
World Watch Research

Russian Federation: Persecution Dynamics

January 2025



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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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

2025

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

Russian Federation: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
143,957,000	120,215,000	83.5

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

Russian Federation: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	120,215,000	83.5
Muslim	15,511,000	10.8
Hindu	44,700	0.0
Buddhist	553,000	0.4
Ethnic religionist	1,060,000	0.7
Jewish	132,000	0.1
Bahai	20,600	0.0
Atheist	811,000	0.6
Agnostic	5,603,000	3.9
Other	6,480	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

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

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

Many ethnic Russians have left Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia due to the fighting between Islamic militant groups and the government. Churches have seen the number of their members drop in these regions. Of all the Christian communities, the Russian Orthodox churches experience the least problems from the government. Unregistered churches active in evangelism may face obstructions in the form of surveillance and interrogation by the local authorities. However, it is the indigenous Christians with a Muslim background in the Muslim majority regions who are bearing the brunt of persecution both at the hands of family and friends and from the local community; in some areas they have to keep their faith secret for fear of being attacked and possibly executed. The “military campaign” launched by Russia in Ukraine on 24 February 2022 has led to an increase in state surveillance. Any form of criticism (even from Christians who opposed the invasion of Ukraine on religious grounds) has been immediately dealt with by the authorities and punished.

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

The list of incidents below is divided into two sections: one section lists incidents that occurred on Russian territory, and the other lists incidents that occurred in Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine where Russian troops were responsible for the violence.

Russia

- October 2023:** In early October, 10 unidentified armed men raided a non-Moscow Patriarchate Russian Orthodox Church in the southern Krasnodar Region whose clergy have repeatedly spoken out against Russia's war in Ukraine. A priest was physically attacked, detained and charged with "disobeying a police officer" and "discrediting the Russian Armed Forces". (Source: [Forum 18, 2 November 2023](#))

- **October 2023:** Former Russian Archdeacon Andrei Kurayev, who lost his rank in April 2023 over his calls for an end to the invasion of Ukraine, wrote on Telegram on 16 October that he had left Russia for the Czech Republic. Kurayev wrote that he will be involved in public activities, including presenting lectures, and expressed hope that he will be able to return to Russia soon. In August 2023, a court ordered Kurayev to pay a fine after finding him guilty of discrediting the Russian armed forces involved in Moscow's war on Ukraine. The charge stemmed from his online post criticizing the war. (Source: [RFE/RL, 17 October 2023](#))
- **17 February 2024:** Grigory Mikhnov-Vaitenko, a priest in St. Petersburg, suffered a stroke after being arrested and detained for planning a memorial service for the late Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny in Russia. The priest, who was later hospitalized, was on his way to the Solovetsky Stone in St. Petersburg (a memorial set up to commemorate victims of Soviet political repression) on 17 February 2024 when he was apprehended and taken into custody. (Source: [Christian Post, 18 February 2024](#))
- **May 2024:** An independent Orthodox parish in the southern Krasnodar Region may be forced to demolish its own church, apparently as a direct result of its Archbishop's prosecution for opposing Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The city administration in Slavyansk-na-Kubani has lodged a civil lawsuit against Archbishop Viktor Pivovarov, claiming that the Holy Intercession Tikhonite Church - which has stood for nearly 25 years - is an "unauthorised structure" and must be demolished at his own expense. The decision comes into force either one month after the judge issues it in its final form, or upon an unsuccessful appeal. Archbishop Viktor would have one month to lodge an appeal, should he choose to do so. (Source: [Forum 18, 29 May 2024](#))
- **23 June 2024:** At least 20 people were killed in a coordinated and extremely violent attack by Islamic militants targeting two churches and a synagogue in Derbent and Makhachkala, North Caucasus. A 66-year-old clergyman was killed in church in front of his parishioners during the Pentecost Day celebration. (Source: [AsiaNews, 24 June 2024](#))

Russian-occupied areas in Ukraine

- **8 October 2023:** On 8 October 2023, armed and masked men in military uniform raided Sunday worship at the Council of Churches Baptist congregation in Melitopol. The pastor was interrogated closely. (Source: [Forum 18, 24 October 2023](#))
- **November 2023:** Anatoly Prokopchuk, a Pentecostal deacon, and his 19-year-old son Aleksandr, were kidnapped, mutilated, and shot in Kherson in November 2023. (Source: [Christian Today, 25 March 2024](#))
- **15 February 2024:** Unknown men from the Russian occupation forces seized 59-year-old Fr Stepan Podolchak of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine on 13 February in the Ukrainian village of Kalanchak in the Russian-occupied part of Kherson Region. They took him away barefoot with a bag over his head, insisting he needed to come for questioning. His bruised corpse - possibly with a bullet-wound to the head - was found on the street in the village on 15 February. (Source: [Forum 18, 20 February 2024](#))
- **March 2024:** Russian occupation forces in Ukraine have continued to crack down on Catholics, with one militant group sealing off Ukrainian Greek Catholic churches in Ukraine's Donetsk region. The Kyiv-based Institute for Religious Freedom reported on 23 March 2024 that since the beginning of the year, Russian militants calling themselves "Cossacks" had been seizing UGCC

churches and adjacent property, while barring UGCC Christians from entering the churches for prayers and worship. (Source: [UCAN, 28 March 2024](#))

- **August 2024:** "The Russian-controlled Crimean Supreme Court on Thursday (Aug. 2) sentenced a Ukrainian Orthodox priest to 14 years in a harsh labor camp for conviction on false espionage charges. The Prosecutor's Office alleged that the Rev. Kostiantyn Maksimov, 41, of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), used the internet to transmit coordinates of the deployment of Russian air defense equipment to the Ukrainian security service." (Source: [Christian Daily International, 7 August 2024](#))

Christian communities and how they are affected

Russian people are immensely proud of their culture and history and this has consequences on a religious level as well: While Russian Orthodoxy is regarded as typically Russian, Roman Catholicism and especially Protestantism are seen as Western and alien.

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

Historical Christian communities: After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the state lost its atheistic zeal and stopped persecuting Christians so severely. Religious prisoners were freed, and most churches belonging to Historical Christian communities could function more or less freely. This resulted in a revival of Christianity in the country, with the state favoring the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). Other Christian denominations in this category, however, continue to experience difficulties. For instance, the registration of a Protestant church will take more time, energy and resources, since church members will be investigated by the secret services concerning contacts with the West. If contact with Western churches are discovered, the request for a Protestant church's registration could well be denied.

Converts to Christianity: Christian converts with a Muslim background experience most pressure from the Muslim population in the Caucasus region. Here all Christians are facing violence and pressure, but converts from Islam bear the brunt of it. Converts living in Chechnya or Dagestan, for example, are regarded as betraying their national identity. Christianity is associated with the 'Russian occupiers', the ones who are being attacked in the guerrilla war that has been going on for decades. Over the years, dozens of Christian converts have had to flee their homes and spend time in safe houses. It is very difficult for them to return home.

Non-traditional Christian communities: Non-traditional Christian groups have frequently been criticized by the ROC for so-called sheep stealing. The ROC often considers Protestant groups as sects who are teaching heresy. The state regards these groups as un-Russian and often as Western spies. In Muslim areas, these Christians are often targeted because they are suspected of being active in evangelism.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

From a national perspective, persecution is only caused by restrictions imposed by the government. However, the situation is different in the northern Caucasus region where conservative Islam (Wahhabism) has a stronghold, especially in Chechnya and Dagestan (see above: *Map of country*). As

a result, almost all Russian Christians have left those areas. Converts from Islam are under such immense pressure to recant that most have to hide their new faith. Some have been forced to flee or find refuge in safe houses.

Position on the World Watch List

Russian Federation: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2025	63	56
WWL 2024	58	62
WWL 2023	57	61
WWL 2022	56	62
WWL 2021	57	58

The Russian Federation scored 63 points in WWL 2025, five points higher than in WWL 2024. The main reason for the increase was a rise of 2.7 points in the violence score, along with a rise in average pressure of 0.4 of a point. All over the country, the government imposes restrictions on non-Russian Orthodox church activities and on those Christians opposing the war in Ukraine. In the northern Caucasus, especially converts are targeted by their Islamic families and communities. *Islamic oppression* (blended with *Clan oppression*) is particularly evident in the *Private, Family and Community spheres of life* (especially in the northern Caucasus), while *Dictatorial paranoia* (all over the country) is dominant in the *Church and National spheres of life*.

Persecution engines

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

Legislation in Russia is being adapted and many new restrictions have been introduced. The government continues to favor the Russian Orthodox Church at the expense of other Christian groups. Jehovah Witnesses have been banned since 2017. After the start of the war in Ukraine in February 2022 state surveillance has increased, including the monitoring of non-ROC Christians.

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

In the Caucasus region, these are the most important Persecution engines. In the various republics on the northern slopes of the Caucasus range (Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia) Islamic militants are fighting against the Russian army to establish a Muslim emirate. Many ethnic Russians have left the area due to the violence. Churches have seen their membership drop. Christian converts with a Muslim background have to keep their faith secret for fear of being discovered and executed. *Islamic oppression* is also active in Tatarstan (with its capital city, Kazan, on the Volga river), a region 800km east of Moscow, where the influence of Islam is growing. Islamic terrorism moved closer to the capital in 2024: On 22 March 2024 the Islamic State-Khorasan group active in Afghanistan and Central Asia, claimed responsibility for an attack on Crocus City Hall near Moscow. (Source: [RFE/RL, 3 May 2024](#)) The attack killed over 150 and injured hundreds more. (Source: [AsiaNews, 25 March 2024](#))

Christian denominational protectionism (Strong)

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is regarded as typically Russian; Roman Catholics and especially Protestants are viewed as foreign and Western. Outreach activities by non-Orthodox denominations are not welcomed and non-traditional Christian communities have in particular been targeted by the ROC for so-called sheep-stealing – robbing the Orthodox Church of its members – and for false teaching.

Drivers of persecution

Russian Federation: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG	-	WEAK	STRONG	STRONG	-	-	VERY STRONG	-
Government officials	Weak	-	-	Weak	Weak	-	-	Very strong	-
Ethnic group leaders	Strong	-	Weak	Strong	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong	-	-	Strong	-	-	-	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	Weak	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Medium	-	Very weak	Medium	Medium	-	-	Medium	-
One's own (extended) family	Strong	-	Weak	Strong	Strong	-	-	-	-
Political parties	-	-	-	-	Medium	-	-	Medium	-
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 various levels carry out surveillance and impose restrictions. Legislation in Russia is being adapted and bringing in new restrictions constantly.
- **Normal citizens (Medium):** All over Russia, local communities oppose openly evangelistic activities carried out by Protestant Christians.
- **Political parties (Medium):** Although Russia has a parliament (with elections), it is completely dominated by President Putin's United Russia party. They are constantly tightening existing legislation and imposing new restrictions.

Drivers of Islamic oppression, blended with Clan oppression

- **Extended family (Strong):** This is only the case in the Muslim areas, with converts from Islam being targeted most.
- **Ethnic or Clan group leaders (Strong):** There is a strong link between religion and nationalism in the Muslim regions of Russia: Conversion to Christianity is strongly opposed.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Muslim clerics will oppose conversion to Christianity.
- **Normal citizens (Medium):** This is only the case in the Muslim areas, with converts from Islam being targeted most.

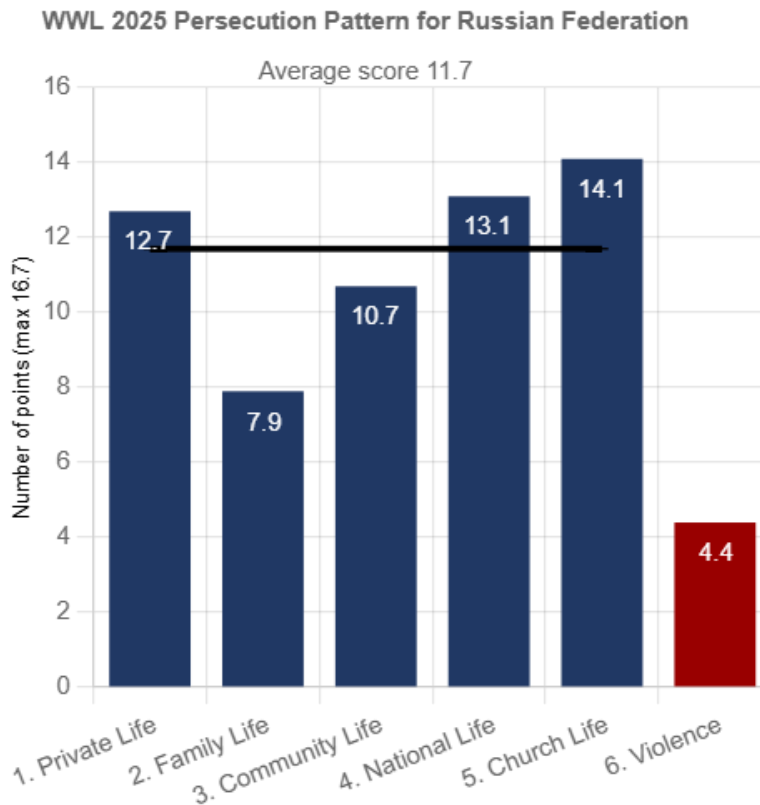
Drivers of Christian denominational protectionism

- **Extended family (Strong):** Russian Orthodox Christians will oppose anyone in their family turning to Protestantism.
- **Christian religious leaders (Medium):** The ROC has a negative attitude towards other denominations and accuses them of sheep stealing. However, they are not officially the state church.
- **Normal citizens (Medium):** Occasionally, Orthodox priests will encourage citizens to act against Protestants.
- **Political parties (Medium):** The ROC has a favored status among politicians in Russia.

The Persecution pattern

The WWL 2025 Persecution pattern for the Russian Federation shows (see chart below):

- The average pressure on Christians rose slightly to the very high level of 11.7 points.
- Pressure was highest in the *Church and National spheres of life* (reflecting the influence of *Dictatorial paranoia*) and in the *Private sphere of life* (which reflects the effect of *Islamic oppression* blended with *Clan oppression*).
- The score for violence rose significantly from 1.7 points in WWL 2024 to 4.4 points in WWL 2025. The main reason for the increase was the killing of 2 Christians and the attacks on at least 4 churches.



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 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (3.50 points)

In the northern Caucasus, and to a lesser extent also in the mid-Volga, converts will avoid letting any Christian materials be discovered by their family or community. The possession of Christian materials is considered to be clear evidence of conversion. The legislation imposes restrictions on religious materials - so Christians can be fined for owning Christian materials that do not meet the state criteria.

Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.50 points)

In the northern Caucasus, and to a lesser extent also in the mid-Volga, converts will avoid revealing their new faith because they fear the consequences. As a result, many live as secret believers. Protestants are wary of publicly expressing their faith in these regions as well. Religious legislation does not allow information to be posted about church and faith issues on social networking sites. Christians from registered churches in Russia openly share their faith, although the access to their web-

pages would be restricted to a group of friends. However, Christians from non-registered churches tend not to use Facebook, mainly because they fear being accused of illegal missionary activities.

Block 1.6: It has been risky for Christians to access Christian radio of TV or Christian materials on the Internet. (3.50 points)

In the northern Caucasus, and to a lesser extent also in the mid-Volga converts run a risk of being caught in the act of accessing Christian sources by their families, friends and the community. The state is keeping close watch over all non-Orthodox Christians and may block access to some media.

Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.25 points)

Conversion is strongly opposed in the Northern Caucasus and less strongly in the mid-Volga region (Tatarstan and Bashkortostan) by the Muslim environment (family, friends, community, local imams). Officially, there is no hindrance to conversion - the laws are secular. In the European part of the Russian Federation, conversion to Catholic and all other non-Russian Orthodox denominations is opposed by Russian Orthodoxy and (local) government supporting Russian Orthodoxy. In Caucasian, Siberian and Far Eastern areas, conversion to Protestant, Catholic and non-Russian Orthodox denominations is opposed by local religious (Islamic or Buddhist) leaders or Russian Orthodoxy and (local) government supporting local religious tradition. The understanding that "Russians are Russian Orthodox" and "others are Islamic or Buddhists" is typical for both secular and religious authorities.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

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

In cases where children of converts remain in the northern Caucasus, and to a lesser extent also in the mid-Volga, they are often treated badly by family, friends and neighbors. It is usual for them to be put through a process of "re-education" by the family to make sure they know the right way to be Muslim. Children of Protestants may experience being bullied or ousted from the community.

Block 2.3: Christians have been hindered in celebrating a Christian wedding for faith-related reasons. (2.50 points)

This is a problem for converts in the northern Caucasus, and to a lesser extent also in the mid-Volga. Muslim families will not tolerate any Christian influence in their lives. Local Muslims will also not allow openly Christian celebrations organized by Protestants. Family weddings will mostly be left alone by the state.

Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (2.50 points)

In the northern Caucasus, and to a lesser extent also in the mid-Volga, baptisms are regarded as the final farewell to the faith of the fathers - the final sign of conversion. Family, friends and community will oppose this fiercely. The state does not block baptisms, but if an unregistered group makes a high-profile event out of baptisms, they will face monitoring and possible interference.

Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (2.50 points)

In the northern Caucasus, and to a lesser extent also in the mid-Volga, children of converts are almost always removed from the parents temporarily, if not permanently, by the extended family. Officially, however, Russia is a secular country and does not prevent Christians from raising their children according to their faith.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

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.). (3.75 points)

In the northern Caucasus, and to a lesser extent also in the mid-Volga, converts and Protestants are constantly monitored by the Muslim community. According to the Yarovaya Law, it is the responsibility of every Russian citizen to report to police about every religious meeting, or cases of proselytism etc. Telephone and internet providers are obligated to keep records and contents of conversations and messages and provide these if needed by the police. Not executing this legal obligation is a criminal offence.

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

When it becomes known in the northern Caucasus, and to a lesser extent also in the mid-Volga, that a person has become a Christian, the family, friends and community will use maximum pressure to make the convert recant his/her faith. It affects Protestants as they are under constant pressure of being considered "sects", which means dangerous, foreign, bad, traitors of Russia.

Block 3.12: Christians have been fined for faith-related reasons (e.g. jizya tax, community tax, protection money). (3.50 points)

Fines are usually issued by the state. All over Russia, the local authorities may fine churches that operate without formal registration. After the implementation of the Yarovaya Law there were hundreds of court hearings and heavy fines - the majority involving Protestant Christians. They can be fined for illegal missionary activities (e.g. inviting people to the church), possessing Christian literature (without full details of publisher) and for holding illegal religious meetings (e.g., house prayer meetings and Bible studies).

Block 3.13: Christians have been interrogated or compelled to report to the local vigilante/police for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)

In the northern Caucasus, and to a lesser extent also in the mid-Volga, converts and Christians active in evangelism are under constant surveillance by the Muslim community. After the implementation of the Yarovaya Law hundreds of Christians were interrogated, the majority of them Protestant Christians. Church pastors can be interrogated and fined if their church members are accused of illegal missionary activities.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.3: Christians have been forced by law or in practice to act against their conscience. (3.75 points)

Since the military mobilization in September 2022, the government has consistently expanded the mobilization age bracket and has jailed and fined individuals for refusing to participate due to conscientious objections. Islam has no impact on legislation in Russia.

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

The Yarovaya Law completely undermines the principles of religious freedom in the Constitution. Since its introduction in 2016, it has become inadvisable for Christians to express their views or opinions in public even on social network sites. They can be fined for doing this. In the northern Caucasus, and to a lesser extent also in the mid-Volga, converts and Protestants will also experience problems in expressing their views and faith in public. There is no such Muslim influence at the national level, however.

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

After the launch of the attack on Ukraine on 25 February 2022, Russia was excluded from the Council of Europe. Due to this, victims of human rights violations committed by the Russian Federation lost protection under the European Convention on Human Rights. The country's diplomatic isolation from those states which had been supportive of human rights and civil society in Russia, made it increasingly difficult for Russian human rights defenders, religious activists and civil society organizations to engage with the international community. It has also meant that international monitoring in Russia has been cut.

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. (3.50 points)

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, equal rights irrespective of religious belief, and the rights to worship and profess one's religion. The law states government officials may prohibit the activity of a religious association for violating public order or engaging in "extremist activity".

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

When the instigators of persecution are state agents at any level (which affects practically all Christians - even critical ROC church leaders and ordinary Christians), it is risky to speak out against them. State agents can act with impunity and - since the judiciary in Russia is not independent - any complaints will result in detention or fine. This has only become worse in recent years. When the instigators of persecution are Muslims from the local community (affecting mainly converts and those Protestants active in evangelism), it is useless to speak out against them since this will make the local Muslims only more determined to stop any outreach activities.

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

Since the implementation of the anti-terrorist Yarovaya Laws in 2016, the level of surveillance of all non-Orthodox Christian churches has increased. Many meetings have been raided, and church leaders and Christians have been fined. In the northern Caucasus, converts will not even attempt to go to church meetings for fear of reprisals from the Muslim community.

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

The state puts restrictions on who can be the leader of religious organizations. From 2020 on, there were discussions about making it necessary for all church staff - including pastors - to have a state-recognized proof of their (academic) qualifications. Not all current church leaders can meet these criteria because many were called to ministry in the 1990s when there were no seminaries or other Bible educational institutions allowed. Even now, there is an insufficient number of state-licensed theological education institutions. The existing theological institutes sometimes have to battle for the right to continue their educational activities and enroll new students. A few higher educational Christian institutions had their licenses cancelled for various reasons. This creates a hindrance to the churches in choosing their own leaders - they need to be the people educated in the seminaries approved by the state.

Block 5.13: Churches have been hindered in importing Christian materials from abroad. (3.50 points)

In theory, it is not prohibited to import religious literature from abroad, but in practice it is problematic. Importing religious literature from abroad implies having contact with (religious) organizations abroad. All organizations that have (non-business) relations with foreign organizations are labelled as foreign agents by the government.

In the northern Caucasus, and to a lesser extent also in the mid-Volga, the Muslim authorities will oppose any imported Christian materials (especially when it is in their own language) as they regard these as being intended for evangelistic purposes.

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.

Russian Federation: 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)?	2	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?	4	0
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	7	4
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?	6	5
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	0	1
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)?	2	3
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

(table continues below)

Russian Federation: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2025	WWL 2024
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	0
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	3

In the WWL 2025 reporting period:

- **Christians killed:** At least 2 Christians were killed in an Islamic terrorist attack in Dagestan.
- **Churches damaged/destroyed:** At least 4 churches were damaged/destroyed.
- **Christians detained:** At least 7 Christians were detained.
- **Christians attacked:** At least 2 Christians were beaten for their faith in Krasnodar region.

5 Year trends

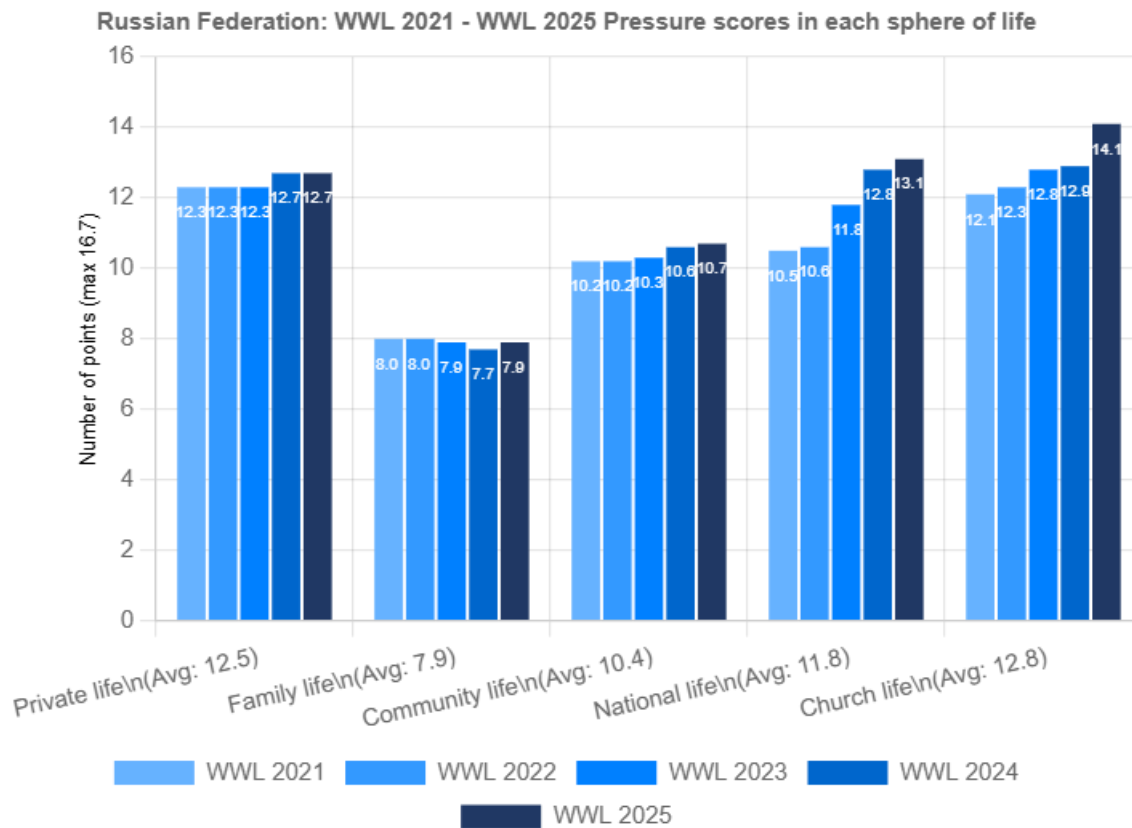
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

Russian Federation: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2025	11.7
2024	11.3
2023	11.0
2022	10.7
2021	10.6

As can be seen from the table above, the very high average pressure on Christians has crept up yearly from 10.6 points in WWL 2021 to 11.7 points in WWL 2025.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



Private and Church spheres of life have always been the highest scoring spheres of life in Russia. In WWL 2024 and WWL 2025 they were joined by the increase in score in the *National sphere of life* which is a sign of growing state intolerance.

- Pressure in the *Private sphere of life* over the past five years has always been very high - it has never been lower than 12.2 points. The score for WWL 2025 was the same as for WWL 2024 (12.7 points). This indicates the pressure especially on converts from Islam in the northern Caucasus.
- Pressure in the *Family sphere of life* has always had the lowest score of all five spheres of life. This means that pressure from family members on Christians has been relatively limited and mostly only affects converts in the Muslim regions. In WWL 2025 the score went up again to the WWL 2023 level (7.9 points).
- Pressure in the *Community sphere of life* is fairly stable at a high level (10.7 points). Again, most affected are converts in the Muslim regions.
- Pressure in the *National sphere of life* has seen a significant increase in points from 10.5 in WWL 2021 to 13.1 points in WWL 2025. This shows how the government has been working at tightening legislation affecting Christian life.
- Pressure in the *Church sphere of life* is the other sphere of life where there has been a major increase from 12.1 points in WWL 2021 to 14.1 in WWL 2025. As in the *National sphere of life*, the increase in the *Church sphere of life* is an indication that pressure from the authoritarian gov-

ernment has increased and that it is deliberately making life for (non-ROC) Christians more difficult, and that it is clamping down on Christians opposing the war in Ukraine.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



In the period WWL 2021 - WWL 2024, there had been a successive downward trend in violence targeting Christians for their faith. In WWL 2025, the number of violent incidents was much higher. The main reason for the increase was that 2 Christians were killed and at least 4 churches were damaged/destroyed.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

The most vulnerable Christian women in Russia are converts from a Muslim background. In Russia's Muslim regions, daily life is based on Islamic culture which gives women an inferior status. Traditional culture based on Islamic teaching puts women lower than men and requires obedience and [submission to men](#) in the family (CEDAW, 2015, "Concluding Observations on the Eighth Periodic Report of the Russian Federation"). For that reason, a woman cannot freely choose her own religion and will be persecuted if she converts to Christianity. If her faith is discovered, the first thing her family will do is lock her in the home and put high levels of pressure on her to return to Islam. In the northern Caucasus (and to a lesser extent in the mid-Volga region) converts also run the risk of being kidnapped and married off to a Muslim, particularly if premarital arrangements were made prior to the conversion. Such instances are, however, relatively rare.

Converts may also face threats, verbal insults, physical abuse and sexual assaults, all of which are unlikely to be reported due to a widespread culture of domestic violence, stigma around sexual

violence, and impunity for perpetrators ([HRW, 8 March 2021](#)). While domestic violence has moved to a prominent place on the public agenda, it remains a common problem across the country with Russia's North Caucasus regions being a particular hotspot for gender-based violence ([Wilson Centre, December 2021](#)). A culture of masochism and isolation has eroded what few protections survivors of gender-violence have left. Indeed, of all those who die globally from domestic violence each year, 10 percent of them are in Russia - a country which makes up less than 2 percent of the global population ([Harvard International Review, 3 August 2022](#)). A married Christian woman may experience beatings from her husband who can divorce her because of her faith.

Those leaving the ROC to join another Christian denomination also face challenges from the community they were once a part of. They are typically excommunicated and isolated (particularly if they marry outside of the ROC), which can traumatize Christian women.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

The range and forms of discrimination and persecution faced by Christian men in Russia mainly affect Christians from a Muslim background in the predominantly Muslim regions. They may be threatened, beaten, verbally harassed and denied access to communal platforms. Men are considered the heads of their families and are also usually the main financial providers; this means that when a Christian man loses his job due to persecution for his faith, his whole family will suffer. Businesses whose owners are Christians may also experience problems. For example, more frequent visits from officials are not uncommon (e.g. from fire-brigades, health departments etc.).

Men also experience economic pressure through being forced to pay fines and being imprisoned. The state regards non-ROC church leaders (contextually, mostly men) as primary targets to make a strong impression on the wider Christian community. When churches are raided, it is mostly the leaders who are detained, interrogated and fined. This often has a negative effect on whole congregations and can result in fear spreading among church members. Typical charges against church leaders include "distributing religious literature" and "carrying out unspecified missionary activity". In the northern Caucasus, Muslims will hold church leaders primarily responsible for any conversions among their people; active convert leaders will be attacked even more fiercely.

Persecution of other religious minorities

The Supreme Court ruled in [March 2017](#) (RFE/RL, 16 March 2017) to criminalize the activity of Jehovah's Witnesses as "extremist", effectively banning their activities and literature, and ordered their headquarters property to be liquidated. The authorities continue to detain and fine members of minority religious groups and minority religious organizations for alleged "extremism". For groups that are forbidden (like the Jehovah Witnesses), owning religious materials is prohibited.

According to [HRW 2023 Russian Federation country chapter](#):

- "Police continued to raid houses and open new criminal cases against Jehovah's Witnesses, banned as 'extremist' in Russia since 2017. In 2022, at least 84 Jehovah's Witnesses were sentenced to up to 7 years in prison, and 68 were behind bars awaiting trial."

- “In June [2022], Tatarstan's Supreme Court ruled to ban as 'extremist' the All-Tatar Public Center. In 2021 the Justice Ministry had suspended the center's activities on allegations of "ethnic enmity.””
- “Russian courts sentenced at least 20 persons to 11 to 18 years in prison on politically motivated charges of membership of Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HuT), a pan-Islamist movement that seeks to establish a caliphate but denounces violence to achieve that goal. At least another 13 persons were detained on the same charges and also face lengthy prison terms. Russia banned HuT as a terrorist organization in 2003.”
- “ Several people were indicted for supposed affiliation with Nurdzhular, a group of followers of the late Turkish theologian Said Nursi that Russia banned as extremist in 2008, even though it has no history of incitement or violence.”

According to the US State Department ([IRFR 2023 Russian Federation](#)):

- "Religious groups and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) again reported authorities investigated, detained, imprisoned, tortured, and physically abused persons and seized their property because of their religious belief or affiliation or membership in groups designated 'extremist', 'terrorist', or 'undesirable'. Targeted groups included Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatars, Hizb ut-Tahrir, Tablighi Jamaat, followers of Turkish Muslim theologian Said Nursi, the Church of Scientology, Falun Gong, and multiple evangelical Protestant groups."
- "During the year, Memorial identified 836 Jehovah's Witnesses, compared with 486 in 2022, who had been subjected to criminal prosecution, with 385 individuals awaiting sentencing (25 of whom were in detention, 16 under house arrest, and 344 under other preventive measures or wanted), 353 individuals sentenced (108 in prison or performing forced labor, 193 for whom imprisonment was suspended, and 52 of whom were fined); and 98 individuals whose criminal cases were completed (with 69 individuals having served their term of imprisonment, 20 having had their criminal prosecution terminated, and 9 having died)."
- "Individuals continued to receive long prison sentences for their alleged involvement with the Islamic political organization Hizb ut-Tahrir, which the government defined as a terrorist organization."
- "According to news reports, authorities continued to prosecute organized followers of Turkish Muslim theologian Said Nursi, whose organization government officials call 'Nurdzhular', although Nursi followers continued to deny such an organization existed in the country."
- "Church of Scientology organizations remained closed following a 2021 government designation of two church groups – the World Institute of Scientology Enterprises International and the Church of Spiritual Technology – as 'undesirable organizations', which effectively banned Scientology in the country."
- "A court in Altai banned the activities of the Allya-Ayat religious group. The court found that the practices of self-healing used by the followers of this group did not have any medical justification."

According to [USCIRF 2024 Russia chapter](#):

- “In 2023, religious freedom conditions in the Russian Federation remained severe as authorities targeted members of religious minorities on spurious charges related to their peaceful religious activities. Muslims, including Crimean Tatars detained in Russian-occupied Crimea, faced unsubstantiated terrorism charges for possessing religious materials and meeting together to discuss religion as alleged members of Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT).
- “Human rights organization Memorial reported in December [2023] that at least 335 people were in prison, faced prosecution, or were under investigation for such alleged affiliations; of these prisoners, 128 had received prison sentences between 10 and 15 years, and 115 had received sentences of 15 years or more. In June, a court sentenced Crimean Tatar activist Ansar Osmanov to 20 years in prison on charges related to possessing religious literature and organizing religious meetings. In February 2023, Crimean Tatar Dzhemil Gafarov died in prison after officials refused to transfer him to a hospital. Imprisoned Muslims reported experiencing torture, medical neglect, forced beard shavings, the confiscation of religious materials, prayer bans, and pork-filled food.”
- “Since the Supreme Court declared Jehovah's Witnesses 'extremist' in 2017, law enforcement has subjected the group to more than 2,000 home searches and opened criminal cases against nearly 800 members. In April 2023, a court fined four Jehovah's Witnesses \$24,095 (2,195,000 rubles) for gathering. In November, a court sentenced Yevgeny Bushev to seven years' imprisonment after he discussed his religious beliefs with an undercover agent. At the end of the year, nearly 150 Jehovah's Witnesses remained under house arrest or in pretrial detention or prison.”
- “The government prosecuted several individuals on charges of blasphemy, including persons perceived to have insulted Islam. In May, authorities arrested 19-year-old Nikita Zhuravel after he allegedly burned a Qur'an and mocked Muslims on video. Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov's 15-year-old son Adam Kadyrov beat Zhuravel after he was transferred to a detention center in Chechnya. Federal officials refused to investigate the beating, despite the existence of video evidence, and Adam subsequently received nearly a dozen awards for 'defending' faith and traditional values.”
- “The government harassed, discriminated against, detained, fined, deported, and imprisoned members of religious minorities because of their religious identities, activities, and affiliations.”
- “Individuals and communities incurred fines for so-called 'illegal missionary activities' for possessing unlabeled religious materials or engaging in unregistered religious activities as a foreigner. Law enforcement searched the homes and meeting places of Falun Gong practitioners and members of the spiritual movement Allya Ayat. Similarly, security forces raided mosques to force Muslim migrant men to enlist in the military. In June, a Moscow court sentenced six followers of Muslim theologian Said Nursi to as many as six and a half years in prison for gathering to read religious literature.”

Further information

- **December 2023:** A court in Russia's Far Eastern Amur region has replaced a four-year prison term with a one-year suspended sentence for 71-year-old Jehovah's Witness Vladimir Balabkin after changing his indictment from organizing an extremist group's activities to taking part in such activities. Balabkin, who has been diagnosed with cancer, left the courtroom a free man on 19 December 2023 (Source: [RFE/RL, 19 December 2023](#)).

- **May 2024:** A court in Russia's North Caucasus region of Kabardino-Balkaria acquitted a Jehovah's Witness in an extremism case, a rare move by a judiciary that has sentenced dozens of the religion's adherents in similar cases. The Maisky district court found Kirill Gushchin not guilty on May 2, but did not give the reasoning behind its decision (Source: [RFE/RL, 3 May 2024](#)).
- **August 2024:** "Russian authorities are cracking down on the Chinese Falun Gong spiritual movement, with searches in southern Krasnodar and other regions, confiscating banned Falun Dafa literature, deemed extremist. Falun Gong has been banned in China since 1999, and Moscow is trying to please Beijing." (Source: [AsiaNews, 13 August 2024](#))

Trends Summary

1) The government is stable despite opposition to the invasion of Ukraine

The regime headed by President Vladimir Putin has not experienced any significant opposition in ruling Russia over the past years. Constitutional barriers to limit the number of terms a president could be in power were removed. The September 2021 parliamentary elections resulted in a overwhelming win for Putin's United Russia party. No political changes are to be expected in the short-term. At the same time, Russia has continued to increase its influence in all former Soviet republics, which Moscow considers to be part of the Russian world (Rusky mir). The ultimate aim is to wipe out the shame of the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union – i.e. the Russian Empire. The 2022 invasion of Ukraine needs to be seen in this context. Russia is cooperating closely with China to achieve its goals. President Putin was re-elected as president of Russia in March 2024 with a considerable majority.

2) The Russian economy is in bad condition

Due to Western sanctions, falling prices for oil and natural gas and the effects of the COVID-19 crisis, Russia has been facing serious economic and social problems. Widespread corruption is an additional problem. The fact that the Russian government is spending a large part of its budget on defense and the war in Ukraine does not help the economic situation. The worldwide energy crisis that began in 2021 and continued through 2022 gave the regime of President Putin the chance to control the export of natural gas and oil to Western countries, making Russia's influence clear.

3) Religious freedom is in decline

The passing of the anti-terrorism legislation on 6 July 2016 resulted in a total ban on all activities associated with the Jehovah's Witnesses in early 2017. On 24 September 2021 Russia's Prosecutor-General's Office declared two organizations linked to the US-based Church of Scientology "undesirable", in a move that is likely to lead to the group being banned. The Prosecutor-General's Office said that the World Institute of Scientology Enterprises International and the Church of Spiritual Technology are religious corporations that "pose a threat to the security of the Russian Federation" (Source: [RFE/RL, 24 September 2021](#)). The restrictions brought in by this legislation are increasingly affecting non-ROC Christians in Russia. Any connections Christians in Russia may have with churches and organizations abroad are coming under increasing surveillance and limitations.

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, 2 November 2023 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2872
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: RFE/RL, 17 October 2023 - <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/sensorok-navalny-without-advocates/32640521.html>
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