

WORLD WATCH LIST 2025

SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

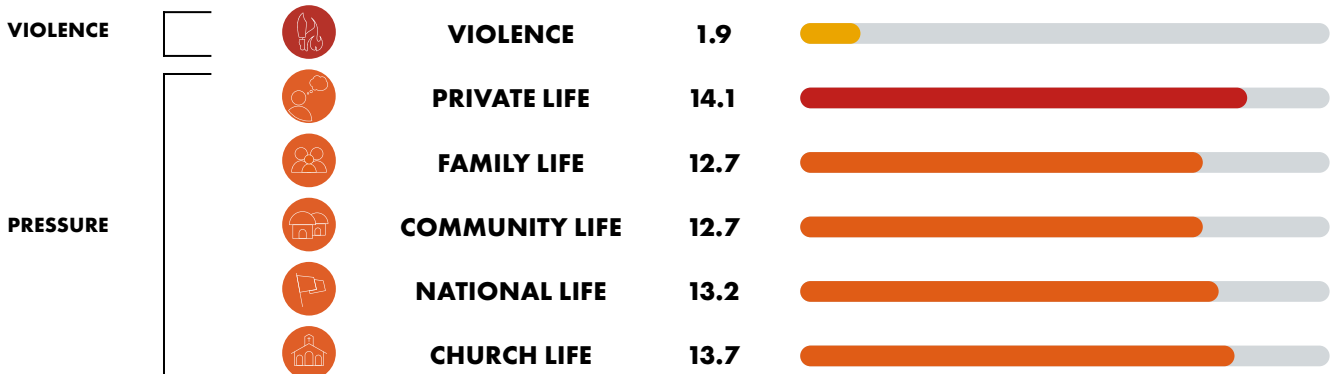
WORLD WATCH LIST NO.
39

TAJIKISTAN



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LEVELS OF VIOLENCE AND PRESSURE



Each of the six categories is scored out of a maximum of 16.7 points. The categories added together total 100 points (6 x 16.7 = 100).

Key findings

The government puts pressure on all “deviating” groups by tightening existing laws and 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 and the community. Russian Orthodox churches experience the fewest problems from the government, as they do not usually attempt to make contact with the Tajik population. The youth law has left Christians (and other religious minorities) in legal limbo, as it is not clear what kind of youth work is still allowed.

Quick facts

LEADER

President Emomali Rahmon

POPULATION

10,332,000

NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

62,600¹

MAIN RELIGION

Islam

GOVERNMENT

Presidential Republic



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Context

Religious Context	Number of adherents	Percentage
Christians	62,600	0.6
Muslims	10,103,000	97.8
Agnostics	120,000	1.2
Atheists	27,000	0.3

Source²

Tajikistan has the highest percentage of Muslims in Central Asia, but it would be wrong to call Tajikistan a Muslim country. Seventy years of atheism during the Soviet era have left their mark, and the secular government keeps Islam firmly under control. Most citizens follow Islamic culture rather than strict teachings. Most Christians are Russian Orthodox (ethnic Russians); around 3,000 are Tajik converts to Christianity. No religious activities beyond state-run and controlled institutions are allowed and Protestants in particular (who are seen as extremists, unlike Orthodox Christians) experience significant violations.

A new law regulating religious affairs was implemented in August 2011. It prohibits all religious youth work with 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 January 2018, [amendments to the law on religion](#) came into force, which included allowing the state to increase religious organizations' requirements to report all their activities and seek state approval for the appointment of all imams. On 6 October 2021, Tajikistan introduced new punitive measures against the "underground" religious education of children. Amendments were made 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. According to [USCIRF Annual Report 2024 -Tajikistan Chapter](#): "In 2023, religious freedom conditions in Tajikistan remained dire as the government continued to restrict and penalize the religious activity of its citizens, including those living abroad."

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

¹ Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

² Data source: Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

How the situation varies by region

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

Who is 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

Historical Christians include the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). They are not involved in evangelism among Tajiks so they can function without much interference since the Tajik regime does not consider them a threat. Also, the Tajik government does not wish to provoke Russia by attacking the ROC.

CONVERTS TO CHRISTIANITY

Christian converts with a Muslim background are under strong pressure from family and community as conversion is seen as an ethnic, national and religious betrayal, which brings shame to the family.

NON-TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

After converts, this category experiences the second most violations (raids, threats, arrests and fines) due to active evangelism. Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal groups suffer from many raids, threats, arrests and fines by the authorities.



Main sources of persecution and discrimination

DICTATORIAL PARANOIA

Only state-controlled institutions are allowed. Pressure from the authorities has increased since 2015, causing a rise in the number of raids on meetings, Christian materials confiscated and an increase in Christians being fined and interrogated. Protestants are regarded as dangerous followers of an alien sect with the aim of destroying the current political system.

ISLAMIC OPPRESSION BLENDED WITH CLAN OPPRESSION

If indigenous citizens (who are Muslim) convert to Christianity, they experience pressure and occasionally physical violence from their families and communities to force them to return to their former faith, especially in rural areas. Some converts are put in domestic incarceration or expelled from their homes. Many choose to keep their faith secret.



How are men and women differently affected?

WOMEN

Men and women are equal under law, but traditional culture puts women in a subservient position to men and domestic violence is widespread. Female converts from Islam are particularly vulnerable to intolerance, discrimination and violence, as women do not have the independence or freedom to choose their own religion. Women risk house arrest, beatings, rejection, harassment and forced marriage. If already married, domestic violence and forced divorce is likely. The state also prohibits religious clothes or symbols, including those worn by female Christians.

Female typical pressure points:

- Abduction
- Forced divorce
- Forced marriage
- Incarceration by family (house arrest)
- Violence – physical
- Violence – verbal

MEN

Like much of Central Asia, men in Tajikistan normally hold leadership roles within families and churches, and are therefore targeted in this capacity. They are pressured by the police through interrogation, fines and the disruption of meetings. State violations also include searches, detention, interrogation, confiscation, fines and imprisonment. When detained, men suffer verbal and physical abuse, threats, beatings and pressure to inform. Known converts can lose jobs and suffer beatings, discrimination and ostracization at the hands of their communities and families. Mandatory military service also exposes Christians to persecution.

Male typical pressure points:

- Denied inheritance or possessions
- Economic harassment via work/job/business
- Economic harassment via fines
- Imprisonment by government
- Military/militia conscription/service against conscience
- Travel bans/restrictions on movement
- Violence – physical
- Violence – psychological
- Violence – verbal

WWL 5 year trend

WWL Year	Position on Open Doors World Watch List	Persecution rounded score out of 100
2025	39	68
2024	46	66
2023	44	66
2022	45	65
2021	33	66

The score for Tajikistan in WWL 2025 was 2 points higher than in WWL 2024: 68 points. Pressure went up in all spheres of life, but the highest increase came from Violence. Pressure was highest in the Private and Church spheres of life. The government imposes many restrictions on church activities.



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Examples of violence in the reporting period

- **Churches attacked:** One house church was attacked twice by teenagers belonging to the Muslim community. The windows were broken at Christmas and Easter.
- **Christians arrested:** Sources reported that 5 Christians were detained and subjected to interrogation.
- **Christians attacked:** At least 20 converts to Christianity were abused and beaten by their families and local community.
- **Christians forced to leave their country:** At the end of 2023, two families left for the USA because their families had humiliated and insulted them because of their Christian faith.

WWL Year	Churches or Christian buildings attacked or closed	Christians detained	Christians physically or mentally abused	Christians forced to flee their countries
2025	1	5	20	2
2024	0	0	45	0

This table includes only a few categories of faith-based violence during the reporting period - for full results see the violence section of the country's corresponding WWL Persecution Dynamics. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as minimum figures. In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10, 100* or 1000*) is given which in reality could be significantly higher. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000*, 100,000* and 1,000,000*.*

PRIVATE LIFE

Conversion is officially allowed, but it is viewed as a betrayal of family and culture. It can lead to violence and pressure, as community members try to make converts recant. Many converts choose to keep their faith secret.

FAMILY LIFE

When a parent converts to Christianity, family members will try to take custody of the children to raise them according to Islamic principles. The law does not permit under-18s to take part in activities linked to a church or mosque. Christian children experience slander from community members, and Muslim children are often kept from having contact with them. All children are required to study "History of Religions" at high school, which is taught from a Sunni Muslim perspective.

COMMUNITY LIFE

Non-Orthodox Christians are monitored by members of their community and local state officials by methods including phone-tapping. They can be harassed, interrogated and threatened. This is particularly true for known converts.

NATIONAL LIFE

The Constitution protects religious freedom. However, the Religion Law of 2009/2011 (with its amendments in January 2018) requires compulsory registration of all religious organizations. Any church activities by non-registered groups are illegal. There is a ban on unlicensed religious education and censorship of any religious materials. The law on parents' responsibilities prohibits young people under 18 from participating in the activities of religious organizations.

CHURCH LIFE

The August 2011 law on religion prohibits any church youth work. The government must approve the production, importation, sale and distribution of religious materials by registered religious groups, which in effect is a ban on all religious materials used by unregistered religious groups. There are restrictions on foreign Christians visiting Tajikistan. They need a special visa, which is very difficult to obtain.

International obligations & rights violated

Tajikistan has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights under 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)



Situation of other religious minorities

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

Open Doors in Tajikistan

Open Doors strengthens the persecuted church in Central Asia primarily through:

- Literature distribution
- Prayer support
- Biblical training
- Children and youth training
- Women's ministry
- Presence ministry
- Social and medical ministry
- Vocational training and micro credit
- Social-economic development projects, like rehabilitation centers for children, men, and women



ABOUT THIS BRIEF

- The content of this document is based on the more detailed WWL Persecution Dynamics per country published annually by World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. It may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © 2025 Open Doors International.
- All brief country profiles can be accessed under 'Advocacy resources' on the research pages of the Open Doors International website, along with the WWL Persecution Dynamics per country, accompanying Background Information per country and the latest update of WWL Methodology. These are also available at the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).
- The WWL 2025 reporting period was 01 October 2023 – 30 September 2024.

All photos in this dossier are for illustrative purposes.