence on remittances from Tajik migrant laborers working in Russia and Kazakhstan, pervasive corruption, the opium trade and destabilizing violence emanating from neighboring Afghanistan (Source: CIA Factbook). Drug trafficking is a major source of illegal income in Tajikistan as it is an important transit country for Afghan narcotics bound for Russian and European markets. Some opium is also produced locally for the domestic market.

Tajikistan lacks natural resources like ore, gold, oil and gas. Since the economy is underdeveloped, many Tajiks are forced to work abroad, above all in Russia. Without this possibility, many Tajik families would have very little money to live on. And without the money coming in from such remittances, the country's economy would break down. There are also other positive effects: While working abroad Tajiks are much more open to outreach by Christians.

The COVID-19 crisis had a big impact on the Tajik economy. Not that the country saw a huge number of infections itself, but many migrant workers in Russia could not go to work. This caused a drastic drop in the level of remittances. The deteriorating economy affects Christians just as much as the rest of the population.

In early April 2022 President Rakhmon congratulated the population of the Islamic faith on the start of Ramadan. In his message, he pointed out that this year's Muslim holiday coincided with the beginning of the spring planting season, saying: "This means that we must effectively use every favorable day of spring, extend the planting of all crops and intensify agricultural activities." Rakhmon expressed his concern for the future of the economy and said: "We need the basis for a bountiful harvest, always remembering that each family must be able to stock up on food for the next two years". The difficulties of the pandemic period have left their mark, and without directly mentioning the nearby military activities, the Tajik leader warned that "today it is essential to take all measures so that our children and members of our families do not face other insurmountable difficulties, suffering from the lack of food or the increase of its prices, in view of the coming autumn-winter". (Source: [Asia News, 4 April 2022](#))

### Gender perspective

Women have diminished chances of achieving economic independence, due to gender gaps in relation to access to education, as well as employment ([UNDP 2020, p.363](#)). Representing a positive development however, Tajikistan was among the top ten countries to report the largest gains in financial inclusion on [Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2019/20](#) (p.33).

## Social and cultural landscape

According to the CIA Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Tajik 84.3% (includes Pamiri and Yagnobi), Uzbek 13.8%, other 2% (includes Kyrgyz, Russian, Turkmen, Tatar, Arab) (2014 est.)
- **Main languages:** Tajik (official) 84.4%, Uzbek 11.9%, Kyrgyz .8%, Russian .5%, other 2.4% (2010 est.)
- **Urban population:** 28 % of total population (2022)
- **Literacy rate:** 99.8% (male: 99.8%, female: 99.7%) (2015)

According to the UN Global Human Development Indicators (HDI profile):

- **HDI score and ranking:** 0.668 (0.586 for females, 0.712 for males), ranking 125
- **Total population:** 9.3 million (2019)
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 71.1 years (73.4 for females, 68.9 for males) (2019)
- **Expected years of schooling:** 11.7 years (10.7 for females, 12.6 for males) (2019)
- **Gender Inequality index:** 0.314 (2019)
- **Labor Force Participation Rate (% ages 15 years and older):** Female: 31.3, Male: 52.8 (2019)

Tajikistan is the only Central Asian country where a non-Turkic language and culture prevail. Tajik belongs to the same group of languages as Farsi (Iran) and Dari (Afghanistan), and the Tajik culture closely resembles the culture found in parts of Iran and Afghanistan. Tajiks do not draw a line between their own literature and general Persian literature, but there is a difference in writing: Farsi uses Arabic lettering, while Tajik uses the Cyrillic alphabet.

Thanks to the former Soviet system of education, practically every citizen in Tajikistan is literate. This means that people who are interested in the Christian message can read materials in their own language. The restrictions imposed by the government (all materials must be approved and only registered groups may be active) mean that most distribution etc. must be done unofficially. A Tajik Bible translation has been available since the 1990s.

**Unemployment:** Due to the country's high level of unemployment, Russia has always been a key destination for hundreds of thousands of Tajiks seeking seasonal jobs at Russian construction sites, farms and factories. Unemployment surged when Russia announced in March 2020 that it would close its borders to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, Tajikistan itself had not yet registered its first COVID-19 death. (Source: [RFE/RL, 18 March 2020](#)).

**Corruption:** In Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index 2021 (CPI 2021), Tajikistan ranks among the thirty most corrupt countries: 150th out of 180 countries. Corruption in Tajikistan is 'systemic in nature'. The majority of Tajiks believe that bribes, embezzlement of state funds, the government's inability to eliminate the phenomenon, nepotism and other similar problems are normal practice. (Source: [Asia News, 28 January 2022](#))

**Poverty:** In February 2022, the government of Tajikistan decided not to increase pensions for any category, except for orphaned or abandoned children. The Central Asian country continues to be one of the poorest in the world, according to World Bank figures: a third of the population

(just under 10 million) lives below the poverty line. The situation is also worsening due to the exponential growth of inflation. (Source: [Asia News, 10 February 2022](#))

In general, Christians experience the same problems as all other people in the country and are not especially targeted economically or socially. The only exception to this is the pressure from the social environment (family, local imams, villagers) on Christians with a Muslim background.

### Gender perspective

Tajikistan has deeply entrenched patriarchal norms. According to a [2019 OECD](#) report, 90% of women have no say in domestic decisions. Human Rights Watch has highlighted domestic violence as an ongoing serious problem, noting that protection and support for victims fall short (HRW 2022 country chapter). Many victims are fearful of accessing justice due to a lack of trust in the police, stigma surrounding domestic violence, and insufficient laws criminalizing domestic violence. Reports of domestic violence – primarily affecting women and girls – rose significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2022):

- **Internet usage:** 30.4% penetration (survey date: July 2022)
- **Facebook usage:** 16.0% penetration (survey date: July 2022)  
December 2022 data shows that 75% of Facebook users in Tajikistan are male and only 25% female ([NapoleonCat](#), December 2022).

According to the World Bank country profile:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 106.2 per 100 people (2020)  
According to a [June 2020 study by the Asian Development Bank](#), significant gender gaps remain in access to mobile phones and the Internet. This makes accessing information and participating in digital community harder for women.

According to [BuddeComm Research](#) (publication date: January 2023):

- "The nation of Tajikistan has had to struggle through a further two years of economic hardship following the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. This has included receiving millions of dollars in foreign aid and loans just to maintain liquidity in a country that is already one of the most impoverished in the region. The strain on financial resources inevitably means a continuation of the absence of any meaningful investment or development programs for telecommunications infrastructure, beyond the occasional symbolic and superficial pronouncements from the government for the sector to 'do better'."
- "The fixed-line telephony and fixed broadband markets continue to languish far behind the mobile sector in terms of teledensity and penetration. With only around 6,000 fixed broadband customers (0.07% penetration), there would appear to be massive growth potential but the limited fixed-line infrastructure in the country suggests there's little likelihood of that occurring any time soon."



- "The size of Tajikistan's mobile market dwarfs the fixed-line segment, with an estimated penetration rate of nearly 120%. With a number of private sector companies active in the mobile market, so too has there been more commitment to investment in network upgrades and expansion. Three MNOs – MegaFon, Tcell, and ZET Mobile – have all launched commercial 5G services, initially in areas of the capital city Dushanbe. The move towards higher-speed mobile services should further underpin the growth in the nascent mobile broadband market, which is still estimated to be at a relatively low penetration level of 42% (at least relative to most other Asian nations) but is predicted to enjoy a strong compound annual growth rate of more than 8% for at least the next five years."

Despite Tajikistan not being included in Freedom House's Freedom on the Net report 2022, it is known that Internet access is strictly monitored and censored by the regime. However, foreign Christian websites (e.g. in Russia) are mostly accessible. Satellite dishes provide a good alternative to access international information, but they are expensive and few Tajiks can afford them. Nonetheless, there are many options for Christians to present the Christian faith via (foreign) websites, via SD cards in smartphones, and through radio and television programs via satellite technology. These modern possibilities are popular, since Christian publications in book format (also magazines and DVDs) are much more easily confiscated by police during raids and searches.

## Security situation

Tajikistan shares a long border with Afghanistan of well over 1,000km. This brings two main worries: a) possible infiltration by radical Islamic groups such as the Taliban or Islamic State group (IS); and b) cross-border transportation of opium from the production fields in Afghanistan to the 'markets' in Russia and Europe. To counter the first threat, the Tajik government has made a deal with Russia, allowing Russian soldiers to be stationed along the border with Afghanistan. So far, this has succeeded, since no infiltration by Islamic militants has been reported. However, the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan is porous enough to allow drug trafficking. Due to corrupt officials, organized crime cartels manage to transport huge amounts of opium across Tajikistan to destinations in Europe.

IS activity has been the cause of some killings, as listed by [UK Government travel advice/terrorism](#) (accessed on 7 January 2023):

- On 6 November 2019, it was reported that 17 people were killed in an armed attack by IS on a Tajik security checkpoint in Rudaki District on the Tajik/Uzbek border, approximately 60km south-west of Dushanbe.  
On 29 July 2018, 4 tourists were killed in a deliberate attack while cycling in the south of the country.

The Taliban took over power in Afghanistan in August 2021. Prior to that, approximately 600 Afghan servicemen crossed the border into Tajikistan while retreating from Taliban fighters; they were repatriated on 6 July 2021. (Source: [RFE/RL, 7 July 2021](#)) Confronted with the new Taliban government in Afghanistan, adjacent Tajikistan has broken ranks from its Central Asian neighbors (who largely adopted a conciliatory posture) and opted for a more confrontational approach. (Source: [Jamestown Foundation, 10 September 2021](#)) In October 2021, Tajikistan

moved additional armed forces up to the Afghan border and the president visited a border area to watch a military parade. The Taliban responded by bringing up extra forces to the border with Tajikistan, including Tajik citizens belonging to radical Islamic groups in Afghanistan and whom the Taliban recently armed with captured US weapons and equipment. (Source: [RFE/RL, 10 October 2021](#)) Since then, there has been no improvement in the situation.

In October 2021, China began building military bases and observation points on the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan. In an unspecified location, not far from the Wakhan Corridor in Badakhshan province, the Chinese are showing ambitions to control the region, also by training Tajik forces. (Source: [Asia News, 20 October 2021](#))

The eastern region named Gorno-Badakhshan is another security issue for Tajikistan. Problems in the remote area have a long history. Tensions between the government and residents of the restive region have simmered ever since a five-year civil war broke out shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Gorno-Badakhshan, a linguistically and ethnically distinct region, was home to rebels who opposed government forces during the conflict. (Source: [RFE/RL, 19 May 2022](#)) The region makes up 45% of Tajikistan but only 3% of its population but has seen many violent protests and skirmishes, including in July 2012, when 40 people were killed in the unrest that was sparked by the fatal stabbing of the regional head of the State Committee on National Security. Other sources say the number of dead was more than 200. (Source: [RFE/RL, 18 May 2022](#)). The most recent outbreak of violence was in May 2022. On 17 May 2022 Tajikistan's Ministry of Internal Affairs said one person was killed in Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO) when security forces fired rubber bullets and tear gas against protesters who were calling for the resignation of political leaders in the region. (Source: [RFE/RL, 17 May 2022](#)) A few days later the number of dead rose to more than 20. (Source: [Asia News, 21 May 2022](#))

Another source of major conflict over the past years has been the poorly demarcated border with Kyrgyzstan. The following incidents occurred in 2022:

- **27 January 2022:** Border clashes left at least two people dead and many more wounded in a standoff over a blocked road. (Source: [RFE/RL, 28 January 2022](#))
- **10 March 2022:** Officials from Kyrgyzstan's Batken district and Tajikistan's Sughd region held talks after border guards from the two sides exchanged fire earlier in the day. (Source: [RFE/RL, 10 March 2022](#))
- **12 April 2022:** A Tajik border guard died of wounds he sustained in a shoot-out. Two Kyrgyz border guards and four Kyrgyz civilians were also wounded in the incident. (Source: [RFE/RL, 14 April 2022](#))
- **June 2022:** Several clashes and shootings occurred in June 2022 between Tajik and Kyrgyz border guards in the Kekh locality, 15 km from the Tajik town of Isfar. (Source: [RFE/RL, 20 June 2022](#))

## Trends analysis

### 1) Tajikistan continues to depend on Russia, both economically and militarily

Tajikistan is a country that has almost no natural resources to keep its economy going. Many workers travel abroad to feed their families – especially the younger generation. Most of them live and work in Russia as migrant workers. For Russia, Tajikistan is of particular interest because it is located in a very strategic position bordering China and Afghanistan.

### 2) Tajikistan's government is increasingly taking on a dictatorial character

This is also the case in most other countries in Central Asia. Since 2015, President Rahmon's regime has been expanding its control over the country. All political opposition - most importantly from the Islamic Renaissance Party - has been dismantled. This means that political changes are unlikely to occur in Tajikistan. The president has more or less succeeded in establishing a dynasty.

### 3) Christians continue to live under a considerable level of surveillance

In general, Christians experience the same problems as all other people in the country and are not especially targeted economically or socially. The only exception to this is the pressure from family, local imams and villagers on Christians with a Muslim background. However, there have been no changes in government policy regarding freedom of religion since the introduction of the new law in January 2018. This means that raids on meetings, the arrest and interrogation of Christians, fines and confiscation of religious materials continue to occur. Due to the very high level of stability of the two strongest Persecution engines in Tajikistan (*Dictatorial paranoia* and *Islamic oppression*), this pressure will likely continue unabated.

## External Links - Keys to understanding

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- Security situation: RFE/RL, 28 January 2022 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyz-tajik-border-shootout-batken/31674508.html>
- Security situation: RFE/RL, 10 March 2022 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-tajikistan-border-shooting/31746784.html>

- Security situation: RFE/RL, 14 April 2022 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyz-tajik-border-clash-kazakbaev-muhriddin/31803646.html?ltflags=mailer>
- Security situation: RFE/RL, 20 June 2022 - <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Border-clashes-continue-between-Tajiks-and-Kyrgyz-56070.html>

## WWL 2023: Church information / Tajikistan

### Christian origins

Nestorian missionaries first brought Christianity to the Tajiks during the 6th century and Islam arrived about a century later. The Nestorian Christians (also known as the Church of the East) lived side-by-side with the Muslims until Timur Lenk (a.k.a. Tamar Lane) eradicated Christianity from his empire in the 14th century.

Christianity returned to Tajikistan at the end of the 19th century when the Russian Empire conquered the mountainous region. Between 1864 and 1885 Russia gradually took control of the entire territory of Russian Turkestan, the Tajikistan portion of which had been controlled by the Emirate of Bukhara and Khanate of Kokand. It should be noted that only the Russian rulers were Christians - there were no known Tajik Christians at the time.

Under Joseph Stalin many Russians, Germans, Ukrainians, Belarusians and Poles that were deemed unreliable were sent to Tajikistan in the 1930s. This meant a huge growth in the number of Christians in Tajikistan. After the death of Stalin in 1953, many of them returned home and left Tajikistan. Christians currently form just 0.6% of the Tajik population.

### Church spectrum today

Tajikistan: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	50,100	78.2
Catholic	200	0.3
Protestant	8,400	13.1
Independent	4,700	7.3
Unaffiliated	750	1.2
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>64,150</b>	<b>100.1</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	2,300	3.6
Renewalist movement	5,600	8.7

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

**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.

Most Christians belong to ethnic minorities - Russian and Ukrainian. The number of Christians decreased sharply in the 1990's due to the wave of Russian and Ukrainian emigration from Tajikistan in the early independence period.

Despite the emigration, according to the World Christian Database data of April 2022, the largest official church denominations in Tajikistan are the Russian Orthodox Church and Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

## Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Rights violations targeting all Christian communities and carried out by government officials can occur all over the country. Pressure from family, friends and community on converts is stronger outside the urban areas.

## Christian communities and how they are affected

**Communities of expatriate Christians:** These are not involuntarily isolated groups and so have not been counted as a separate category in WWL analysis.

**Historical Christian communities:** These groups, the largest of which is the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), are not involved in evangelism among Tajiks. They can function without much interference since the Tajik regime does not consider them a threat. What is more, the Tajik government has no interest in provoking Russia by attacking the ROC.

**Converts to Christianity:** Christian converts with a Muslim background bear the brunt of persecution in Tajikistan. Apart from limited restrictions from the state, they are also under strong pressure from family, friends and community. For them, the latter is by far the more powerful. Conversion is seen as ethnic, national and religious betrayal and brings shame upon the family.

**Non-traditional Christian communities:** After converts, this category of Christians is the second most persecuted group (mainly due to active evangelism). Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal groups suffer from many raids, threats, arrests and fines by the authorities.

# WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Tajikistan

## Reporting period

1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022

## Position on the World Watch List

Tajikistan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	66	44
WWL 2022	65	45
WWL 2021	66	33
WWL 2020	65	31
WWL 2019	65	29

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

The score for Tajikistan in WWL 2023 was one point higher than in WWL 2022: 66 points. Pressure was highest in the *Private and Church spheres of life*. The two main Persecution engines in Tajikistan (*Dictatorial paranoia* and *Islamic oppression*, the latter blended with *Clan oppression*) are active in all spheres of life, but *Islamic oppression (blended with Clan oppression)* dominates in the *Private and Family spheres of life*, while *Dictatorial paranoia* dominates in the *National and Church spheres of life*. Both engines 'meet' each other in the *Community sphere of life*. Muslim families, friends and villagers exerted pressure on at least 37 converts. The government imposes many restrictions on church activities. One church was shut down and the Youth Law in particular has left Christians (and other religious minorities) in legal limbo as it is not clear what is still allowed.

## Persecution engines

Tajikistan: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Strong
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all

Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Very strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Not at all

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

### Dictatorial paranoia (Very strong)

No religious activities beyond state-run and state-controlled institutions are allowed. Pressure from the authorities has increased since 2015, causing a rise in the number of raids on meetings and of Christians being interrogated. It is very common that members of Protestant churches are regarded as followers of an alien sect with only one goal, namely to spy on and destroy the current political system. Thus they are regarded as dangerous, requiring control and, if necessary, eradication. Another area of crackdown involves religious education, no matter which religion is concerned.

### Islamic oppression (Strong), blended with Clan oppression (Strong)

If indigenous citizens (who are Muslim) convert to Christianity, they are likely to experience pressure and occasionally physical violence from their families, friends and local community to force them to return to their former faith. Some converts are locked up by their families for long periods, beaten and may eventually be expelled from their communities. Local imams preach against them, so adding pressure. As a result, converts will do their best to hide their faith – they become so-called secret believers.

## Drivers of persecution

Tajikistan: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG	-	-	STRONG	-	-	-	VERY STRONG	-
Government officials	Medium	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	Very strong	-
Ethnic group leaders	Medium	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	Medium	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	Very weak	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong	-	-	Strong	-	-	-	Medium	-
One's own (extended) family	Strong	-	-	Strong	-	-	-	-	-
Political parties	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Strong	-



Tajikistan: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG	-	-	STRONG	-	-	-	VERY STRONG	-
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Organized crime cartels or networks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

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

#### Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

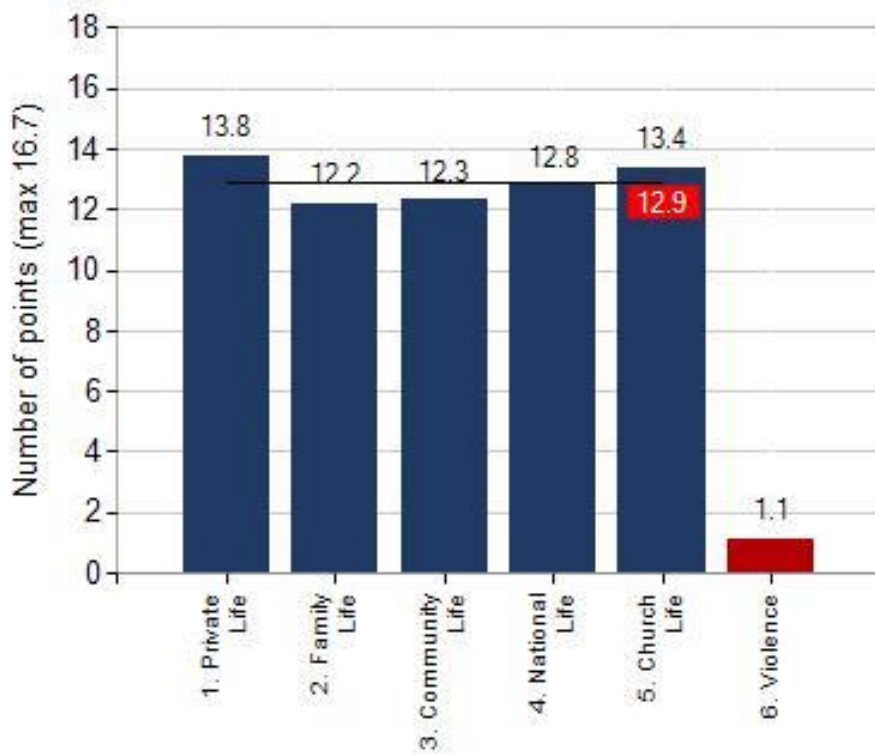
- **Government officials (Very strong):** Police raid homes and churches and confiscate Christian books, DVDs and computers. This is followed by detention, interrogation and fines for Christians. Church leaders are called for interrogation regularly and placed under pressure to become informers. This pressure is strongest on Tajik church leaders.
- **Political parties (Strong):** Few political parties are allowed in Tajikistan. The ruling party which controls the government led by President Rahmon by definition participates in persecution insofar as much of the persecution is government-sanctioned.
- **Citizens (Medium):** Normal citizens are members of the Muslim majority; they also report Christian activities to the authorities.

#### Drivers of Islamic oppression (blended with Clan oppression)

- **Extended Family (Strong):** Muslim family members, especially in the countryside, will exert high pressure on converts to Christianity, often involving threats, beatings, house arrest and ostracism.
- **Citizens (Strong):** In the case of conversion, persecution by the local community and its religious leaders will be severe. Normal citizens at the community level exert pressure on converts with the aim of making them return to Islam.
- **Ethnic or Clan group leaders (Medium):** Tajik ethnic leaders see conversion to Christianity as an assault against the Tajik identity and react with hostility.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Medium):** Muslim clerics may resort to physical violence to make converts to Christianity recant their new faith.
- **Government officials (Medium):** Staff working at local authorities have connections to the Muslim community. This produces problems for converts and Protestants.

## The Persecution pattern

### WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Tajikistan



The WWL 2023 Persecution pattern for Tajikistan shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (12.9 points), scoring a little more than in WWL 2022 (12.8 points). Pressure decreased very slightly in the *Private and Family spheres of life*, and it increased very slightly in the *Community, National and Church spheres of life*.
- Pressure is highest and at an extreme level in the *Private sphere of life* (13.8 points), followed by the *Church sphere of life* (13.4 points). This is an indication that pressure on Christians in Tajikistan comes from two main sources: *Islamic oppression (blended with Clan oppression)* in the *Private sphere of life*, and *Dictatorial paranoia* in the *Church sphere of life*.
- The score for violence is very low, increasing from 0.7 points in WWL 2022 to 1.1 points in WWL 2023. As in most countries in Central Asia, violent incidents targeting Christians are seldom reported.

## 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 2023 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 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.50 points)**

Conversion is viewed as betrayal of the family and culture, as well as of Islam. When people convert, they place themselves outside the community. Family, friends and community will try to make the converts recant their faith. This can lead to physical violence. Officially, there is no hindrance to conversion - Tajikistan is a secular country. But the government prefers that conversions do not take place as they can lead to tension among the population.

### **Block 1.2: It has been risky for Christians to conduct acts of Christian worship by themselves (e.g. prayer, Bible reading, etc.). (3.50 points)**

This is very risky for converts from Islam. Even at this very private level, the level of hostility can be quite severe if they are found simply worshiping on their own. There have been reports of families beating converts in an attempt to force a renunciation of faith. Although the state tries to regulate religious activities as much as possible, it does not have influence at this private level.

### **Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.50 points)**

Converts will avoid sharing their new faith with members of their communities. It can be risky for Protestants when they discuss their faith with Muslim people. Sharing your faith with other people will be interpreted as an act of encouraging religious hatred and then state agents will come into action.

### **Block 1.7: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with immediate family members. (3.25 points)**

Converts are strongly suppressed from practicing their religion by their family so they would definitely be afraid to discuss it with them. It can also affect Russian Protestants as they are traditionally considered sects.

## Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

### **Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.75 points)**

The Muslim environment (family, friends, community) will pressurize children of converts in particular to receive Islamic teaching - sometimes even against the wishes of their parents. "History of Religions" is a subject at high school which all children are required to attend and is taught from a Sunni Muslim perspective.

### **Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.5 points)**

Family members will oppose converts raising their children according to Christian faith and values. They will try to take custody of the children in order to raise them according to Islamic

principles. The law is very restrictive regarding the religious education of children. It allows parents to bring up children according to their religious beliefs but at the same time the parents should not allow their children (up to the age of 18) to participate in the activities of religious organizations (e.g. churches and mosques).

**Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (3.25 points)**

Baptism is regarded as the final step in becoming a Christian and leaving the previous faith. Family, friends and community will oppose this. Baptisms are regarded by the state with hostility as they are automatically connected to evangelism and conversion - two activities opposed by the state.

**Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.25 points)**

Children from Christian families regularly experience slander and Muslim children are often kept from contact with Christian children. Children of converts are seen as outsiders and are frequently harassed by other children as a result. This is not done by the state.

## 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.). (3.50 points)**

Converts are harassed and threatened by family, friends and community (including the local imam). Local state officials harass, threaten and obstruct Christians belonging to unregistered church groups.

**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)**

Known converts will be monitored by members of their family and community. Local state officials closely monitor all activities of non-Orthodox Christians. This is one of the strongest forms of persecution in the country as the state closely monitors non-Orthodox Christians (including their phones). Converts are of course also monitored by the family and surrounding community.

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

Pressure on converts from their community to recant their new faith is usually very strong. Several tactics will be applied - threats, beatings, house-arrest, forced marriages and ostracism. Protestant Christians are also under pressure from the community as they are viewed as belonging to a dangerous sect. If this occurs, it is caused by the Muslim environment, not by the state.

**Block 3.13: Christians have been interrogated or compelled to report to the local vigilante/police for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)**

Known converts are harassed and interrogated harshly by their family and community. From time to time, the police will disrupt church meetings and interrogate the Christians present.

## Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

**Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (4.00 points)**

It is impossible to establish such organizations or parties in Tajikistan; this is banned in the Tajik Constitution. Muslims will quickly regard Christian organizations as an attempt to convert people to Christianity. They will block this with all available means.

**Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (3.75 points)**

The Constitution protects religious freedom; however, other laws and policies restrict religious freedom. The Religion Law of 2009/2011 (with its amendments of January 2018) requires compulsory registration of all religious organizations. Any church activities by non-registered groups are illegal. At the same time, it is very difficult to get state registration. There is a ban on unlicensed religious education and there is also a requirement for censorship of any religious materials. The law on parents' responsibilities prohibits young people up to 18 years of age from participating in the activities of religious organizations.

**Block 4.6: Christians have been barred from public office, or promotion has been hindered for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)**

Converts and Protestants are most affected in this respect. They do not have any possibility of getting a job in the public sphere or of being promoted if their Christian faith becomes known to the authorities. If it becomes known, they are likely to be made redundant. At the local level, the focus of Muslims will be on converts.

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

When the authorities act against Christians, they do so with the backing of the law and generally interpret their enforcement of the law as they deem acceptable. Officials can generally expect to act with utter impunity and even beyond the legal limits of the allowed measures. There is nothing to suggest that the government takes any steps to stop such cases by punishing the perpetrators, bearing in mind that most of the Christian persecution that occurs is in fact supported by the government. Any action against converts is done with impunity and the blessing of the Muslim community.

## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

### **Block 5.6: Work among youth in particular has been restricted. (4.00 points)**

The August 2011 laws prohibit any church youth work. The law is consistently enforced by state officials who carry out church raids. Church raids have been defended by citing this law and the need to protect children. Since about 50% of Tajik Christians are classified as youth, the impact of the law and its enforcement have major consequences. Muslims oppose Christian activities aimed at youth and will deliberately block events and summer camps and report anything they discover to the police.

### **Block 5.12: Churches or Christian organizations have been hindered in printing Christian materials or owning printing presses. (3.75 points)**

The government must approve the production, importation, export, sale and distribution of religious materials by registered religious groups, which is in effect a ban on all religious materials used by unregistered religious groups. Permission to registered groups is rarely given. The Muslim community will oppose the production and public distribution of any Christian materials (especially when it is in their own language) as they assume they will be used for evangelistic purposes targeting Muslims.

### **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. (3.75 points)**

The government does not allow Christians to establish such institutions or associations at all. Muslims would immediately connect these kinds of activities with evangelism and block them.

### **Block 5.19: Churches have been hindered in their interaction with the global church (both foreigners visiting and nationals being able to visit Christians in other countries to attend conferences etc.). (3.75 points)**

There are restrictions on foreign Christians visiting Tajikistan. They need a special visa which is very difficult to obtain. Likewise, Tajik Christians can visit other countries and attend conferences only after getting permission. The state clearly monitors who is applying for such trips. The Muslim community objects to foreign Christians preaching in Tajikistan, especially when the language used can be understood by Muslims.

## 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 5 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. For further discussion** (with a focus on the complexity of assessing the numbers of Christians killed for their faith) please see World Watch Monitor's article dated 13 November 2013 available at:  
<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/11/number-of-christian-martyrs-continues-to-cause-debate/>.

**4. 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 WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

**5. The symbol "x" in the table:** This denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security concerns.

Tajikistan: Violence Block question	WWL 2023	WWL 2022
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
6.2 How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	1	0
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)?	0	0
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	0
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	37	37
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?	0	0
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?	0	0
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	0	1
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	0

In the WWL 2023 reporting period:

- **Churches attacked:** In January 2022, a church was shut down by the authorities.
- **Christians attacked:** At least 37 converts were abused and beaten by their families and local community.

## 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.

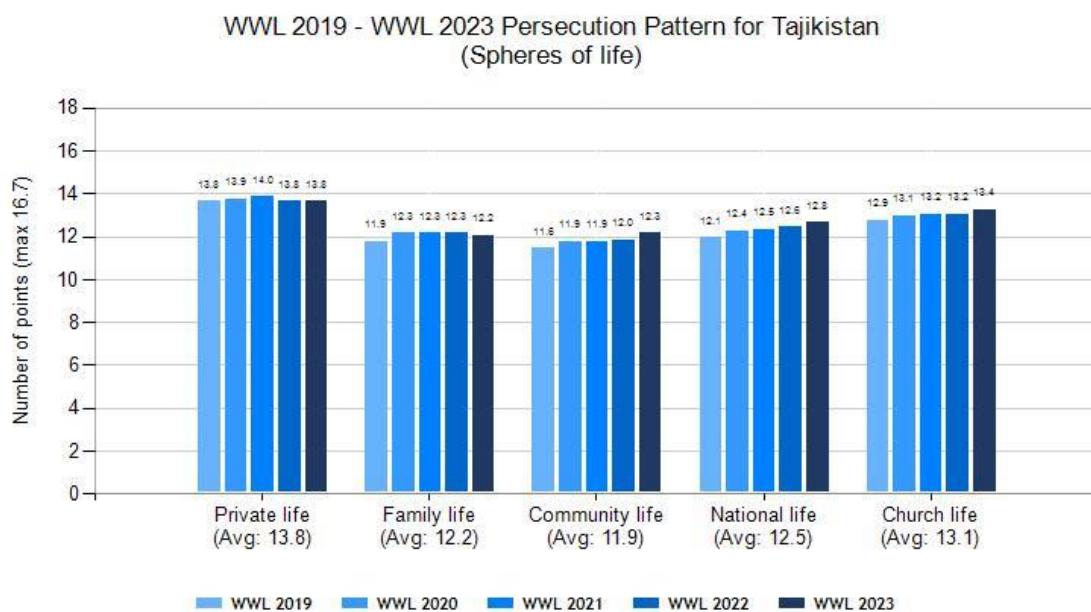


## 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Tajikistan: WWL 2019 - WWL 2023	
Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2023	12.9
2022	12.8
2021	12.8
2020	12.7
2019	12.4

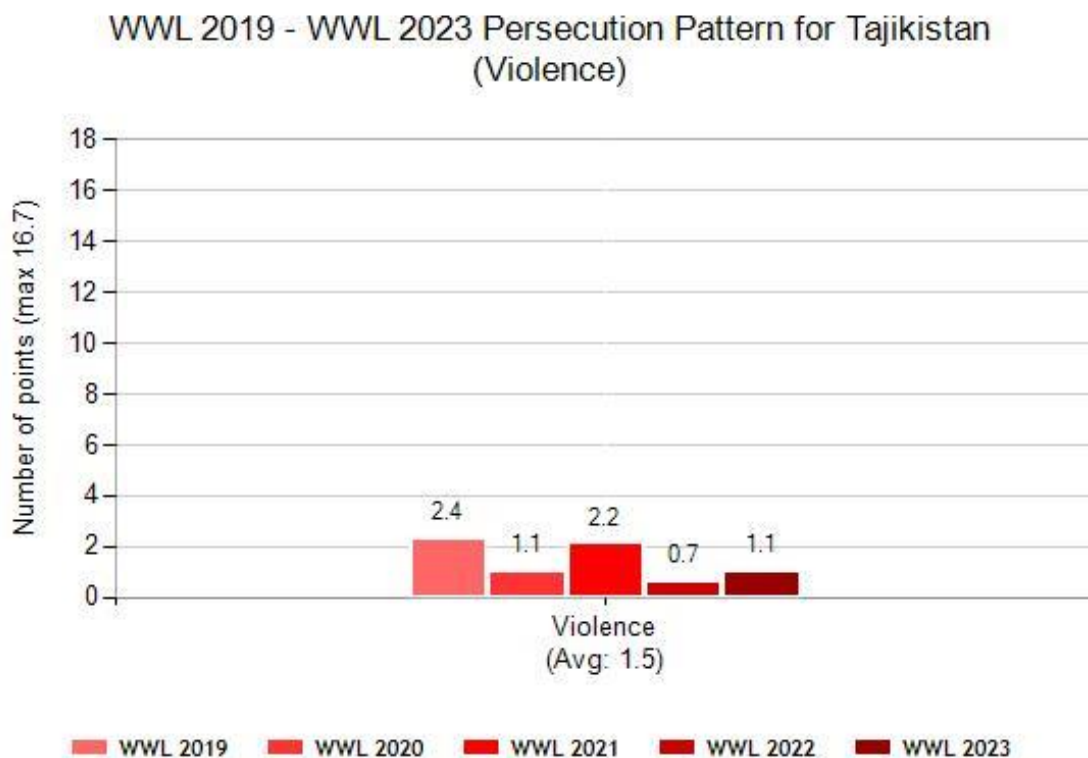
As can be seen from the table above, the average pressure on Christians in Tajikistan has increased slowly since WWL 2018 and now seems to have stabilized off at the very high level of 12.8/12.9 points, indicating the regime's stable attitude towards Christians.

## 5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



Over the past five WWL reporting periods, the scores in *Community*, *National* and *Church spheres of life* have increased, but not very dramatically. This indicates that the situation for Christians in Tajikistan is more or less stable at a very high level of pressure. *Private* and *Church spheres of life* have consistently scored highest, typical for the two main Persecution engines in operation.

## 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



As in many other former Soviet republics, the number of reported violent incidents in Tajikistan tends to be relatively low. Over the past five WWL reporting periods, the score has varied, but never gone beyond 2.4 points. In WWL 2022, the score was the lowest of all 5 reporting periods. It went up a little in WWL 2023 to 1.1 points.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Although in Tajikistan the law generally gives equal rights to men and women, traditional culture puts women in an inferior position compared to men and requires them to be obedient to male family members. Domestic violence is widespread, and perpetrators operate in a culture of impunity. Compounding struggles for victims, there is a distinct lack of mental health support in the country ([MNN, 20 October 2020](#)).

As Tajikistan is a predominately Muslim nation, female converts from Islam are particularly vulnerable to intolerance, discriminating pressure and violent persecution. Since Islamic teaching in the country compels women to submit in all ways to the men in the family, in practice, women do not have the independence or freedom to choose their own religion. If their conversion is discovered, female converts run the risk of being locked up, beaten, rejected, sexually assaulted, or forced to marry a Muslim. In particular, women and girls who had a premarital arrangement before their conversion will be forced to marry. Although there were no reported cases in the WWL 2023 reporting period, this remains an ongoing risk for converts. If a woman was already married before becoming a Christian, she will likely experience beatings from her husband and be forcibly divorced. In short, female converts are put under immense pressure to recant their new faith.

A country expert gives an example from one city in Tajikistan, where a female Christian's husband "simply forbids her and her son to attend the Church and locks them up." This temporary house-arrest ensures that she and her son do not have access to Christian teachings and rites.

The state authorities in Tajikistan prohibit the use of religious clothes or symbols, including those worn by female Christians. Among some Baptists and Pentecostal groups, married women traditionally cover their heads with a headscarf. This headscarf is different from the one used by Muslim women, but there is concern that it could possibly become a future cause for arrest.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Economic harassment via business/job/work access; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Military/militia conscription/service against conscience
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Like other parts of Central Asia, men in Tajikistan normally hold leadership roles within the family and within the churches. As such, there is more pressure on men from the police. From time to time, police officers disrupt meetings and interrogate the Christians attending. The local authorities often impose fines on Christians because of their faith and for legal reasons such as gathering without a permit, possessing and printing religious material without a permit, or perceived proselytization. Rights violations by the state include searches, detention, interrogation, confiscation, fines and imprisonment. When detained by the police, Christian men suffer verbal and physical abuse, threats, beatings, and pressure to become informers. If a man is a church leader, his treatment by the authorities will affect his church and cause levels of fear to rise; active convert leaders will face the highest levels of pressure.

At the hands of the local community, Christian men can lose their jobs and suffer beatings, threats, verbal and physical abuse, discrimination, ostracization and pressure aimed at their family members. Men are the main providers and if they lose employment it affects the whole family. Within the context of mandatory military service, too, Christian men have been exposed to various forms of physical and mental persecution.

Known converts will be harassed and interrogated harshly by non-Christian members of their family and community. At the hands of his own Muslim family, a Christian convert may face beatings, humiliation and loss of inheritance. For young men who are students and still needing financial support, such financial dependency can be the means parents use to prevent and discourage conversion.

Due to strict laws about religious education, the state restricts the training of church leaders. As church leaders are predominately male, this primarily affects men, particularly those belonging to non-Orthodox groups.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

Tajikistan has a record of violating freedom of religion or belief and related human rights such as the freedom of expression and association. There is no focus on any specific religious group - Muslims, Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, Bahais etc. all suffer under a high level of state surveillance and oppression.

According to USCIRF 2022:

- "In 2021, the Tajikistani government's record on religious freedom remained bleak. State repression of the country's Muslim majority gained momentum amidst government fears about threats emanating from neighboring Afghanistan, especially after the Taliban's August takeover. In Tajikistan, alleged extremism and terrorism are punishable without requiring acts that involve violence or incitement of imminent violence. Charges are often arbitrarily issued against religious individuals and their trials lack due process and procedural safeguards. During 2021, the government conducted several mass arrests and imprisoned individuals for alleged involvement in illegal Muslim groups."

According to HRW 2022 country chapter on Tajikistan:

- "The Tajik government severely curtails freedom of religion or belief, proscribing certain forms of dress, including the hijab for women and long beards for men. Salafism, a fundamentalist strand of Islam, has been officially banned in Tajikistan since 2011 and authorities regularly arrest individuals for alleged membership in Salafi groups."
- "In June 2021, a closed-door trial of 18 suspected members of the Salafi movement began, with scant information made public about the defendants or the charges they faced. The suspects—all residents of the Bobojon Ghafurov district in northern Tajikistan—were arrested in a police raid in February. The defendants deny having links with the Salafi movement or any other religious extremist group, their relatives said. They accused police of torturing the detainees to obtain confessions. In July, 14 of the 18 defendants were sentenced to five and five-and-a-half years in prison. The remaining four were convicted of not reporting a crime and sentenced to one year in prison."

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2021):

- "In April [2021], the Supreme Court issued a verdict in the high-profile case begun in July 2020 against a large group of individuals it said were members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Independent news outlet *Asia-Plus* reported that the court sentenced 119 individuals, including Ismoil Qahhorov (from a prominent religious and political family) and two Egyptian citizens, to between five and 23 years in prison each.
- "Radio Ozodi reported in February that local officials in Mastchoh District destroyed the dome of a newly constructed mosque. Turob Turobov, chair of the Mastchoh *jamoat* (a small, rural administrative unit), told Radio Ozodi that the CRA had not approved construction of the mosque and that the structure was supposed to be turned into a library, in accordance with a 2018 decision by the Mastchoh District chair. Turobov also said there were already two mosques in the village."
- "Jehovah's Witnesses continued to seek registration, an effort at which they had been unsuccessful since 2007, and some adherents stated they were harassed by authorities."
- "Jehovah's Witness Shamil Khakimov continued to serve a four and a half-year sentence in a prison in Shughd Region that began in 2019 for 'inciting religious hatred' after police found Jehovah's Witnesses literature and a Tajik-language Bible in his home."
- "On social media, while open hostility toward minority religious groups was still relatively limited, there was significant criticism of Ismaili Shia Muslims and Zoroastrians. Traditional state and private media reportedly did not negatively portray or target minority religious groups."

Further information:

- As early as 2011, regulations were passed according to which religious formation abroad is permitted only by agreement with the authorities, and only after completion of formation courses at home. At the time President Emomali Rakhmon warned that Tajiks in foreign madrasas "do not become mullahs, but terrorists". According to information from the Religious Affairs Committee, since 2010 the government has forcibly repatriated over 3,000 Tajik citizens who received religious training through illegal routes in Yemen, Syria, Egypt, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran. (Source: [Asia News, 8 October 2021](#))

## Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

### **Dictatorial paranoia**

The current government exerts a very high level of control over the country. Government officials at all levels are the strongest violators of Christians' rights in Tajikistan. They have imposed all kinds of legal restrictions, monitor all religious activities, raid meetings and block the use of religious materials. This is likely to continue.

### **Islamic oppression/Clan oppression (blended)**

Islam is not the state religion but is the traditional religion of most of the population. Muslim pressure on Christians in Tajikistan does not come from radical Islamic movements but from the

far-reaching influence of family, friends and community on converts. The chances that this Islamic culture will change are as good as non-existent.

## External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: MNN, Oct 2020 - <https://www.mnnonline.org/news/suicides-rising-among-women-in-tajikistan/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Asia News, 8 October 2021 - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Dushanbe-punishes-'underground'-religious-formation-for-children-54235.html>

## Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the new Research & Reports page of the website od.org. As in earlier years, they are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) using the following links:

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Tajikistan>