

World
Watch
Research

Belarus: Full Country Dossier

March 2024



OpenDoors

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Introduction

World Watch List 2024

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

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

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2024 reporting period was 1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/> and on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom): <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>.

WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Belarus

Brief country details

Belarus: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
9,419,000	7,496,000	79.6

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

Map of country



Belarus: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	46	75
WWL 2023	43	76
WWL 2022	33	-
WWL 2021	30	-
WWL 2020	28	-

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Belarus: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials
Christian denominational protectionism	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 has reacted by cracking down on all forms of opposition. In the WWL 2024 reporting period, the country 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

- September 2022:** On 25 September, police banned Minsk's New Life Church from meeting for Sunday worship in the car park of the building from which officials forcibly evicted it in February 2021. Police detained the church's pastor, Vyacheslav Goncharenko, and another pastor, Antoni Bokun. A judge fined each two months' average wage for leading the 18 September service which police had observed. Minsk City Executive Committee refused to return the seized church building or allow the church to meet for worship in the car park. (Source: [Forum 18, 3 October 2022](#))
- October 2022:** The Catholic Church of Saints Simon and Helena (Red Church) in central Minsk was ordered to close down and all property to be removed on 12 October. This enforced closure followed a minor early-morning fire on 26 September in an annex, causing very little damage. (Source: [Forum 18, 13 October 2022](#))
- December 2022:** After holding his last Catholic service in Grodno's Holy Redeemer Church on 27 December, Polish priest Jozef Geza left Belarus after 25 years' service. Religious affairs official Aleksandr Rumak rejected the bishop's request to extend the permission which foreign citizens need for conducting religious work. In July 2022, Rumak refused a request for permission for Russian priest Klemens Werth. (Source: [Forum 18, 5 January 2023](#))
- May 2023:** Seven Protestants were fined about 2 months' average wages each for talking to others on a Minsk street about Easter. Police arrested and handcuffed the seven, took them to a police station, and held them for about eight hours. (Source: [Forum 18, 11 May 2023](#))
- June 2023:** On 2 June, a judge fined Vladimir Burshtyn - who is in his seventies - over a month's average pension for an outdoor meeting in Drogichin with fellow Baptists to share their faith. Police held him overnight before the hearing in the police station. He has appealed against the fine. (Source: [Forum 18, 12 June 2023](#))
- June 2023:** On 20 June, the regime brought in bulldozers to start the destruction of New Life Pentecostal Church in the capital, Minsk. By later in the day, much of the building was reduced to rubble. (Source: [Forum 18, 22 June 2023](#))

Specific examples of positive developments

- **May 2023:** On 20 May, a new Roman Catholic church (Saint Francis of Assisi) was consecrated in Minsk. The celebration was presided over by the Apostolic Nuncio in Belarus, Archbishop Ante Jozić, and was attended by many bishops. Diplomatic representatives of various nations were also present. (Source: [Agenzia Fides, 20 May 2023](#))

External Links - Situation in brief

- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Forum 18, 3 October 2022 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2777
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Forum 18, 13 October 2022 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2781
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Forum 18, 5 January 2023 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2800
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Forum 18, 11 May 2023 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2831
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Forum 18, 12 June 2023 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2838
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Forum 18, 22 June 2023 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2841
- Specific examples of positive developments: Agenzia Fides, 20 May 2023 - http://www.fides.org/en/news/73801-EUROPE_BELARUS_The_new_church_of_St_Francis_of_Assisi_consecrated_in_Minsk

WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Belarus

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/23 country report - Belarus	AI Belarus 2022	https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/belarus/report-belarus/	14 September 2023
BBC News Belarus profile - updated 28 June 2023	BBC Belarus profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17941131	14 September 2023
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2022 - Belarus	BTI Belarus Report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/BLR	14 September 2023
Crisis24 Belarus report (Garda World)	Crisis24 Belarus report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/belarus	14 September 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit 2023 - Belarus summary	EIU 2023 Belarus	https://country.eiu.com/belarus	14 September 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 - Belarus	FSI 2023 Belarus	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	14 September 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index - covering 29 countries	Democracy Index 2023 Belarus	https://freedomhouse.org/country/belarus/nations-transit/2023	14 September 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index - Belarus	Global Freedom Index 2023 Belarus	https://freedomhouse.org/country/belarus/freedom-world/2023	14 September 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report - covering 70 countries	Freedom on the Net 2023 Belarus	https://freedomhouse.org/country/belarus/freedom-net/2023	1 March 2024
Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 – Belarus	GIWPS 2021 Belarus	https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/belarus/	14 September 2023
Girls Not Brides Belarus report	Girls Not Brides Belarus	https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/belarus/	14 September 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 - Belarus country chapter	HRW 2023 Belarus country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/belarus	14 September 2023
Internet World Stats 2023 Belarus	IWS 2023 Belarus	https://www.internetworldstats.com/europa2.htm#by	14 September 2023
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index - Belarus	World Press Freedom 2023 Belarus	https://rsf.org/en/belarus	14 September 2023
Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index - Belarus	CPI 2022 Belarus	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/blr	14 September 2023
UNDP Human Development Report Belarus - data updates as of 8 September 2022	UNDP HDR Belarus	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#/countries/BLR	14 September 2023
US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report Belarus	IRFR 2022 Belarus	https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/belarus/	14 September 2023
USCIRF 2023 country reports - covering 17 CPC /11 SWL (Belarus not included)	USCIRF 2023	https://www.uscifr.gov/countries	
World Bank Belarus data - 2021	World Bank Belarus data	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=BLR	14 September 2023
World Bank Belarus overview	World Bank Belarus overview	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/belarus/overview	14 September 2023
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook Belarus - April 2023	Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Belarus	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/d5f32ef28464d01f195827b7e020a3e8-0500022021/related/mpo-blr.pdf	14 September 2023
World Factbook Belarus - updated 5 September 2023	World Factbook Belarus	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/belarus/	14 September 2023

Recent history

Belarus only became an officially independent republic in 1991. Neighboring countries have always been dominant: The government of Belarus under President Alexander Lukashenko cannot make major policy decisions without bearing in mind what its powerful eastern neighbor Russia thinks.

Until the 20th century, the territory of modern-day Belarus was controlled by a variety of states including the Principality of Polotsk (11th-14th centuries), the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (14th-18th centuries), and the Russian Empire (1795-1917). When the Russian Empire ended with the Communist revolution in October 1917, Belarus officially became a socialist republic and founding member of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1922. Soviet agricultural and economic policies, including collectivization and five-year plans for the national economy, led to famine and political repression.

Belarus declared itself sovereign on 27 July 1990 and officially became the Republic of Belarus on 25 August 1991. A national Constitution was adopted in March 1994 in which the functions of prime minister were given to the president of Belarus - thus concentrating most of the power in the country in the hands of one person. The formerly unknown Alexander Lukashenko was elected president in July 1994 and he was re-elected in 2001, 2006, 2010, 2015 and again in 2020. Western governments have criticized Lukashenko's authoritarian style of government.

After years of embracing Russian influence in the country, President Lukashenko began to encourage a revival of Belarusian identity in 2014, following the Russian annexation of Crimea and the military intervention in Eastern Ukraine. For the first time, he delivered a speech in Belarusian (rather than Russian, which most people use), in which he said "We are not Russian - we are Belarusians", and later encouraged the use of Belarusian. Trade and border disputes, and a much more relaxed official attitude towards dissident voices are all part of a weakening of the long-time warm relationship with Russia.

On 9 August 2020 presidential elections were held in Belarus, but this time, things did not go so smoothly. On 24 May 2020 more than a thousand people [demonstrated](#) against Lukashenko and his intention to go for a sixth term in office (RFE/RL, 24 May 2020). Demonstrations in Belarus became more widespread and continued after Lukashenko won the 9 August elections. When the head of the Roman Catholic Church in Belarus, Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, made some critical remarks, the Belarusian government refused him [entry to the country](#) after he had visited family in Poland (Source: Asia News, 1 September 2020). The conflict with the Roman Catholics was only solved when the archbishop [stepped down](#) in December 2020 (Asia News, 25 January 2021).

Lukashenko was sworn in as president on 23 September 2020. After consultations with Russian President Putin the regime of Lukashenko began tightening the screws. Hundreds of pro-democracy demonstrators were arrested. In March 2021 more than 400 people had been convicted in the crackdown. In April 2021, lawmakers approved a second reading of [several amendments](#) to legislation severely restricting civil rights and the free flow of information (RFE/RL, 16 April 2021). These events caused the Lukashenko regime to move closer to Russia.

When Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022, Lukashenko officially stated that his country's armed forces were not taking part in the operation ([RFE/RL, 24 February 2022](#)). It soon became clear that this did not mean his country was not assisting Russian forces. In March 2022 the Belarusian government shut down Ukraine's consulate in the western city of Brest and ordered an unspecified number of Ukrainian diplomats to leave the Ukrainian Embassy in Minsk ([RFR/RL, 23 March 2022](#)).

On 14 May 2023, Belarus's authoritarian leader, Alyaksandr Lukashenko, failed to attend events to mark the National Flag, Coat of Arms, and Anthem Day amid rumors of ill-health. Lukashenko had attended the 9 May Victory Day celebrations in Moscow, where he looked unwell, and a bandage was visible on his right hand. (Source: [RFE/RL, 14 May 2023](#)). Lukashenko's illness led to all kinds of speculation, but he made a swift recovery. He marks his 70th birthday in August 2024.

After the mutiny of the Wagner Group mercenaries in June 2023, President Lukashenko declared that the (now deceased) leader Prigozhin had moved to Belarus. (Source: [RFE/RL, 27 June 2023](#))

As reported by [Euro News on 26 February 2024](#):

- The February 2024 elections "have further cemented the 30-year iron rule of Lukashenko, who [also] declared his intention to seek yet another five-year term in next year's presidential election."
- "Only candidates belonging to the four officially registered parties that are loyal to the country's authoritarian leader, President Alexander Lukashenko, were allowed to compete in the polls."
- "Opposition leader, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, in exile since challenging Lukashenko in the 2020 presidential election, had called for a boycott of the vote which she said was a 'senseless farce'".

Political and legal landscape

According to the Belarusian Constitution, Belarus is a presidential republic, governed by a president and the National Assembly. The term for each presidency is currently five years. Alexander Lukashenko has been the president of Belarus since 1994.

The National Assembly is a bicameral parliament comprising the 110-member House of Representatives (the lower house) and the 64-member Council of the Republic (the upper house). In the 2012 parliamentary election, 105 of the 110 members elected to the House of Representatives were not affiliated with any political party. The Communist Party of Belarus won 3 seats, and the Agrarian Party and Republican Party of Labor and Justice, one each.

Belarus has been labeled "Europe's last dictatorship" by some Western journalists, because President Lukashenko has described himself as having an "authoritarian ruling style". The Council of Europe has barred Belarus from membership since 1997 for undemocratic voting and election irregularities in the November 1996 constitutional referendum and parliament by-elections. The Belarusian government is also criticized for human rights violations and its harsh attitude towards non-governmental organizations, independent journalists, national minorities and opposition politicians.

President Lukashenko has continued a number of Soviet-era policies, such as state-ownership of large sections of the economy. Elections under Lukashenko's rule have been widely criticized as unfair; and according to many countries and organizations, political opposition has been violently suppressed. Belarus is also the last country in Europe using the death penalty. The political unrest after the 9 August 2020 presidential elections was brutally crushed (see further below in this section).

According to Article 16 of the Constitution, Belarus has no official religion. While the freedom of worship is granted in the same article, religious organizations deemed harmful to the government or social order can be prohibited. The Office of the Plenipotentiary Representative for Religious and Nationality Affairs (OPRRNA) regulates all religious matters. The government has continued to restrict religious freedom in accordance with the provisions of a 2002 law on religion. The law bans all religious activity by unregistered groups and subjects group members to penalties ranging from unspecified fines to two years in prison. The government has continued to arrest or fine individuals for organizing unauthorized religious meetings in private homes, for proselytizing, and for refusing to serve in the armed forces despite the enactment of a law permitting alternative forms of national service. Minority religious groups continued to have difficulty registering and in some cases remained reluctant to apply for registration, reportedly out of fear of harassment and punishment.

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Belarus):

- “The constitution grants the freedom to profess and practice any religious belief but prohibits religious activities directed against the sovereignty of the state, its constitutional system, and 'civic harmony'. A concordat grants the Belarusian Orthodox Church (BOC) rights The law prohibits all religious activity by unregistered groups and requires all registered religious groups to obtain permits to proselytize or hold events outside of their premises, as well as prior approval from the authorities to import and distribute religious literature. During the year, the government increased the penalty for activities conducted by unregistered religious groups from a fine to imprisonment of two years.”
- “Authorities continued to use laws regulating 'mass events' to target members of the clergy and members of religious groups engaged in the prodemocracy movement that emerged following the 2020 fraudulent presidential election, as well as those protesting Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Authorities detained numerous religious leaders in connection with these protests and also for reasons such as holding unauthorized baptisms, posting material on social media from a television station based in Poland deemed 'extremist' by the regime, and publicly displaying materials from the political opposition. Human rights organizations said authorities restricted clergy access to prisons and denied pastoral visits to some political prisoners.”
- “According to observers, authorities continued surveillance of registered and unregistered religious groups, including through monitoring of social media. Following a fire in September, authorities evicted the congregation and barred access to the Catholic Church of St. Simon and St. Helena in Minsk, which has been subject to years-long tax and property disputes between the government and Catholic Church. In September [2022], authorities prevented the New Life Church, engaged in a years-long tax dispute with authorities, from holding services in the parking lot of the building the church formerly occupied; authorities

had removed the congregation from the building in February 2021.”

According to Forum 18 [BELARUS: Religious Freedom Survey, January 2023](#):

- Freedom of religion and belief, with its interlinked human rights, are seriously violated by the regime of Aleksandr Lukashenko. Violations by his regime of the human rights of the people it rules have increased since fraudulent presidential elections in August 2020, and the regime's support for Russia's renewed invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.
- Serious freedom of religion and belief violations documented by Forum 18 include but are not limited to:
 - a web of "legal" restrictions which against international human rights law make the exercise of freedom of religion and belief dependent on state permission;
 - surveillance by the KGB secret police of religious believers along with monitoring of and restrictions on religious communities by the Plenipotentiary for Religious and Ethnic Affairs;
 - banning religious communities from legally existing unless they have state registration;
 - arbitrary obstacles imposed on the activities of even registered communities, such as denials of building permission;
 - multiple restrictions on where religious events can be held, what an event can be about, and how participants can act;
 - obstacles against religious communities using and reclaiming their places of worship including, in Minsk, the denial of use of the Catholic "Red Church" after a fire in unexplained circumstances, and the forcible eviction of New Life Pentecostal Church and bans on it meeting in-person for worship;
 - compulsory prior state censorship of and restrictions on the distribution of most religious literature and objects, which runs in parallel with the threat of banning texts or websites as allegedly "extremist";
 - large scale repression of meetings for worship and nationwide belief-based protests against election fraud, regime violence, and the invasion of Ukraine;
 - the prosecution of and removal from office of religious leaders, which in the case of Orthodox clergy happens in collaboration with the Belarusian Orthodox Church;
 - forced participation of state employees in regime-ordered religious events to support the regime;
 - serious human rights violations against political prisoners, including their freedom of religion or belief;
 - strict controls on the exercise by foreign citizens of their freedom of religion and belief, including arbitrary denials of permission to work to Catholic priests.

[Forum 18, 15 June 2023](#): On 2 June, the regime made public on its legal website the draft of the proposed new Religion Law, prepared by the Plenipotentiary for Religious and Ethnic Affairs Aleksandr Rumak. The website said the draft Law was open for public comments from 5 to 15 June. This new, repressive law was sent to parliament in [October 2023](#) (Forum 18, 18 October 2023).

The proposed new Law would (see below) among other things:

- continue to require all religious communities to gain state registration before they are allowed to operate;
- ban "the activity of unregistered religious organisations";
- impose compulsory re-registration within one year on all registered religious communities, paralleling earlier demands on political parties and other public associations;
- impose even tighter registration restrictions and conditions;
- make extensive and arbitrary use of the undefined terms "extremism", "terrorism", and "the ideology of the Belarusian state" to justify restricting the exercise of freedom of religion or belief and related fundamental freedoms;
- give the regime new powers for regime to inspect and monitor religious communities;
- give greater "legal" possibilities for the regime to forcibly close religious communities;
- continue and increase censorship and restrictions on religious literature and items, including banning educational establishments from including religious literature in their libraries;
- impose new restrictions on religious education by religious communities, as well as increasing regime surveillance of this;
- aim to separate religious communities from involvement with wider society;
- and impose new restrictions on religious charitable activity (see below).

When Lukashenko was sworn in as president on 23 September 2020, he held consultations with Russian President Putin and then began tightening the screws. This was aimed primarily against political demonstrators, but when church leaders began to show support for the demonstrations, they were targeted by Lukashenko's regime too. There were at first no changes in the religious legislation of Belarus after it came under closer Russian influence again. The equivalent of the Russian Yarovaya laws, for instance, have not been introduced in Belarus, and Jehovah's Witnesses are not banned in Belarus as they are in Russia. However, the June 2023 proposal for a New Law on Religion shows the government's intention to considerably tighten control.

On 21 December 2020, President Lukashenko issued a [decree against all forms of regime dissent](#) by religious leaders (Asia News, 23 December 2020). The decree required the new head of the Department for Religions and Nationalities, Aleksandr Rumak, "to punish in the most severe way all those who disturb the peaceful coexistence of our people and work to the detriment of our state". According to the president, "these are not many, but we must take them and show them, even within religious communities". Among those targeted was the former Orthodox Metropolitan Pavel, removed by the very top of the Moscow patriarchate and replaced by the more loyal Venjamin. Lukashenko has thus made it clear that no church leaders in Belarus may express any form of government criticism.

When dispersing peaceful protests, the authorities, including plain-clothes law enforcement officers, resorted to excessive use of force. Police arbitrarily detained people for wearing or exhibiting the white-red-white stripe pattern associated with the protest movement, at times using brutal force, and charged them with violating rules on public gatherings even if they were

detained during raids on apartment buildings (HRW 2022 Belarus country chapter).

On 27 February 2022 a referendum was held in Belarus. The vote was marked by large protests in Minsk and elsewhere against the ballot and Belarus's role in Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Nearly 800 people were detained by police, according to the Interior Ministry. The constitutional changes would allow Lukashenka, who has ruled the country since 1994, to secure further time in office and guarantee him lifelong immunity from prosecution after his eventual withdrawal from politics. It would also allow Russian troops and nuclear weapons to be permanently stationed in Belarus in the future. (Source: [RFE/RL, 28 February 2022](#))

Religious landscape

Belarus: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	7,496,000	79.6
Muslim	26,100	0.3
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	1,300	0.0
Ethno-religionist	550	0.0
Jewish	7,700	0.1
Bahai	150	0.0
Atheist	204,000	2.2
Agnostic	1,684,000	17.9
Other	0	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

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

79.6% of the population are Christian according to World Christian Database estimates (accessed March 2023), the majority being Orthodox believers (76.9%). The minority is made up mainly of Roman Catholic, Baptist, Pentecostal and Seventh-Day Adventist churches. Despite decades of atheistic propaganda by the Communists during the Soviet era, most Belarusians consider themselves Christians and part of the Belarusian Orthodox Church (BOC). There is no social hostility towards Orthodox Christians, who generally live their faith as a cultural tradition with occasional attendance at church services. Outreach activities by non-Orthodox denominations are not welcomed.

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Belarus):

- “A concordat grants the Belarusian Orthodox Church (BOC) rights and privileges not granted to other religious groups, and the law recognizes the "determining role of the

BOC" and historical importance of the 'traditional faiths' of Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, and evangelical Lutheranism.”

- “Following a fire in September, authorities evicted the congregation and barred access to the Catholic Church of St. Simon and St. Helena in Minsk, which has been subject to years-long tax and property disputes between the government and Catholic Church.”

Due to the old Soviet educational system, practically all Belarusian citizens (99.7%) can read. As a result, Christian materials potentially have a big market. But printing, importing and distributing religious materials is strictly monitored.

As described above in *Political and Legal landscape*, Lukashenko made it clear that no church leaders in Belarus can expect to make any form of criticism against the government without punishment. Christians can practice their faith without disruption as long as they are not critical of the regime. They know they are under constant surveillance.

Economic landscape

According to the World Bank Belarus data:

- **GDP (current US\$) (billion):** 68.21 (in 2021)
- **GDP growth (annual %):** 2.3% (in 2021)

Since independence Belarus has gone through many ups and downs regarding its vulnerable economy. According to the World Factbook Belarus:

- “Declining Russian energy subsidies will end in 2024; growing public debt; strong currency pressures have led to higher inflation; recent price controls on basic food and drugs; public sector wage increases and fragile private sector threaten household income gains and economic growth.”

According to Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index [Belarus Country Report 2022](#) (accessed 21 June 2023):

- “In 2019, economic growth slowed down (+1.2%) after solid growth in 2018 (+3.1%) due to negative trends in external trade (especially petroleum and potash products), marking the end of the country’s economic recovery. GDP was around BYN 132 billion or \$61 billion, while GDP per capita (PPP) was \$21,348.”
- “By the end of 2020, the GDP of Belarus fell by 0.9% to BYN 147 billion in current prices (\$57.7 billion) due to a decline in industrial production, wholesale and retail trade, and transportation.”
- “The volume of agricultural production increased by 4.9% to reach BYN 22.9 billion. Only a few branches registered growth, among them pharmaceuticals (+10.1%) and agriculture (+4.9%).”
- “Fixed capital investment fell by 6.8%, down to BYN 28.7 billion. Foreign direct investment was below the target of \$1.7 billion, reaching \$1.415 billion in 2020.”

- “Foreign trade declined in 2020 due to weak global demand, the energy disputes with Russia and low energy prices. As a result, both exports (-11.9%) and imports (-17.4%) were very weak in 2020.”
- “Real wages continued to rise at a rate of 8.2%, despite the pandemic and the political crisis, outpacing productivity growth and fueling household consumption. But average nominal monthly wages, due to the depreciation of the ruble against the U.S. dollar, declined from \$576.60 in December 2020 to \$502.60 in January 2021.”
- “Inflation accelerated to 7.4% above the target rate (5%) due to the currency depreciation. 2020 also saw a marked increase in the budget deficit (-4.7% of GDP), raising public debt to 50.9% of GDP. The current account deficit amounted to -3.3% of GDP in 2020.”
- “In 2020, the government and the National Bank repaid \$3.9 billion of external and internal liabilities in foreign currency, which was partly externally financed. In 2020, the country sold gold and foreign exchange reserves equivalent to \$1.9 billion to support the exchange rate of the national currency. By January 2021, these reserves had decreased by \$265 million (3.5%) to \$7.203 billion.”

Christians in Belarus do not experience any difference in economic matters from other Belarusian citizens.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the World Factbook Belarus:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Belarusian 83.7%, Russian 8.3%, Polish 3.1%, Ukrainian 1.7%, other 2.4%, unspecified 0.9% (2009 est.)
- **Main languages:** Russian (official) 70.2%, Belarusian (official) 23.4%, other 3.1% (includes small Polish- and Ukrainian-speaking minorities), unspecified 3.3% (2009 est.)
- **Urban population:** 80.7% of total population (2023)
- **Literacy rate:** 99.9% (male: 99.9%, female: 99.9%) (2019)

According to the UNDP Human Development Report Belarus:

- **HDI score and ranking:** 0.808 (0.812 for females, 0.803 for males), ranking 60 (2021)
- **Total population:** 9.6 million (2021)
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 72.4 years (77.7 for females, 67.3 for males) (2021)
- **Expected years of schooling:** 15.2 years (15.3 for females, 15.0 for males) (2021)
- **Gender Inequality index:** 0.104 (2021)
- **Labor Force Participation Rate (% ages 15 years and older):** Female: 57.3, Male: 71.4 (2021)

Like many other eastern European countries, Belarus has a negative population growth rate and a negative natural growth rate. With an efficient health system, Belarus has a very low infant mortality rate. According to the United Nations Development Program, the GINI coefficient (inequality indicator) is one of the lowest in Europe.

The Belarusian labor market is highly regulated. Important elements of the central-planning system are still in place. In principle, the decision to determine wages is left to firms, but the

government can influence the structure of wages through the so-called tariff system, a type of centrally determined wage grid. The tariff system is binding in the budget sector, including enterprises and organizations mainly financed and subsidized within the state and/or the local budgets. The private (so-called self-financing) sector, representing only a small share of employment, has little autonomy.

The official unemployment rate is lower than 1%. Many unemployed people in Belarus are trying to avoid registration because of the resulting obligatory public duties, while unemployment benefits are very low (~70,000 BYR per month, or less than \$5).

Many people in Belarus earn low wages – luxury goods are scarce. 5.7% of the population is living below the poverty line. The economic problems have also had its effect on the Church. Buying equipment and materials for maintaining churches was nearly impossible.

The fact that Belarus depends so heavily on Russia has also affected Protestants in particular, since contacts with the West have been limited.

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2023 Belarus):

- **Internet usage:** 82.8% penetration - survey date: January 2022
- **Facebook usage:** 47.8% penetration - survey date: January 2022

According to the World Bank Belarus data:

- **Mobile cellular subscriptions:** 122.8 per 100 people (2021)

According to the World Factbook Belarus:

- “7 state-controlled national TV channels; Polish and Russian TV broadcasts are available in some areas; state-run Belarusian Radio operates 5 national networks and an external service; Russian and Polish radio broadcasts are available (2019)”

According to [BuddeComm Research](#) (updated June 2023):

- “The government of Belarus has successfully promoted the migration to an all-IP platform as part of a wider effort towards a digital transformation for the economy. In the process, the state-supported infrastructure operator beCloud has built an extensive fibre network which reaches all but the smallest settlements in the country. Belarus has the second highest fibre penetration rate in Europe, behind only Iceland. LTE coverage is almost universal, while considerable progress has also been made in developing 5G services.”
- “On the down side, the country faces considerable political and economic turmoil, and telcos have had to invest in network infrastructure while managing a significant fall in the value of the local currency (particularly against the euro and the US dollar). The depreciation of the currency is expected to continue further into 2022, though at an uncertain rate. Telcos are separately affected by difficulties in securing supplies of equipment as a result of EU sanctions. In addition, Ukrainian mobile operators have

stopped roaming with Belarusian networks.”

- “Although the sector has been reformed, this has not yet resulted in the privatisation of the incumbent, despite the government being pressed to sell state enterprises in a bid to reduce overall debt. Revenue growth for Beltelecom is expected to come from the FttP sector, where much of the company’s capex is directed.”

According to Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 Belarus report:

- Belarus is listed as 'not free' with a score of 25 points.
- “Internet freedom in Belarus deteriorated further during the coverage period. The government intensified its suppression of online critical voices, blocking of independent media outlets and information sources, and use of legislation to criminalize online materials produced by what it deemed to be “extremist” or “terrorist” groups. Although virtually all nonstate media outlets are now operating from exile, they continue to disseminate content via social media and messaging applications. In the context of the ongoing political crisis and the full-scale Russian military invasion of Ukraine, the Belarusian government increased its arbitrary arrests of media workers, online activists, and ordinary users, imposing lengthy prison sentences on those detained. Security forces conducted raids, employed torture, and released forced-confession videos to deter and silence critical speech. The impact of war and international sanctions has compelled the government to sharply increase its propaganda and other efforts to manipulate the information environment.”
- “Belarus is a consolidated authoritarian state ruled by Alyaksandr Lukashenka, who first took office as president in 1994. Elections are openly orchestrated, and civil liberties are tightly restricted. Since 2020, when Lukashenka’s fraudulent reelection prompted mass protests, the regime has depended on support from Moscow to maintain its grip on power and the country’s overall human rights situation has declined precipitously. Tens of thousands of people have been arrested, and as many as 250,000 Belarusians, including most of the country’s independent media workers, may have emigrated since the crackdown began. By the end of May 2023, approximately 3,300 people had been convicted in politically motivated criminal crimes, and the Viasna Human Rights Center, a Belarusian civil society organization, had recognized 1,496 political prisoners in the country, including at least 33 media workers.”

Security situation

Until 2020, Belarus was a stable, authoritarian country ruled by President Alexander Lukashenko. Until 2020, Belarus tried to maintain a good relationship with the West. No visas were required and usually travelling and the crossing of borders went without problems. This changed dramatically in May 2020, when growing numbers of the opposition took to the streets to protest against President Lukashenko running for re-election. At first these demonstrations took place peacefully, but after President Lukashenko claimed he had won the 9 August 2020 elections the situation deteriorated. Security forces and police began to use increasing violence and hundreds of protestors were arrested and sent to jail. Leaders of the opposition fled abroad, but even this did not satisfy the regime. In a dramatic example of the regime’s ruthlessness towards the opposition, the [Belarusian authorities](#) forced down a Ryanair flight on false pretens-

es on 23 May 2021 to enable them to detain activist Raman Pratasevich and his girlfriend, Sofya Sapega (Human Rights Watch, 24 May 2021).

In 2021, thousands of migrants from the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa attempted to enter Poland and fellow EU members Latvia and Lithuania illegally via Belarus, many of them after arriving in Minsk by plane. This led to a huge refugee crisis and the sealing of the borders ([RFE/RL, 10 November 2021](#)).

Although the regime of Lukashenko has so far managed to stay out of the war in Ukraine that was launched by Russia on 24 February 2022, there have been joint military exercises in Belarus which clearly gives a signal to Ukraine. The war has also increased tension with neighboring NATO countries Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. This means that access to the border regions of Belarus is restricted (Source: [RFE/RL, 30 December 2021](#)).

On 13 June 2023 President Lukashenko announced that Russian tactical nuclear weapons were to arrive in his country within "days," earlier than previously thought for a move that has heightened already strained tensions between the Kremlin and the West. Lukashenko said the decision to deploy tactical nuclear weapons on Belarusian soil was his and not that of Russian President Vladimir Putin, who said last week that the weapons would likely be deployed around the second week of July, once storage facilities were ready. (Source: [RFE/RL, 13 June 2023](#))

Trends analysis

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 were arrested. The situation regarding religious freedom is tense and any criticism of the regime by any Christians is very risky.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: demonstrated - <https://www.rferl.org/a/more-than-1-000-belarusians-protest-lukashenko-s-bid-for-sixth-term/30631784.html>
- Recent history: entry to the country - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Lukashenko:-Archbishop-Kondrusiewicz-'persona-non-grata'-in-Russia-and-Belarus-50917.html>
- Recent history: stepped down - <http://asianews.it/news-en/Msg.-Kondrusiewicz-farewell:-'Thank-you-for-your-solidarity'-52155.html>

- Recent history: several amendments - <https://www.rferl.org/a/belarus-lawmakers-approve-second-reading-of-draconian-bills-to-limit-freedoms/31207699.html>
- Recent history: RFE/RL, 24 February 2022 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/31720334.html>
- Recent history: RFR/RL, 23 March 2022 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/31767073.html>
- Recent history: RFE/RL, 14 May 2023 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/belarus-lukashenka-rumors-health/32411147.html>
- Recent history: RFE/RL, 27 June 2023 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/belarus-lukashenka-prigozhin-alert-nato-threat/32477711.html>
- Recent history: Euro News on 26 February 2024 - <https://www.euronews.com/2024/02/26/belarus-elections-were-a-sham-us-says-as-results-are-announced>
- Political and legal landscape: BELARUS: Religious Freedom Survey, January 2023 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2806
- Political and legal landscape: Forum 18, 15 June 2023 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2839
- Political and legal landscape: October 2023 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2868
- Political and legal landscape: decree against all forms of regime dissent - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Lukashenko-clamps-down-on-churches-and-opposition-51920.html>
- Political and legal landscape: RFE/RL, 28 February 2022 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/31727695.html>
- Economic landscape: Belarus Country Report 2022 - <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/BLR#pos14>
- Technological landscape: BuddeComm Research - <https://www.budde.com.au/Research/Belarus-Telecoms-Mobile-and-Broadband-Statistics-and-Analyses>
- Security situation: Belarusian authorities - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/05/24/belarus-shocking-new-low-crushing-dissent>
- Security situation: RFE/RL, 10 November 2021 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/belarus-eu-migrants-border-explainer/31555214.html>
- Security situation: RFE/RL, 30 December 2021 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/belarus-russia-military-drills-/31632460.html>
- Security situation: RFE/RL, 13 June 2023 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/32457509.html>
- Trends analysis: allowing a military build-up along its border with Ukraine - <https://www.rferl.org/a/31727695.html>

WWL 2024: Church information / Belarus

Christian origins

Christianity came to Belarus from two separate directions - in the form of Catholicism from the west, and in the form of Orthodoxy from the east. Poland converted to Catholic Christianity in 966, while Russia converted to Orthodoxy in 988. Both churches spread the Gospel into surrounding areas. By the end of the 12th century, Europe was generally divided into two blocks: A western area dominated by Catholicism and an eastern area dominated by Orthodox and Byzantine influences. The dividing line between the two was roughly along the Bug River. This is the area where today's Belarus is to be found. When Protestantism came into existence in the 16th century, it soon reached Lithuania (and Belarus). The first Protestant Church in Belarus was established in Brest by Mikolaj "the Black" Radziwill (1515-1565).

Before 1917, Belarus had 2,466 religious communities, including: 1,650 Orthodox, 127 Catholic, 657 Jewish, 32 Protestant, and several Muslim communities. Under Communist rule, the activities of these communities were severely restricted. Many religious communities were eradicated and their leaders exiled or executed; the remaining communities were sometimes co-opted by the government for its own ends, as in the effort to instill patriotism during World

War II.

(Sources: Fedor, H (ed.), *Belarus: A Country Study*. Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1995; [g4 Tours](#), accessed 4 March 2024)

Church spectrum today

Belarus: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	5,761,000	76.9
Catholic	1,025,000	13.7
Protestant	242,000	3.2
Independent	65,100	0.9
Unaffiliated	423,000	5.6
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-20,100	-0.3
Total	7,496,000	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	85,900	1.1
Renewalist movement	252,000	3.4

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

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

According to the World Christian Database data of March 2023 the largest denominations in Belarus are:

- The Belarusian Orthodox Church
- The Roman Catholic Church
- Unaffiliated Christians
- The Pentecostal Union

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.

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 the Orthodox and are regarded as propagating a Western/alien religion.

External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: A Country Study - <https://countrystudies.us/belarus/20.htm>
- Christian origins: g4 Tours - <https://belarus-travel.com/religious-history/>

WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Belarus

Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

Position on the World Watch List

Belarus: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	46	75
WWL 2023	43	76
WWL 2022	33	-
WWL 2021	30	-
WWL 2020	28	-

The overall score rose by 3 points. Violence remained unchanged at 3.3 points, which means that the rise in points was solely due to increases in pressure. Indeed, only the *Family sphere of life* showed no increase in pressure. The biggest increase was in the *Church sphere of life* and is an indication of a government that is deliberately making life increasingly difficult for Christians who do not belong to the Belarus Orthodox Church.

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	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 (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.

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	-	-	STRONG	-
Government officials	-	-	-	-	Very weak	-	-	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.

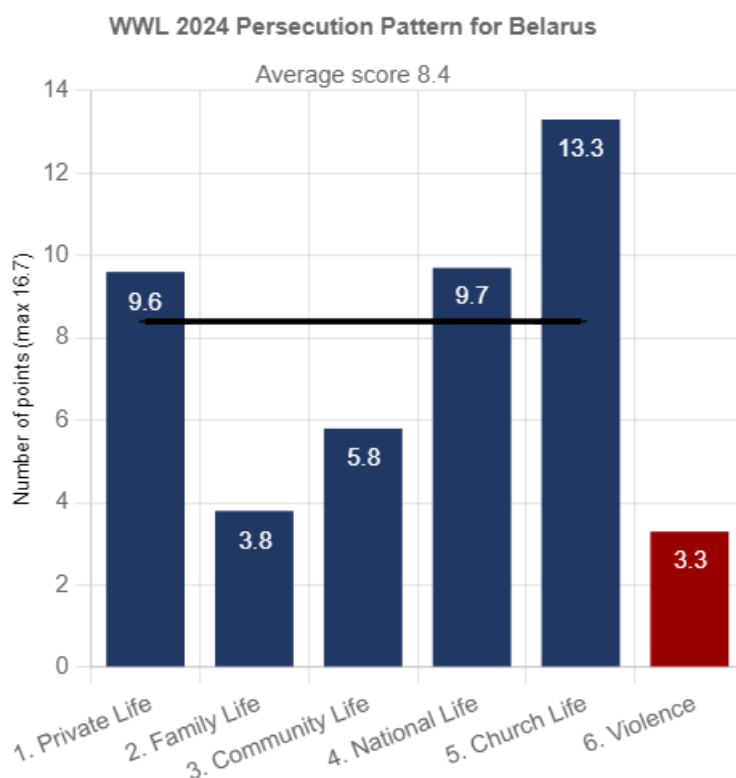
Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (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.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2024 Persecution pattern for Belarus:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a level of 8.4 points. It went up from 7.9 in WWL 2023.
- Pressure is highest (and increased) in the *Church, Private and National spheres of life*. This reflects the increasing pressure from the state (*Dictatorial paranoia*).
- Violence against Christians in Belarus is at a level of 3.3 points, the same as in WWL 2023.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

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

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 only to people who have left the BOC and is dangerous as it could be seen as proselytizing.

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

The attitude of Orthodox Christians against those who change churches can be hostile.

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to discuss their faith with those other than immediate family members. (3.00 points)

Orthodox Christians oppose those who leave the BOC to join other church groups. However, the pressure is lower than that exerted by the immediate family. The state has no impact at this level.

Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (2.75 points)

The family of someone who has left the BOC will react angrily if they discover Protestant materials. The state might be interested to find out if the materials had been obtained legally.

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 Christians who leave the BOC and whose family would want a traditional Orthodox education for the children. It also affects Protestant parents who often face opposition from the surrounding Orthodox community.

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

Basics of Orthodox Culture is part of the school curriculum. Children are not obliged by law to attend these lessons but they experience peer pressure and other forms of school pressure if they opt out.

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

This will happen to children of non-Orthodox Christians. The Orthodox environment will treat children of Protestants and of Christians who have left the Orthodox Church to join other church groups negatively.

Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (2.00 points)

Hindrance may occur in cases of baptism of Christians who have left the Orthodox Church to join non-traditional groups. Such baptism seems to many to be like betrayal of one's family and national identity. It will often be viewed as bringing shame on the family.

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 believers can be fined for different faith-related reasons especially for speaking openly about their faith with others and distributing literature. However, the authorities are currently more focused on persecuting political opponents. Nevertheless, many Christians and priests were detained, interrogated, fined and imprisoned for organizing or participating in prayer events and/or singing the "Mighty God" protest hymn during demonstrations ([Spring96/Viasna, 17 October 2023](#)). The arrests and fines continued after Russia invaded Ukraine. The priests and other Christians who speak out against the war and organize prayer events can be fined and imprisoned for "extremist violations and crimes". Especially Catholic priests 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)

Protestants and other non-Belarus Orthodox church Christians are often monitored by the local community and in some individual cases reported to police or Centers for Sect Studies. The state monitors all Christians and this has increased since August 2020 when the protests first started following the presidential election.

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 influence on the local police leadership and this will mean the risk for interrogations of non-Orthodox Christians is higher. Since August 2020 the (local) authorities have increased their control over Protestants and other non-Orthodox Christians; they have been interrogated for faith related reasons. This increased during the WWL 2024 reporting period.

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)

Family and community will exert pressure on Christians who have left Orthodoxy to join another church denomination 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 protest which began in August 2020, Christians in 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 about this on numerous occasions. One of the most publicized cases was that of a Catholic priest who was refused en-

trance to Belarus after he had voiced support for the opposition after the August 2020 presidential elections. Although Christians from "traditional" denominations had been able to travel freely in the past, the government has tightened visa requirements and is denying travel to its citizens, especially when it involves religious activities. This also affects the BOC as well; the government is paranoid when it comes to potential dissidents within the country.

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 are likely to be detained. Any form of public religious activity by Orthodox or Catholic groups is seen as suspicious and faces monitoring by the government and Orthodox community members loyal to the government.

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 research into the persecution of Christians. This opposition to international monitoring has become worse since the crackdown that began in August 2020.

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

(Local) authorities interfere in church activities, something that has markedly increased since August 2020. Difficulties in finding a place to worship, strict processes of registration, strict financial controls concerning the collection and spending of church offerings and donations. Such pressure is applied mainly to non-Orthodox groups since Orthodoxy is treated favorably and has no difficulties in collecting offerings, also publicly.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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. The activities of non-registered churches are considered illegal, including any youth-work.

Block 5.20: It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution. (3.75 points)

It 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 has experienced problems when clergy spoke out against Lukashenko.

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

Non-Orthodox including Catholic groups are impacted, but of course evangelical groups are the main target. Over past years there have been numerous reports of raids from the authorities on various church groups; however, there is also evidence that much unregistered church activity continues unimpeded as well, hence the lower score for intensity and frequency. The BOC also often obstructs the activities of the other churches, accusing them of sheep-stealing.

Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored. (3.50 points)

All religious materials of non-Orthodox churches are monitored. This is exclusively done by state agents.

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.*

Belarus: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	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?	14	10
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?	2	10
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)?	14	10
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	10
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?	20	0
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	1	0

In the WWL 2024 reporting period:

- **Churches damaged/closed:** There were two cases in Minsk - the New Life Pentecostal Church and the Roman Catholic Church of St. Simon and St. Helena.
- **Christians arrested:** At least 12 Christians were detained, including Protestant pastors, Catholic and Orthodox priests.
- **Christians sentenced:** Roman Catholic religious instructor, Uladzislau Beladzed, was sentenced to 15 days in jail for a third consecutive time. Of the detained mentioned above, several received short-to-long term prison sentences for possessing "extremist material" or for criticizing the state. Vitaly Chychmaou (also spelt: Chichmarev), a Baptist pastor, was arrested and given a prison sentence in 2022 for participating in the 2020 protests.

- **Christians forced to leave their home:** Many Orthodox priests were moved into rural areas due to their faith-based attitude to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- **Christians forced to leave the country:** Polish Catholic priest Jozef Geza was [forced to leave](#) Belarus in December 2022 after serving congregations in Belarus for 25 years (Forum 18, 5 January 2023)

5 Year trends

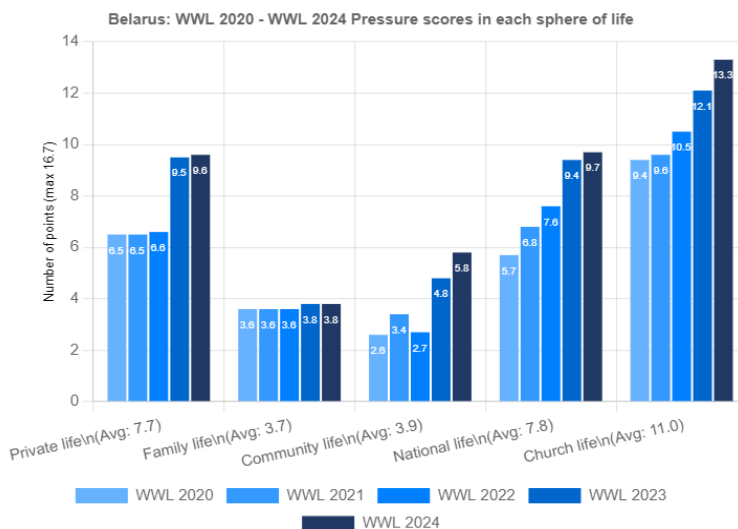
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

Belarus: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024	8.4
2023	7.9
2022	6.2
2021	6.0
2020	5.5

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 is the growing state oppression following the large-scale antigovernment 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.

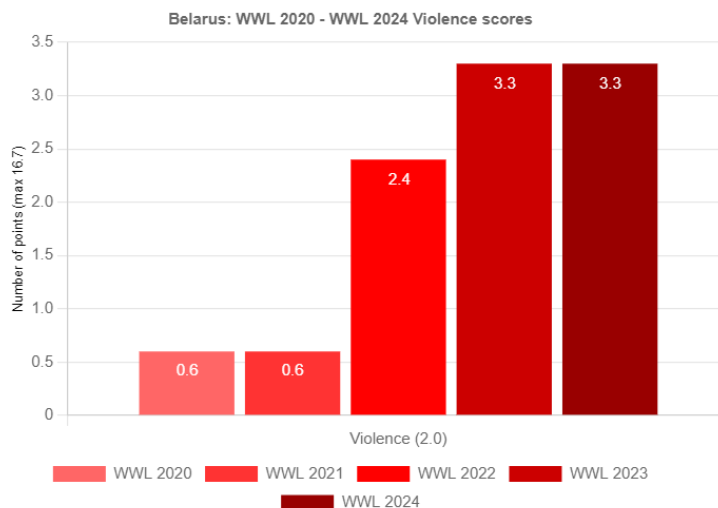
5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



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 further increasing pressure. This increase of pressure is 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*.

- Pressure in *Private sphere of life* in WWL 2020-2022 had always been stable at a fairly high level. However the score then jumped in WWL 2023 and WWL 2024, now reaching the high level of 9.6 points.
- Pressure in *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 *Community sphere of life* rose sharply in WWL 2023 and is now even higher at 5.8 points in WWL 2024. Despite this rise, Community pressure on Christians is limited and mostly affects people who change church affiliation.
- Pressure in *National sphere of life* has risen each year since WWL 2020. The increase is a reflection of more and more restrictions being imposed by the regime.
- Pressure in *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 2020. The score in WWL 2024 is now extremely high (13.3 points). As in the *National sphere of life*, the notable increase in the *Church sphere of life* in WWL 2024 is an indication of a government that is 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. However, in WWL 2023 and WWL 2024 the score went up to the fairly high level of 3.3 points.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	-
Security	-
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

Currently, there are no gender specific pressures recorded for female Christians in the country.

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, 2024](#)). 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

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	-
Security	Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

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. While no gender-specific religious persecution against male Christians has been recorded for the WWL 2024 reporting period, the general political situation in Belarus is fragile and poses potential avenues for religious persecution.

Men in Belarus 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. In a context of increasing state repression, some male Christ-

ian 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.

A country expert explains the risk for ordained clergy: “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 the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Belarus):

- “Some minority religious groups stated that 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. Other minority religious groups preferred to negotiate registration and other concerns with local authorities.”
- “There were antisemitic comments on social media and in the comment sections of local online news articles, but the origin of some of the comments was undetermined. Several religious groups reported instances of vandalism of their properties.”
- “Religious groups labeled as 'nontraditional' by the authorities continued to state the procedure for registering communities and using residential premises for religious gatherings remained cumbersome and arbitrary. Authorities in Lida continued to refuse to register a local community of Jehovah's Witnesses.”
- “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 is considered an unsanctioned mass event, and hence illegal. Some of these groups had requested authorization, but authorities either denied or ignored the requests.”
- “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 Russian Orthodox Church considers him one of its saints and martyrs, and the BOC falls under the authority of the Russian Church on traditional practices such as this. The traditional memorial prayer recited on the 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. Some antisemitic references to Belastoksky remained on the BOC's official website, although in recent years the BOC's online materials focused more on his role as a regional patron saint of children. While Jewish community leaders said they prioritized other concerns, prayers for the commemoration reportedly continued to include antisemitic references.”

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Dictatorial paranoia

Since demonstrations occurred all over the country against the outcome of the August 2020 presidential elections, the regime has reacted by cracking down on all forms of opposition. The war in Ukraine has caused the situation to further deteriorate. Christians must be very careful in what they say and do. No change in this respect is likely in the foreseeable future.

Christian denominational protectionism

Orthodoxy is predominant in Belarus, enjoys state protection and is considered to be the "religion of the Belarus people". Though the regime struck out against some Orthodox clergy who had spoken out against the outcome of the elections, the Orthodox Church in general did not suffer. Some Orthodox clergy also faced state persecution when they spoke out against the war in Ukraine. In general, though, it is likely that the influence of the Orthodox Church on the regime will remain limited. On the other hand, clergy and members of the Orthodox Church are likely to remain hostile towards other church denominations.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere: Spring96/Viasna, 17 October 2023 - <https://spring96.org/en/news/113099>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: forced to leave - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2800
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: (UNFPA, 2024). - <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>

Further useful reports

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

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

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

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