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World Watch Research

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# Belarus: Persecution Dynamics

February 2025



**OpenDoors**

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Open Doors International / World Watch Research

February 2025

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## World Watch List 2025 – Top 50

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	98	96	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.7	11.1	94	93	92	91	92
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	89	89	88	87
4	Libya	16.0	16.2	15.9	16.2	16.4	10.6	91	91	88	91	92
5	Sudan	14.1	14.2	15.5	14.9	15.3	16.1	90	87	83	79	79
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.9	12.2	89	89	89	88	88
7	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.6	14.9	14.5	16.7	88	88	88	87	85
8	Pakistan	13.6	13.9	15.0	15.0	12.9	16.7	87	87	86	87	88
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.9	16.5	10.9	86	86	86	85	86
10	Afghanistan	15.6	15.9	15.9	16.4	16.7	5.0	85	84	84	98	94
11	India	12.2	12.9	13.3	14.9	13.9	16.5	84	83	82	82	83
12	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.8	16.6	3.3	81	81	80	81	78
13	Myanmar	12.6	11.1	13.5	14.1	12.9	16.5	81	79	80	79	74
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	13.0	15.2	15.6	80	79	76	70	67
15	China	13.2	10.1	12.8	14.6	16.1	11.1	78	78	77	76	74
16	Maldives	15.6	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.7	78	78	77	77	77
17	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.3	14.8	13.9	6.1	78	79	76	78	82
18	Syria	13.5	14.4	13.9	14.4	14.3	7.0	78	81	80	78	81
19	Algeria	14.7	14.3	11.5	14.7	16.0	6.3	77	79	73	71	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	14.0	15.6	76	75	71	68	67
21	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.6	12.9	14.3	8.3	74	71	69	69	67
22	Laos	11.8	10.7	13.5	14.1	13.9	9.8	74	75	68	69	71
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	2.8	74	72	72	70	71
24	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.7	11.3	10.4	16.1	74	71	69	68	67
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.5	12.4	15.5	4.4	73	71	71	71	71
26	Cuba	13.2	8.5	13.9	13.3	15.1	9.1	73	73	70	66	62
27	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	14.0	15.6	72	70	70	68	66
28	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	14.6	15.7	72	70	70	68	62

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
29	Turkmenistan	14.3	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.3	1.5	71	70	70	69	70
30	Nicaragua	12.4	7.6	13.7	13.3	14.1	9.6	71	70	65	56	51
31	Mexico	11.7	9.0	12.5	11.8	11.0	14.6	71	68	67	65	64
32	Oman	14.5	14.1	10.9	13.8	14.1	3.0	70	69	65	66	63
33	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	15.6	70	69	66	66	65
34	Tunisia	12.4	13.2	10.1	12.6	13.8	8.1	70	69	67	66	67
35	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	10.8	14.5	16.1	70	67	67	66	64
36	Bhutan	13.2	13.2	12.3	14.1	14.2	2.2	69	68	66	67	64
37	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.9	68	68	68	65	63
38	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.6	12.2	12.8	14.2	4.3	68	65	65	64	64
39	Tajikistan	14.1	12.7	12.7	13.2	13.7	1.9	68	66	66	65	66
40	Egypt	12.7	13.7	12.1	12.4	10.9	6.3	68	68	68	71	75
41	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.7	67	67	68	74	67
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	2.6	67	66	66	63	62
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.4	13.1	16.1	67	66	65	65	64
44	Vietnam	10.8	9.5	12.2	14.1	14.1	5.9	67	68	70	71	72
45	Turkey	13.0	11.7	11.7	13.2	11.5	5.4	67	64	66	65	69
46	Colombia	11.0	7.9	12.7	11.5	10.5	12.6	66	68	71	68	67
47	Kyrgyzstan	13.5	10.3	11.7	11.4	12.4	6.9	66	59	59	58	58
48	Brunei	14.8	14.8	10.8	10.8	14.0	0.6	66	66	65	64	64
49	Chad	11.0	8.2	10.2	9.9	10.3	15.9	65	61	58	55	53
50	Jordan	12.9	14.3	10.4	12.2	12.8	2.4	65	65	65	66	64

## World Watch List 2025 – Ranks 51-78

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
51	Malaysia	12.8	13.7	11.7	12.4	11.2	3.0	65	64	66	63	63
52	Azerbaijan	13.3	10.2	9.6	12.2	13.7	5.6	65	60	59	60	56
53	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.9	64	63	64	63	62
54	Nepal	12.2	10.6	9.5	12.6	12.3	5.9	63	62	61	64	66
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.4	63	62	63	61	58
56	Russian Federation	12.7	7.9	10.7	13.1	14.1	4.4	63	58	57	56	57
57	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.1	1.7	61	61	60	59	56
58	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	61	64	64	63
59	Indonesia	10.9	11.9	10.9	11.6	10.2	5.7	61	66	68	68	63
60	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.6	61	61	62	62	62
61	Sri Lanka	12.7	8.7	11.5	11.5	8.5	7.6	60	60	57	63	62
62	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	10.3	10.7	12.1	0.2	60	60	60	59	58
63	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	14.6	59	57	55	52	48
64	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	12.1	9.4	58	58	57	50	42
65	Honduras	7.9	4.7	11.7	7.3	9.9	13.1	55	55	53	48	46
66	Togo	9.2	6.7	10.4	7.1	11.5	9.3	54	52	49	44	43
67	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	0.6	54	55	55	57	56
68	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	8.9	54	52	48	43	47
69	Ukraine	6.8	5.0	7.8	12.5	13.5	7.2	53	44	37	37	34
70	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	8.3	53	52	52	51	46
71	Venezuela	6.3	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	9.6	52	53	56	51	39
72	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	16.1	52	52	51	48	47
73	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	9.6	51	44	44	42	42
74	Lebanon	11.5	10.1	7.0	6.2	6.7	7.2	49	48	40	35	34
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	4.4	48	47	44	44	43
76	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	8.1	15.6	47	46	46	43	43

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
77	Belarus	9.9	3.7	5.0	10.8	14.1	3.1	47	46	43	33	30
78	Philippines	9.2	6.6	6.6	6.1	5.7	8.5	43	40	32	34	26

## Copyright, sources and definitions

World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- [Background country information](#) (published annually in summer)
- [Persecution dynamics](#) (published annually in January/February).

These documents are the property of World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. They include data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and 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 end of each document under the heading “External links”. These documents may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © Open Doors International.

The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.

The latest update of WWL Methodology can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>.

## Reporting period

The WWL 2025 reporting period was 1 October 2023 - 30 September 2024.

## Brief country details

Belarus: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
9,455,000	7,439,000	78.7

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

Belarus: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	7,439,000	78.7
Muslim	26,100	0.3
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	1,100	0.0
Ethnic religionist	480	0.0
Jewish	8,600	0.1
Bahai	100	0.0
Atheist	219,000	2.3
Agnostic	1,760,000	18.6
Other	0	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

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

## Map of country



## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Belarus: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials
Christian denominational protectionism	Government officials, Religious leaders of other churches

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

## Brief description of the persecution situation

Ever since demonstrations occurred all over the country against the outcome of the August 2020 presidential elections, the regime reacted by cracking down on all forms of opposition and has continued its harsh policy, supported by Russia. Christians must be very careful in what they say and do. No change in this respect is likely in the foreseeable future.

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

- **October 2023:** On 17 October 2023, Minsk City Court ordered the closure of New Life Full Gospel Church, because local courts had found some of the church's online materials "extremist". The Church appealed to the Supreme Court against the decision (Source: [Forum 18, 14 November 2023](#)).
- **February 2024:** Pastor Alyksandar Zaretsky, who heads an Evangelical church in the northeastern region of Vitsebsk, was arrested on 23 February 2024 and put under administrative arrest for 15 days for violating an article in the Administrative Code that deals with the distribution of extremist materials [Charter 97]. When he appeared before the district court in Chashniki on 5 March he was found guilty of another crime, namely calling his church members to pray for Ukraine (Source: [RFE/RL, 18 March 2024](#)).
- **March 2024:** A court in Minsk has sentenced a Roman Catholic religious instructor, Uladzislau Beladzed, to three years in prison amid an ongoing crackdown on dissent (Source: [RFE/RL, 14 March 2024](#)).
- **April 2024:** The Christian Vision Telegram channel said that preacher, poet, and father of seven Syarhey Melyanets had fled Belarus after serving two administrative arrests of 13 and 12 days on unspecified charges amid an ongoing crackdown on civil society by the government (Source: [RFE/RL, 18 April 2024](#)).
- **May 2024:** Roman Catholic priests Andrzej Juchniewicz and Pawel Lemekh at the northeastern Vitebsk Diocese's sanctuary of Our Lady of Fatima at Shumilina were given 15- and 10-day detention orders respectively on 10 May 2024 (Source: [UCAN, 22 May 2024](#)).

## Specific examples of positive developments

According to US State Department ([IRFR 2023 Belarus](#)):

- “The government continued to allocate funds to cover salaries of professors and employees, as well as stipends for students at Belarusian Orthodox Church (BOC) seminaries.”



- “An interreligious working group comprising the BOC, Roman Catholic Church, Union of Evangelical Christian Baptists, Union of Evangelical-Lutheran Churches, and Jewish communities organized seminars and educational events during the year. For example, the group held multiple seminars on issues related to the religion and society, in particular religious practice and personal experiences, including modern cultural development in the country in the digital age.”

## Christian communities and how they are affected

**Communities of expatriate Christians:** There are no communities of expatriate Christians in Belarus to be considered for WWL analysis.

**Historical Christian communities:** This category consists mainly of the Belarusian Orthodox Church (BOC), which holds a privileged position in the country, and the Roman Catholic Church. Belarus's Catholic minority is concentrated in the western part of the country, especially around Hrodna. It is made up of a mixture of Belarusians and the country's Polish and Lithuanian minorities. The Catholic Church is also recognized favorably by the government.

**Converts:** This category consists of 'denominational converts' from Orthodoxy to Protestantism. They experience pressure from society and the BOC. However, the individuals involved join non-traditional congregations and do not form separate communities.

**Non-traditional Christian communities:** Of all the Christians in Belarus, Baptists and Pentecostals experience the most difficulties for their faith. Because they are active in evangelism, they are accused of sheep-stealing by Orthodox Christians and are regarded as propagating a Western/alien religion.

## Areas where Christians face most difficulties

The levels of pressure and violence exerted by government officials in Belarus is the same all over the country. Pressure from family, friends and community on 'denominational converts' is stronger outside the urban areas.

## Position on the World Watch List

Belarus: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2025	47	77
WWL 2024	46	75
WWL 2023	43	76
WWL 2022	33	-
WWL 2021	30	-

Belarus scored 47 points in WWL 2025, just 1 point higher than in WWL 2024. The scores in *Family and Community spheres of life* went slightly down, while the scores in *Private and Church spheres of life* went slightly up. The biggest increase in pressure (1.1 points) was in the *National sphere of life* and was the main reason for the rise in Belarus' overall score. The score for violent incidents went down

very slightly. The dominant *Persecution engine* is *Dictatorial paranoia*, and it has its greatest impact on the two highest scoring *spheres of life*: *National and Church spheres of life*. The regime of President Lukashenko is constantly increasing pressure on religious freedom. The other *Persecution engine* active in Belarus (*Christian denominational protectionism*) is only categorized as 'Medium', but it has its effect over *all spheres of life* in the country. It is the Belarusian Orthodox Church that acts against other denominations.

## Persecution engines

Belarus: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Not at all
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Not at all
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Medium
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)**

President Aleksandr Lukashenko has been in power in Belarus since 1994. Through many state agents (such as the police, secret police and local authorities) the government aims to keep the country under firm control. Registration is obligatory for churches and non-sanctioned meetings run the risk of being raided. The level of repression has increased dramatically since August 2020. Foreign funding and support to churches in Belarus has been stopped and foreign Christians active in Belarus have been expelled. Belarus is currently one of the most authoritarian countries in Europe.

### **Christian denominational protectionism (Medium):**

The Belarusian Orthodox Church (BOC) plays an important role in society and is clearly favored by the government. The BOC is fiercely against any forms of evangelization carried out by other denominations who are frequently accused of sheep-stealing. People who do leave Orthodoxy to join other denominations are put under pressure by local BOC clergy, families and community to return to the faith of the ancestors – occasionally this is done with violence.

## Drivers of persecution

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

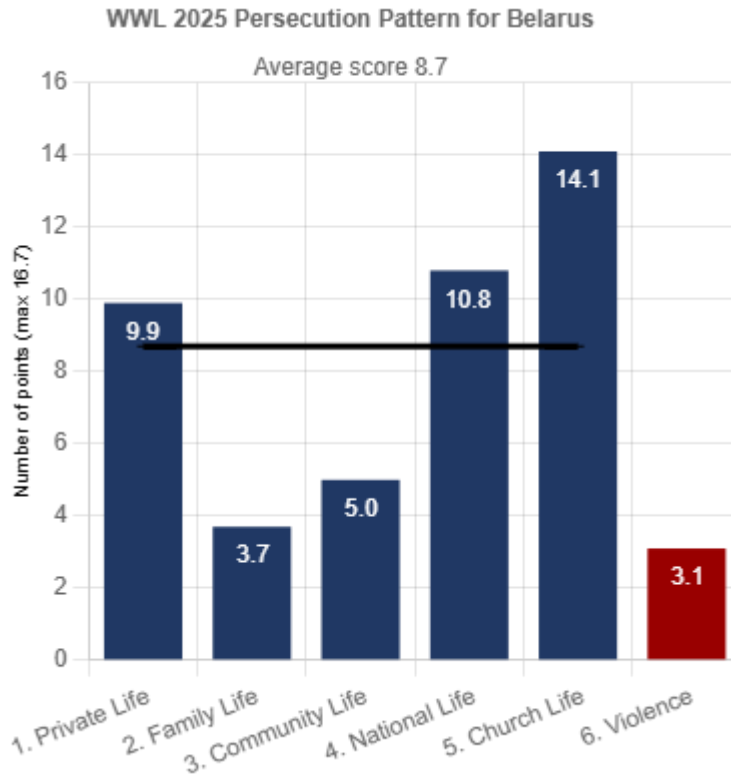
- **Government officials (Very Strong):** State agents at every level of society try to control religion. They will impose restrictions and occasionally raids meetings.

### Drivers of Christian denominational protectionism

- **Christian religious leaders (Medium):** The Belarussian Orthodox Church actively supports the persecution of non-Orthodox Christian groups, and primarily evangelical groups.

- **Government officials (Medium):** At the local level, government officials tend to have connections with the Orthodox Church, which can therefore influence the treatment of other Christian groups.

## The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2025 Persecution pattern for Belarus shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a level of 8.4 points, rising from from 7.9 points in WWL 2023.
- Pressure is highest (and increased) in the *Church, Private* and *National spheres of life*. This reflects the increasing pressure exerted by the state (*Dictatorial paranoia*).
- Violence against Christians in Belarus is at a level of 3.1 points, a 0.2 drop compared to WWL 2024.

## 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 2025 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://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>.*

### Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

***Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression. (3.25 points)***

This relates mainly to 'denominational converts'; such writing is likely to face hostility as it could be seen as proselytizing for a 'rival' church.

***Block 1.6: It has been risky for Christians to access Christian radio or TV, or Christian material on the Internet. (3.25 points)***

It is risky for new non-Orthodox converts as they would experience pressure from their family. No religious community has been allowed to have an FM radio station, so access is inherently limited, but this does not mean that it is risky for Christians in general to try to access Christian materials or programs.

***Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to discuss their faith with those other than immediate family members. (3.25 points)***

The attitude of Orthodox Christians against people who convert to another denomination is negative; however, the pressure is usually lower than that exerted by the direct family. The state has no impact at this level.

***Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (3.25 points)***

The attitude of Orthodox Christians against people who convert is negative. Unregistered churches run the risk of being raided periodically when a pastor or elder speaks out against the government. This has become worse after August 2020.

### Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

***Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (2.75 points)***

This affects 'denominational converts' whose family would want a traditional Orthodox education for the children, and Protestants who are opposed by Orthodox.

***Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (2.25 points)***

The subject 'Basics of Orthodox Culture' is part of the school curriculum. Children are not obliged by law to attend the lessons but often experience peer pressure at school if they choose to opt out.

***Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (2.25 points)***

This generally happens to children of non-Orthodox Christians. The Orthodox environment tends to treat children of Protestants and 'denominational converts' negatively.

***Block 2.11: Spouses of converts have been put under pressure by others to divorce. (2.25 points)***

Orthodox families do exert such pressure occasionally, but this is not something that is instigated by the state.

## **Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere**

***Block 3.12: Christians have been fined for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)***

Protestants and other non-Orthodox Christians can be fined for different faith-related reasons especially for sharing their faith and distributing literature. At the moment, the authorities are more focused on persecuting political opponents. During the 2020-2021 protests, many Christians and church leaders were detained, interrogated, fined and imprisoned for organizing or participating in prayer events and singing the 'Mighty God hymn' during the public demonstrations. It continued happening after Russia invaded Ukraine. Church leaders and other Christians who speak out against the war and organize prayer events can be fined and imprisoned for "extremist violations and crimes". Catholic priests in particular have been targeted.

***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.). (3.25 points)***

At times, Protestants and other non-BOC believers are monitored by the local community and in some individual cases reported to the police or to a local Center for Sect Studies. The state monitors all Christian activities and this has increased since August 2020.

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

Local Orthodox priests have a certain influence on the local police leadership and this will mean the risk for interrogation for non-Orthodox Christians is higher. Since August 2020 the (local) authorities have increased their control over Protestants and other non-Orthodox believers. As a result, interrogation for faith related reasons has risen.

***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.). (3.00 points)***

The family and community will exert pressure on ex-BOC adherents to return to Orthodoxy. Occasionally this may be accompanied by threats and even violence.

## Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

### ***Block 4.4: Christians have been hindered in travelling for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points)***

Since the August 2020 protests, Christians from Belarus have experienced more restrictions on travelling. Some non-Orthodox denominations are banned from receiving foreign missionaries and preachers, and they have voiced their concerns on numerous occasions. The most notorious case was the Catholic priest who was refused entrance to Belarus after he had voiced support for the opposition after the August 2020 presidential elections. However, in general, Christians from "traditional" denominations can travel freely. The government has tightened visa requirements and is denying travel to its citizens, especially when it comes to religious activity. This affects the BOC as well, showing that the government is paranoid when it comes to internal dissidents.

### ***Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.75 points)***

Since August 2020 the authorities in Belarus have increased their control over all religious organizations to prevent them from expressing criticism against the regime. All those who express criticism face arrest. Since the protests, any form of public religious activity by non-Orthodox groups is automatically seen as being suspicious and faces close monitoring by the government and by members of the Orthodox community.

### ***Block 4.16: International monitoring has been hindered when Christians had to stand trial. (3.75 points)***

The government of Belarus is actively trying to prevent any form of international monitoring into the persecution of Christians. This has only become worse since the crackdown that began in August 2020.

### ***Block 4.5: Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities. (3.50 points)***

(Local) authorities interfere in religious practice of churches and hinder their development in a variety of ways, and this has markedly increased since August 2020. Difficulties include: Finding a place to worship, strict processes of registration, strict financial controls over collecting the offerings and how it is being spent by the church. Such measures are mainly applied to non-Orthodox groups since Orthodoxy is treated favorably and has little difficulty in collecting donations.

## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

### ***Block 5.20: It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution. (4.00 points)***

This is risky for everyone in Belarus including churches and Christian organizations because the main instigator of persecution is Lukashenko's regime. Even the powerful BOC experiences problems when clergy speak out against Lukashenko.

### ***Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (3.75 points)***

Non-Orthodox groups (including Catholics) regularly face monitoring and disruption, but it is mainly evangelical groups which are targeted. Though not in the WWL 2025 reporting period, there have been numerous raids from the authorities on religious groups in recent years; however, there is also

evidence that a great deal of unregistered church activity continues unimpeded, hence the lower score for intensity and frequency in scoring this question. The BOC is also known to obstruct the activities of the other churches, accusing them of sheep stealing.

**Block 5.6: Work among youth in particular has been restricted. (3.75 points)**

Registered churches can work with children and youth but this work is constantly monitored by the state. Any youth-activities carried out by non-registered churches are considered illegal and are dealt with accordingly.

**Block 5.9: Christians have experienced interference when choosing their own religious leaders. (3.75 points)**

The removal of Roman Catholic Bishop Kondrusevich and critical Orthodox clergy shows that the regime is clearly involved in church leadership questions. The leadership of the Orthodox Church cooperated in the removal of Orthodox clergy who were critical of the regime.

## Violence

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

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

*Possible reasons for this may be:*

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

**2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons:**

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

**3. The use of symbolic numbers:**

*In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10\*, 100\* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10\* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain.*



Belarus: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2025	WWL 2024
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	2	2
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	12	14
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?	10	2
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)?	10 *	14
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	20
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	2	1

In the WWL 2025 reporting period:

- **Church closures:** There were two cases: The Full Gospel Church "New Life" was closed down in Belarus in Minsk on 2 December 2023, and on 7 February 2024 the Minsk City Court held a court hearing on the forced closure of the local charitable foundation in honor of St. John of Russia, associated with the St. Elizabeth Convent in Minsk.
- **Christians arrested:** At least 12 Christians were detained, including Protestant pastors and Catholic and Orthodox priests.

- **Christians sentenced:** At least 10 Christians were given sentences by Belarusian courts on charges of 'extremism' or 'treason'.
- **Christians attacked:** At least 10 Christians were physically abused - in all cases where police raid churches and arrest Christians, the victims are often physically harassed.
- **Christians forced to leave the country:** Roman Catholic priest Andrei Nozdrin left his parish in western Grodno Region after holding a last church service on the 25th of December 2023. Sergiy Melyanets also left Belarus after he was released from prison in April 2024.

## 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

Belarus: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2025	8.7
2024	8.4
2023	7.9
2022	6.2
2021	6.0

As can be seen from the table above, the average pressure on Christians over the 5 spheres of life has steadily risen in the last 5 WWL reporting periods. The reason for the sharp rises in WWL 2023 and WWL 2024 was the growing state oppression following the large-scale anti-government demonstrations which started in August 2020. Another negative effect came from the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The Belarusian regime of President Lukashenko supported Russia and acts harshly against anyone publicly opposing the war. The average pressure went up further in WWL 2025 to 8.7 points.

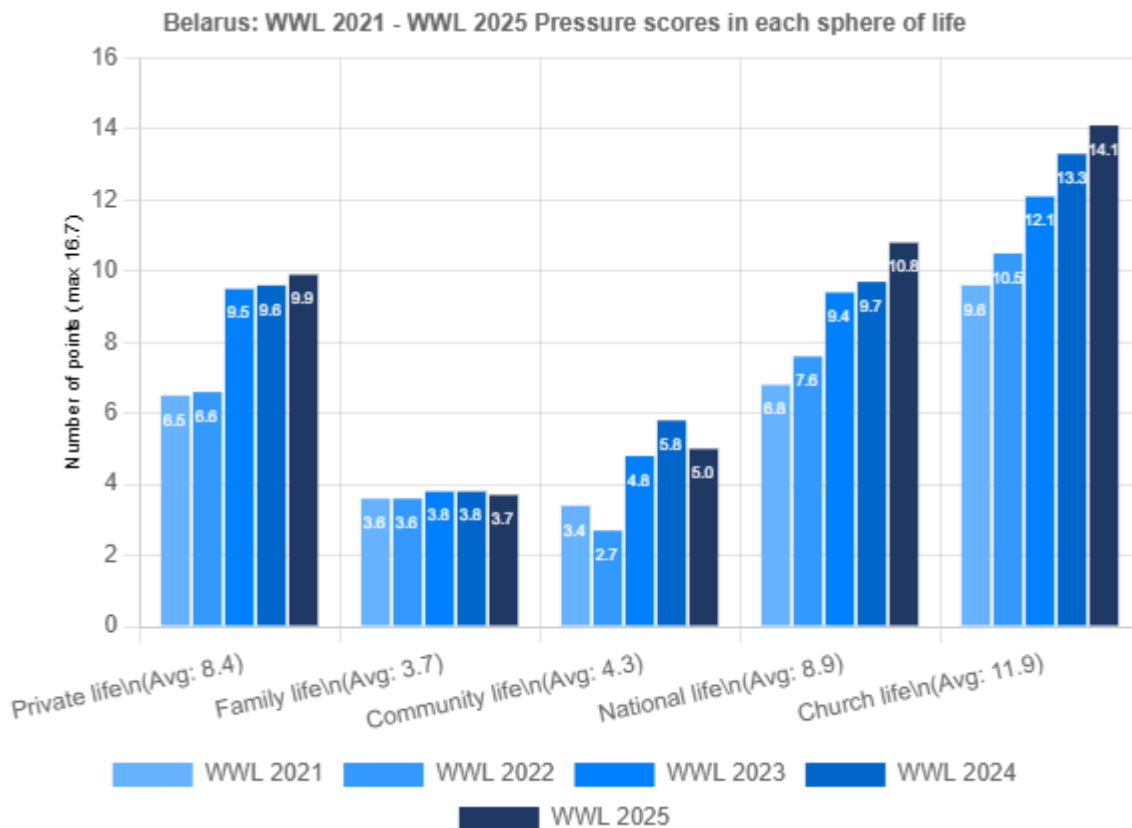
### 5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

Christians in Belarus experienced increasing levels of state oppression since the clampdown on opposition by the regime after the August 2020 demonstrations. Belarus' support for Russia's war in Ukraine provoked a further intensification of pressure. This increase of pressure became visible in almost all spheres of life – also in the spheres of life that already had the highest scores: *National* and *Church spheres of life*. As can be seen in the blue chart below:

- Pressure in the *Private sphere of life* in WWL 2021-2022 had always been stable at a fairly high level. However the score then jumped in WWL 2023, WWL 2024 and WWL 2025, now reaching the high level of 9.9 points.
- Pressure in the *Family sphere of life* has been remarkably constant and low in Belarus. This means that pressure from family on Christians has been relatively limited. Most affected are people who

change denominational loyalty.

- Pressure in the *Community sphere of life* rose sharply in WWL 2023 and went up even higher to 5.8 points in WWL 2024. In WWL 2025 it decreased slightly to 5.0 points. Community pressure on Christians is limited and mostly affects people who change church affiliation.
- Pressure in the *National sphere of life* has risen each year since WWL 2021. The increase reflects the fact that more and more restrictions are being imposed by the regime. It reached a record-high score of 10.8 points in WWL 2025.
- Pressure in the *Church sphere of life* is the sphere of life that has always had the highest score of all five spheres of life in Belarus and has increased each WWL reporting period since WWL 2021. The score in WWL 2025 is now extremely high (14.1 points). As in the *National sphere of life*, the notable increase in the *Church sphere of life* in WWL 2025 is an indication that the government is seemingly deliberately making life for (non-BOC) Christians increasingly difficult.



### 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

As in many other former Soviet republics, the number of violent incidents in Belarus has tended to be low or very low. As can be seen in the red chart below, in the last three WWL reporting periods the score has stabilized within the range 3.1 - 3.3 points.



## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

In Belarus, domestic violence is the most commonly encountered form of gender-based violence. There is a strong correlation between incidents of domestic violence and the socio-economic situation of the family ([UNFPA, last accessed 18 February 2025](#)). Women in Belarus face considerable expectations to care for children and the elderly ([UNDP, 8 March 2021](#)). While Belarus has ratified international legal frameworks related to gender equality, it has no specific legislation addressing female empowerment and equality, and sexual and gender based violence is still a significant risk ([UN Women, 2019](#)). If persecution escalates in Belarus, the gender inequalities listed above could become potential avenues of significant concern.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

The repressive policies of the Belarusian authorities have not changed in the last months, and an atmosphere of fear continues to prevail in the country. As of 31 January 2024, Belarus had 1429 political prisoners. The Belarusian authorities continue to actively persecute participants of the 2020 protests and anyone who disagrees with state policy. In a context of increasing state repression, some male Christian leaders have faced detention by the state. The state can view “Christian activists as the threat to its regime”, as explained by one country expert. In the course of detention, Christian men may risk physical and psychological violence.

Men in Belarus also face social expectations to financially provide for their families ([UNDP, 8 March 2021](#)). They face the potential risk of fines related to their faith, which can then affect the financial stability of their families.

A country expert explains the risk for ordained clergy as follows: “At the local level, Orthodox clergy and believers will target non-Orthodox leaders, but they will also defrock Orthodox clergy who are critical towards the regime.”

## Persecution of other religious minorities

According to US State Department ([IRFR 2023 Belarus](#)):

- “Some minority religious groups stated they did not apply for registration because their members feared harassment by authorities and did not want to submit their names, as required by the application process.”
- “The BOC continued its annual commemoration in honor of Hauryl Belastoksky (Gabriel of Bialystok), a child allegedly killed by Jews in Bialystok in 1690. The ROC considers him a saint and martyr, and the BOC falls under the ROC's authority on traditional practices such as this. The memorial prayer recited on each anniversary of Belastoksky's death on May 3 states the 'martyred and courageous Hauryl exposed Jewish dishonesty', although a trial after the boy's death acquitted the person charged with the crime.”
- “Antisemitic comments appeared on social media, online chat channels, and in the comment sections of local online news articles, although it was unclear whether all comments were posted by persons in the country.”
- “Religious groups labeled as 'nontraditional' by authorities continued to state the procedure for registering their communities and using residential premises for religious gatherings remained cumbersome and arbitrarily applied.”
- “Religious groups, especially Protestants and Jehovah's Witnesses, continued to report they remained cautious about proselytizing and distributing religious materials due to their perceptions that they could face intimidation or punishment, as proselytization without prior authorization was considered an unsanctioned mass event, and hence illegal.”

## Trends Summary

### 1) Belarus remains an authoritarian regime and the situation has deteriorated

Since the unrest in 2020/2021, the regime of President Alexander Lukashenko has done its very best to eradicate all forms of opposition. There are no signs that he will step down any time soon. Although President Lukashenko had previously aimed at gaining some measure of independence from Russia, the recent demonstrations pushed him in exactly the opposite direction. Only with Russian support was he able to stay in power. Belarus supported the Russian invasion of Ukraine by [allowing a military build-up along its border with Ukraine](#) (RFE/RL, 28 February 2022).

### 2) The attitude of the regime towards Christians has hardened

The political unrest had consequences for church leaders (Roman Catholics and Orthodox) who criticized the regime. Christians who spoke out against the Russian war in Ukraine, for instance, were arrested. The situation regarding religious freedom is tense and criticism of the regime by any Christian risks arrest.

## Further useful reports

Further background information per country and a selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

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

## External Links

- Copyright, sources and definitions: Background country information - <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/>
- Copyright, sources and definitions: Persecution dynamics - <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/country-dossiers/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Forum 18, 14 November 2023 - [https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2874](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2874)
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: RFE/RL, 18 March 2024 - <https://www.svaboda.org/a/32865960.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: RFE/RL, 14 March 2024 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/32861961.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: RFE/RL, 18 April 2024 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/belarus-christian-preacher-melyanets-release/32892630.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: UCAN, 22 May 2024 - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/new-clergy-arrests-spark-consternation-in-belarus/105174>
- Specific examples of positive developments: IRFR 2023 Belarus - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/belarus/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: (UNFPA, last accessed 18 February 2025). - <https://belarus.unfpa.org/en/topics/gender-equality-24>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: UNDP - <https://www.undp.org/belarus/blog/way-gender-equality-belarus>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: UN Women - <https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ECA/Attachments/Publications/2020/05/Belarus%20Country%20Gender%20Equality%20Brief.pdf>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: UNDP - <https://www.undp.org/belarus/blog/way-gender-equality-belarus>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: IRFR 2023 Belarus - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/belarus/>
- Trends Summary: allowing a military build-up along its border with Ukraine - <https://www.rferl.org/a/31727695.html>