

World  
Watch  
Research

## Tajikistan: Full Country Dossier

December 2021



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

December 2021

© Open Doors International

[research@od.org](mailto:research@od.org)

# Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
World Watch List 2022 .....	3
Copyright note.....	4
Sources and definitions.....	4
Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic.....	5
External Links - Introduction .....	5
<b>WWL 2022 Situation in brief / Tajikistan .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Brief country details .....	5
Dominant persecution engines and drivers .....	6
Brief description of the persecution situation .....	6
Summary of international obligations and rights violations .....	6
Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period .....	7
Specific examples of positive developments .....	7
External Links - Situation in brief .....	7
<b>WWL 2022: Keys to understanding / Tajikistan .....</b>	<b>8</b>
Links for general background information .....	8
Recent history .....	8
Political and legal landscape .....	9
Religious landscape .....	11
Economic landscape.....	12
Social and cultural landscape.....	13
Technological landscape .....	14
Security situation .....	15
Trends analysis .....	16
External Links - Keys to understanding .....	17
<b>WWL 2022: Church information / Tajikistan .....</b>	<b>18</b>
Christian origins.....	18
Church spectrum today.....	18
<b>WWL 2022: Persecution Dynamics / Tajikistan .....</b>	<b>19</b>
Reporting period .....	19
Position on the World Watch List .....	19
Persecution engines .....	20
Drivers of persecution.....	21

Areas where Christians face most difficulties .....	22
Christian communities and how they are affected .....	22
The Persecution pattern.....	23
Pressure in the 5 spheres of life .....	23
Violence.....	28
5 Year trends .....	29
Gender-specific religious persecution / Female .....	31
Gender-specific religious persecution / Male .....	32
Persecution of other religious minorities.....	33
Future outlook.....	34
External Links - Persecution Dynamics.....	35
<b>Further useful reports.....</b>	<b>35</b>



Teenage boy in Tajikistan (c) Alamy

# Introduction

## World Watch List 2022

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018
1	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	15.0	98	94	93	94	93
2	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	13.1	96	94	94	94	94
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.5	91	92	92	91	91
4	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.2	16.3	11.5	91	92	90	87	86
5	Yemen	16.7	16.6	16.5	16.7	16.7	5.2	88	87	85	86	85
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.6	11.1	88	88	87	86	86
7	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.3	14.5	14.4	16.7	87	85	80	80	77
8	Pakistan	13.6	14.0	15.1	14.9	13.1	16.7	87	88	88	87	86
9	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.6	15.8	16.5	10.4	85	86	85	85	85
10	India	12.7	12.7	12.9	14.7	13.3	15.6	82	83	83	83	81
11	Saudi Arabia	15.1	15.1	15.0	15.9	16.7	3.1	81	78	79	77	79
12	Myanmar	12.4	11.5	13.8	13.4	13.1	14.8	79	74	73	71	65
13	Sudan	13.4	13.4	14.3	13.6	15.7	8.5	79	79	85	87	87
14	Iraq	14.0	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	6.9	78	82	76	79	86
15	Syria	12.9	13.8	13.5	14.3	13.9	9.3	78	81	82	82	76
16	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.4	77	77	78	78	78
17	China	12.6	9.8	12.2	14.4	15.5	11.1	76	74	70	65	57
18	Qatar	14.2	14.1	11.1	13.0	14.3	7.2	74	67	66	62	63
19	Vietnam	11.3	9.7	12.7	14.1	14.5	8.7	71	72	72	70	69
20	Egypt	12.7	13.2	11.5	12.7	10.8	10.0	71	75	76	76	70
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	14.1	11.8	15.6	1.7	71	71	73	74	73
22	Algeria	14.0	14.0	11.1	13.4	14.1	4.1	71	70	73	70	58
23	Mauritania	14.3	13.9	13.1	14.0	14.1	0.9	70	71	68	67	57
24	Mali	9.4	8.2	13.9	10.3	12.8	15.0	70	67	66	68	59
25	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	13.3	15.7	0.6	69	70	70	69	68
26	Laos	12.0	10.3	13.2	13.3	14.1	5.9	69	71	72	71	67
27	Morocco	13.1	13.8	10.8	12.8	14.2	3.9	69	67	66	63	51
28	Indonesia	11.3	11.5	11.5	11.0	9.6	13.5	68	63	60	65	59
29	Bangladesh	11.8	10.7	12.9	11.3	10.2	11.3	68	67	63	58	58
30	Colombia	11.5	8.8	13.1	11.0	9.9	13.3	68	67	62	58	56
31	CAR	9.0	8.6	13.6	9.6	11.4	15.6	68	66	68	70	61
32	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.0	9.6	12.1	14.8	68	67	66	48	-
33	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.9	7.2	12.8	14.8	68	62	60	52	45
34	Bhutan	13.4	12.4	11.7	13.7	13.8	1.7	67	64	61	64	62
35	Tunisia	11.9	12.7	10.6	11.3	13.4	6.5	66	67	64	63	62
36	Oman	13.8	14.0	10.3	13.2	13.4	1.5	66	63	62	59	57
37	Cuba	12.3	8.1	12.6	13.2	14.0	5.9	66	62	52	49	49
38	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.3	12.3	9.8	66	65	63	65	62
39	Jordan	12.9	14.0	11.0	12.3	12.5	3.0	66	64	64	65	66
40	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	12.0	15.6	66	64	56	55	33
41	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	11.3	7.9	12.5	15.6	65	63	43	43	-
42	Turkey	12.6	11.5	11.4	13.2	11.6	4.6	65	69	63	66	62
43	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	10.8	10.3	12.6	65	64	60	61	59
44	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.4	65	64	60	54	38
45	Tajikistan	13.8	12.3	12.0	12.6	13.2	0.7	65	66	65	65	65
46	Brunei	14.8	14.5	10.3	11.0	13.2	0.6	64	64	63	63	64
47	Kazakhstan	13.4	11.6	11.1	12.6	13.5	1.7	64	64	64	63	63
48	Nepal	12.4	9.8	9.9	13.6	12.7	5.2	64	66	64	64	64
49	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	63	62	60	61
50	Malaysia	12.5	14.3	11.5	11.6	10.2	3.3	63	63	62	60	65

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018
51	Kenya	11.7	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	11.1	63	62	61	61	62
52	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.9	11.4	11.3	9.4	7.8	63	62	65	58	57
53	Comoros	12.7	11.1	11.2	12.4	14.2	0.9	63	62	57	56	56
54	UAE	13.4	13.6	10.1	11.8	12.2	1.3	62	62	60	58	58
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	13.7	61	58	55	52	53
56	Azerbaijan	13.1	9.9	9.3	11.0	13.4	3.3	60	56	57	57	57
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.4	9.8	10.2	12.0	0.9	59	58	60	57	60
58	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	11.1	10.0	12.2	0.7	59	56	56	56	56
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.1	11.1	10.4	12.0	1.5	58	58	57	56	54
60	Bahrain	12.5	13.2	9.1	11.1	10.2	0.9	57	56	55	55	57
61	Nicaragua	9.1	5.6	11.1	11.8	11.3	7.6	56	51	41	41	-
62	Russian Federation	12.3	8.0	10.2	10.6	12.3	2.2	56	57	60	60	51
63	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	5.6	55	53	56	48	40
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.1	52	48	48	43	-
65	Venezuela	5.6	4.5	11.2	9.4	11.1	9.6	51	39	42	41	34
66	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	10.1	11.4	7.8	51	46	43	42	-
67	Rwanda	8.1	5.5	6.7	10.3	10.1	9.3	50	42	42	41	-
68	Honduras	7.2	5.1	10.5	7.7	9.2	8.7	48	46	39	38	-
69	Uganda	8.1	4.6	7.4	6.7	9.1	11.7	48	47	48	47	46
70	El Salvador	7.7	4.6	10.7	5.7	9.1	7.2	45	42	38	30	-
71	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	9.8	2.4	44	43	41	42	-
72	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	1.7	44	43	43	43	-
73	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	2.0	43	47	45	46	-
74	South Sudan	5.7	0.9	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.0	43	43	44	44	-
75	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	7.9	2.0	42	42	42	43	-
76	Israel	9.8	8.4	5.6	6.6	6.6	4.3	41	40	38	39	40

## Copyright note

This document is the property of World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. It may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © 2021 Open Doors International.

## 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 2022 reporting period was 01 October 2020 - 30 September 2021.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

## Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic

In the WWL 2022 reporting period, travel restrictions and other measures introduced by the governments of various countries to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic did cause delays and create the need for restructuring grass-roots research in some cases. Through the agile cooperation of In-country networks, Open Doors country researchers, External experts, WWR analysts and an increased use of technological options, Open Doors is confident that – as in the previous reporting period – WWL 2022 scoring, analysis and documentation has maintained required levels of quality and reliability.

## External Links - Introduction

- Sources and definitions: World Watch List Documentation - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>

# WWL 2022 Situation in brief / Tajikistan

## Brief country details

Tajikistan: Population (UN estimate for 2021)	Christians	Chr%
9,657,000	65,300	0.7

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

## Map of country



Tajikistan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	65	45
WWL 2021	66	33
WWL 2020	65	31
WWL 2019	65	29
WWL 2018	65	22

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2018-2022 reporting periods

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

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

## Brief description of the persecution situation

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

## Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Tajikistan has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights in the following international treaties:

1. [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR)
2. [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR)
3. [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) (CAT)
4. [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW)
5. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

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

- Christian converts are ostracized and faced with opposition and violence by their families and communities (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christian children are not allowed to participate in church activities (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Ownership of religious literature is severely restricted beyond international permitted limitations (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)
- Christian female converts are forced to marry non-Christian men and pressured to renounce their faith (ICCPR Art. 23; CEDAW Art. 16 and ICESCR Art. 10)

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

No reports of violent incidents have been published in the media. WWR sources have provided data, but for security reasons no detailed information can be given.

- 37 Christians (all converts from Islam) faced various forms of violations of rights, such as physical and mental abuse, in family, community, education and work. The majority of cases involved persecution in family and included beating, threats and forced isolation. It is very likely that there are considerably more such cases, but many people are reluctant to report such experiences.

## Specific examples of positive developments

- Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the local Caritas NGO has distributed healthcare items to the homeless in the capital, Dushanbe. According to a survey conducted in April 2020 by the Asian Development Bank, over 27% of the total population live below the poverty line. (Source: [Fides, 9 December 2020](#))
- The Tajik Church is also helping people who have lost their jobs. According to the Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting, about one million migrants leave Tajikistan every year to look for work abroad, mainly in Russia, but this came to a complete halt in 2020 due to the closure of borders. This left families with a lack of main income, which previously consisted of remittances from relatives abroad. (Source: [Fides, 21 January 2021](#))
- Tajikistan celebrated National Unity Day on 27 June 2021, which coincided with the opening of the country's first Catholic monastery, an unusual occurrence in Central Asia. (Source: [Asia News, 21 July 2021](#))

## External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>



- Specific examples of positive developments: Fides, 9 December 2020 - [http://www.fides.org/en/news/69197-ASIA\\_TAJIKISTAN\\_Personal\\_visits\\_by\\_priests\\_to\\_families\\_in\\_times\\_of\\_pandemic\\_and\\_without\\_the\\_Internet](http://www.fides.org/en/news/69197-ASIA_TAJIKISTAN_Personal_visits_by_priests_to_families_in_times_of_pandemic_and_without_the_Internet)
- Specific examples of positive developments: Fides, 21 January 2021 - [http://www.fides.org/en/news/69440-ASIA\\_TAJIKISTAN\\_Job\\_loss\\_as\\_a\\_result\\_of\\_the\\_coronavirus\\_pandemic\\_Caritas\\_helps\\_returnees](http://www.fides.org/en/news/69440-ASIA_TAJIKISTAN_Job_loss_as_a_result_of_the_coronavirus_pandemic_Caritas_helps_returnees)
- Specific examples of positive developments: Asia News, 21 July 2021 - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/First-Catholic-monastery-in-Tajikistan-53692.html>

## WWL 2022: Keys to understanding / Tajikistan

### Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International country report	AI 2021	<a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/tajikistan/">https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/tajikistan/</a>	16 July 2021
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16201032">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16201032</a>	16 July 2021
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2020	BTI 2020	<a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard-TJK.html">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard-TJK.html</a>	16 July 2021
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	<a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/tajikistan/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/tajikistan/</a>	16 July 2021
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2020	EIU 2020	<a href="https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/democracy-index-2020.pdf">https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/democracy-index-2020.pdf</a>	16 July 2021
FFP's Fragile States Index 2021	FSI 2021	<a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>	16 July 2021
Freedom House's 2021 Democracy index	Freedom House/Democracy 2021	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/tajikistan/nations-transit/2021">https://freedomhouse.org/country/tajikistan/nations-transit/2021</a>	16 July 2021
Freedom House's 2021 Global Freedom index	Freedom House/Global Freedom 2021	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/tajikistan/freedom-world/2021">https://freedomhouse.org/country/tajikistan/freedom-world/2021</a>	16 July 2021
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2020 report (Tajikistan is not included)	Freedom House/Internet Freedom 2020	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores</a>	
Garda World country report	Garda World	<a href="https://www.garda.com/crisis24/country-reports/tajikistan">https://www.garda.com/crisis24/country-reports/tajikistan</a>	16 July 2021
Human Rights Watch World Report 2021	HRW 2021	<a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/tajikistan">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/tajikistan</a>	16 July 2021
Internet World Stats 2021	IWS 2021	<a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#tj">https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#tj</a>	16 July 2021
RSF's 2021 World Press Freedom Index	World Press Freedom 2021	<a href="https://rsf.org/en/tajikistan">https://rsf.org/en/tajikistan</a>	16 July 2021
Transparency International's 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index	CPI 2020	<a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/tajikistan">https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/tajikistan</a>	16 July 2021
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators	HDI	<a href="http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/TJK">http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/TJK</a>	16 July 2021
US State Department's 2020 International Religious Freedom country reports	IRFR 2020	<a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/tajikistan/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/tajikistan/</a>	16 July 2021
USCIRF 2021 country reports	USCIRF 2021	<a href="https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/Tajikistan%20Chapter%20AR2021.pdf">https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/Tajikistan%20Chapter%20AR2021.pdf</a>	16 July 2021
World Bank country report	World Bank	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/tajikistan">https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/tajikistan</a>	16 July 2021

### Recent history

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

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

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

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

The COVID-19 crisis led to great economic and social problems in Tajikistan. The government of President Rahmon downplayed the impact of the virus. On 26 June 2020 it put the COVID-19 related death toll at 52 with the official number of infections at 5,691. However, an online list regularly updated by local activists put the number of COVID-related deaths at 437, as of 26 June 2020. (Source: [RFE-RL, 26 June 2020](#)).

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

## Political and legal landscape

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

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

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

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

1. Allow the state to restrict manifestations of freedom of religion or belief on a wide range of grounds not permitted under international human rights obligations;
2. Increase religious organizations' requirements to report all their activities to the state;

3. Require state approval for the appointment of all imams;
4. Increase state control both on religious education at home, and on those travelling abroad for such education.

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

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2020 - Executive Summary):

- The [Constitution](#) of 1994 (amended in 1999 and 2003) "provides for the right, individually or jointly with others, to adhere to any religion or to no religion, and to participate in religious customs and ceremonies. The constitution states that 'the citizen shall have the right to participate in the creation of political parties, including parties of democratic, religious and atheistic character' and 'religious organizations shall be separate from the state and shall not interfere in state affairs'."
- "The law ... prohibits persons younger than the age of 18 from participating in public religious activities. The government Committee on Religion, Regulation of Traditions, Celebrations, and Ceremonies (CRA) maintains a broad mandate that includes approving registration of religious associations, construction of houses of worship, participation of children in religious education, and the dissemination of religious literature."
- "According to international NGOs, the CRA levied heavy fines on four Protestant churches between August 2019 and January 2020 for arranging translation of the Bible into Tajik without prior CRA approval, as required by law. The CRA denied the NGO report, stating that translation of religious literature does not fall under its purview."
- "Individuals outside government continued to state they were reluctant to discuss issues such as societal respect for religious diversity, including abuses or discrimination based on religious belief, due to fear of government harassment. Civil society representatives said discussion of religion in general, especially relations among members of different religious groups, remained a subject they avoided."

According to USCIRF 2021 (Key findings):

- "In 2020, the Tajikistani government's record on religious freedom showed little improvement. The regime of President Emomali Rahmon maintained its authoritarian policies, suppressing displays of public religiosity by individuals of all faiths and persecuting minority communities—especially actual and alleged Salafi Muslims, a term the authorities apply broadly and indiscriminately. The authorities have banned Salafi Islam since 2009, calling it "extremist"; as a result, the mere performance of Islamic rituals in ways the authorities deem "foreign" or inconsistent with the government's interpretation of the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam is subject to criminal prosecution."
- "Many religious minorities hide their affiliations for fear of government scrutiny and social backlash, expressing concern over government plans to document individual religious affiliation in the October 2020 census. Social tolerance for religious minority communities continued to decline."

The legal landscape remains restrictive towards women and girls. Many couples marry through *nikeh* ceremonies (an Islamic religious marriage) without registering the marriage with civil registry offices. Thus many do not benefit from the protective provisions set out in the Family Code (OECD, 2019). Child marriages, forced marriages and polygamy remain ongoing practices, despite being illegal (Girls Not Brides, 2021; CEDAW, 2018). Under the civil code both men and women have equal divorce rights, although divorces by *talaq* occur under unregistered Islamic marriages (OECD, 2019). In relation to domestic violence, the 2013 Law on the Protection of Domestic Violence (No. 954) was viewed as a positive turning point in providing protection for victims, particularly as it addressed physical, psychological, social and economic forms of violence. It fails to specifically criminalize domestic violence however. Obtaining justice is notoriously difficult for victims, causing many to remain silent (OECD, 2019; CEDAW, 2018).

Military service is mandatory for men for two years (World Population Review, accessed 16 July 2021). Within this context, Christian men may experience physical and mental persecution on account of their faith.

## Religious landscape

Tajikistan: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	65,300	0.7
Muslim	9,459,000	97.9
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	5,000	0.1
Ethno-religionist	8,400	0.1
Jewish	300	0.0
Bahai	4,300	0.0
Atheist	16,000	0.2
Agnostic	95,800	1.0
Other	2,400	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

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

Tajikistan has the highest percentage of Muslims in Central Asia: According to the World Christian Database (WCD 2021) 97.9% of the population is Muslim. However, it would be wrong to call Tajikistan a Muslim country. 70 years of atheism during the Soviet era have left a deep influence and the government (the heirs of the atheist Soviets) is staunchly secular and keeps Islam firmly under strict control. The population merely follows Islamic culture rather than strict Islamic teachings. However, Tajikistan has had experience with radical Islamic groups like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and *Hizb-ut-Tahrir*, and hundreds of Tajiks have joined these groups, as well as going off to fight for the Islamic State group (IS) in Syria and Iraq.

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

Christians are a very small group; they make up only 0.7% of the population. The overwhelming majority (over 76%) of them are Russian Orthodox (i.e. ethnic Russians). As in many other countries in Central Asia, Christian numbers are shrinking due to the emigration of Russians. This is not compensated by the increase in numbers of converts to Christianity, who number about 3,000. Converts experience huge pressure from family, friends and the local community to return to the faith of their ancestors, believing that a true Tajik can only be Muslim. Female converts are vulnerable to isolation and being forcibly married to a Muslim, whereas male converts are more likely to experience physical violence and discrimination in the workplace.

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

In early 2019, government officials burned 5,000 Baptist calendars that had been seized at Dushanbe International Airport after being deemed "propaganda of an alien religion." (Source: [USCIRF 2020](#)).

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

## Economic landscape

According to the World Bank:

- **GDP (current US\$) (billions):** 7.52 (in 2018)
- **GDP growth (annual %):** 7.3 - Tajikistan's GDP growth has been increasing since 2010.

Tajikistan remains the poorest country in the former Soviet sphere. Tajikistan became a member of the World Trade Organization in March 2013. However, its economy continues to face major challenges, including dependence on remittances from Tajik migrant laborers working in Russia

and Kazakhstan, pervasive corruption, the opium trade and destabilizing violence emanating from neighboring Afghanistan (Source: CIA Factbook). Drug trafficking is a major source of illegal income in Tajikistan as it is an important transit country for Afghan narcotics bound for Russian and European markets. Some opium is also produced locally for the domestic market.

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

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

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

## Social and cultural landscape

According to the [UNDP's full 2020 report](#) (page 343) and the CIA Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Tajik 84.3% (includes Pamiriand Yagnobi), Uzbek 13.8%, other 2% (includes Kyrgyz, Russian, Turkmen, Tatar, Arab) (2014 est.)
- **Main languages:** Tajik (official) 84.4%, Uzbek 11.9%, Kyrgyz .8%, Russian .5%, other 2.4% (2010 est.)
- **Urban population is:** 27.7 % of total population (2021)
- **Literacy rate:** 99.8% (2015)

According to the UNDP's Human Development Indicators (HDI):

- **HDI score and ranking:** 0.668, ranking 125
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 71.1 years
- **Expected years of schooling:** 11.7 years (10.7 for girls, 12.6 for boys)
- **Population in multidimensional poverty, headcount (thousands – for the year of the survey):** 661
- **Gender inequality index:** 0.823
- **Labor Force Participation Rate:** Female: 31.3, Male: 52.8
- **Unemployment, total (% of labor force):** 11.0
- **Unemployment, youth (% ages15-24):** 20.8
- **Vulnerable employment (% of total employment):** 41.8

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

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

When Russia announced in March 2020 that it would close its borders to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, Tajikistan itself had not yet registered its first COVID-19 death. Due to the country's high level of unemployment, Russia is a key destination for hundreds of thousands of Tajiks seeking work. Moscow's announcement that it would close its borders to foreigners as of 18 March 2020 until at least the beginning of May came as many Tajik migrants were packing their bags to travel for seasonal jobs at Russian construction sites, farms and factories. (Source: [RFE-RL, 18 March 2020](#)).

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

Tajikistan has deeply entrenched patriarchal norms. According to a [2019 OECD](#) report, 90% of women have no say in domestic decisions. Human Rights Watch (HRW 2021) has highlighted domestic violence as an ongoing serious problem, noting that protection and support for victims fall short. Many victims are fearful of accessing justice due to a lack of trust in the police, stigma surrounding domestic violence, and insufficient laws criminalizing domestic violence. Reports of domestic violence – primarily affecting women and girls – rose significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2021):

- **Internet usage:** 30.9% penetration (survey date: December 2020)
- **Facebook usage:** 10.5% penetration (survey date: December 2020)  
According to 2019 data, 71.8% of Facebook users in Tajikistan are male and only 28.2% female ([NapoleonCat, April 2019](#)).

According to the World Bank's country profile:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 111.5 per 100 people (2018)  
According to a [2020 study by the Asian Development Bank](#), significant gender gaps remain in access to mobile phones and the internet. This makes accessing information and digital community harder for women.

According to [BuddeComm Research](#) (updated 22 June 2020):

- Of all the former Soviet republics, Tajikistan's telecommunications infrastructure was arguably the least developed. With a telecom network that was near total collapse, the government had the daunting task of bringing it up to modern standards. Despite the launch of 4G/LTE services, the overall the telecom sector has continued to struggle. Tajikistan still has one of the lowest fixed-line penetrations in the Asian region and one of the lowest broadband levels of broadband penetration.
- There are five major operators in the market: Tcell, Babilon Mobile, MegaFon, ZET Mobile (registered as Tacom) and TK Mobile. Tcell has the largest overall market share, followed by Babilon Mobile, Megafon, ZET Mobile and TK Mobile.
- Fixed broadband penetration in Tajikistan remains extremely low, mainly due to a limited number of fixed lines as well as the dominance of the mobile platform. Market penetration has only grown marginally over the last five years from a very small base. Over the next five years growth is expected to continue but overall market penetration will remain extremely low.
- Tajikistan has seen a strong increase in mobile broadband penetration over the past four years, though the market is still at an early stage of development and penetration remains relatively low compared to other Asian nations. Steady growth is predicted over the next five years, supported by the rising number of mobile subscribers, and increasingly faster speeds offered by the mobile operators as they roll out their 4G networks. Tariffs should improve due to strong competition, though the regulator has imposed SMP conditions on all operators, which makes it difficult for them to adjust tariffs to suit market conditions.

Tajikistan is not included in Freedom House's Freedom on the Net Report 2020, but it is known that Internet access is strictly monitored and censored by the regime. However, foreign Christian websites (e.g. in Russia) are mostly accessible. Satellite dishes provide a good alternative to access international information, but they are expensive and few Tajiks can afford them. Nonetheless, there are many options for Christians to present the Christian faith via (foreign) websites, via SD cards in smartphones, and via radio and television programs on satellite dishes. These modern possibilities are popular, since Christian publications in book format (also magazines and DVDs) are much more easily confiscated by police during raids and searches.

## Security situation

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



IS activity has been the cause of some killings, as listed by [UK Government travel advice](#) (accessed on 8 June 2021):

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

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

There were a number of clashes between Tajik and Kyrgyz border guards and civilians in 2019 (Source: [RFE-RL, 16 September 2019](#)). In June 2020 a Kyrgyz national was hospitalized with a gunshot wound received near a disputed segment of the Kyrgyz-Tajik border in the southern Batken region (Source: [RFE-RL, 2 June 2020](#)). On 28 April 2021 new clashes erupted. The situation rapidly escalated, leading to Kyrgyz and Tajik forces exchanging gunfire in the Leylek district of Kyrgyzstan's Batken region. At least 13 people were killed and 134 injured (Source: [RFE-RL, 30 April 2021](#)). Tensions rose again in June 2021 but did not escalate into fighting. (Source: [RFE-RL, 4 June 2021](#))

## Trends analysis

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

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

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

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

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

In general, Christians experience the same problems as all other people in the country and are not especially targeted economically or socially. The only exception to this is the pressure from family, local imams and villagers on Christians with a Muslim background. However, there have been no changes in government policy regarding freedom of religion since the introduction of

the new law in January 2018. This means that raids on meetings, the arrest and interrogation of Christians, fines and confiscation of religious materials continue to occur. Due to the very high level of stability of the two strongest Persecution engines in Tajikistan (*Dictatorial paranoia* and *Islamic oppression*), this pressure will likely continue unabated.

## External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty - RFE-RL, 14 March 2019 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/tajik-villager-killed-in-dispute-over-road-near-kyrgyz-border/29820974.html>
- Recent history: RFE-RL, 14 January 2020 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyz-tajik-officials-hold-talks-after-latest-border-incident/30376316.html>
- Recent history: RFE-RL, 26 June 2020 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/tajikistan-official-coronavirus-stats-don-t-reflect-reality-rfe-rl-investigation-finds/30692651.html>
- Political and legal landscape: RFE-RL - <http://www.rferl.org/content/tajikistan-presidential-dynasty-constitutional-amendments/27503530.html>
- Political and legal landscape: RFE-RL, 2 March 2020 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/as-expected-tajik-ruling-party-wins-parliamentary-elections-opposition-shut-out/30464274.html>
- Political and legal landscape: amendments to the law on religion - <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/coe/tajikistans-new-religion-law-represents-total-control/>
- Political and legal landscape: Asia News, 13 October 2020 - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Dushanbe,-Emomali-Rakhmon,-another-'post-Soviet-eternal-leader'-re-elected-51285.html>
- Political and legal landscape: Constitution - <https://mfa.tj/en/main/tajikistan/constitution>
- Political and legal landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/TJ.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: Girls Not Brides, 2021 - <https://atlas.girlsnotbrides.org/map/tajikistan/>
- Political and legal landscape: CEDAW, 2018 - [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/TJK/CO/6&Lang=En](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/TJK/CO/6&Lang=En)
- Political and legal landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/TJ.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/TJ.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: CEDAW, 2018 - [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/TJK/CO/6&Lang=En](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/TJK/CO/6&Lang=En)
- Political and legal landscape: World Population Review, accessed 16 July 2021 - <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/countries-with-mandatory-military-service/>
- Religious landscape description: USCIRF 2020 - <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Tajikistan.pdf>
- Economic landscape: Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2019/20 - <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WPS-Index-2019-20-Report.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNDP's full 2020 report - <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2020.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: RFE-RL, 18 March 2020 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/tajik-workers-face-dire-future-as-russia-closes-borders-over-coronavirus/30495815.html>
- Social and cultural landscape: 2019 OECD - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/TJ.pdf>
- Technological landscape: NapoleonCat, April 2019 - <https://napoleoncat.com/stats/facebook-users-in-tajikistan/2019/04>
- Technological landscape: 2020 study by the Asian Development Bank - <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/609486/womens-time-use-tajikistan.pdf>
- Technological landscape: BuddeComm Research - <https://www.budde.com.au/Research/Tajikistan-Telecoms-Mobile-and-Broadband-Statistics-and-Analyses>
- Security situation: UK - <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/tajikistan>
- Security situation: Government travel advice - <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/tajikistan>

- Security situation: RFE-RL, 7 July 2021 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/afghan-soldiers-repatriated-tajikistan/31345537.html>
- Security situation: Jamestown Foundation, 10 September 2021 - <https://jamestown.org/program/tajikistan-breaks-from-neighbors-in-policy-toward-afghanistan/>
- Security situation: RFE-RL, 16 September 2019 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/deadly-clashes-on-tajik-kyrgyz-border/30167378.html>
- Security situation: RFE-RL, 2 June 2020 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/one-kyrgyz-national-hospitalized-in-fresh-incident-on-kyrgyz-tajik-border/30648046.html>
- Security situation: RFE-RL, 30 April 2021 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-tajikistan-border-clashes-deaths-ceasefire/31230943.html>
- Security situation: RFE-RL, 4 June 2021 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-tajikistan-border-dispute/31290233.html>

## WWL 2022: Church information / Tajikistan

### Christian origins

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

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

Under Joseph Stalin many Russians, Germans, Ukrainians, Belarusians and Poles that were deemed unreliable were sent to Tajikistan in the 1930s. This meant a huge growth in the number of Christians in Tajikistan. After the death of Stalin in 1953, many of them returned home and left Tajikistan. Christians now form less than 1% of the Tajik population.

### Church spectrum today

Tajikistan: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	51,400	78.7
Catholic	200	0.3
Protestant	8,400	12.9
Independent	4,600	7.0
Unaffiliated	700	1.1
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>65,300</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Evangelical movement	2,200	3.4
Renewalist movement	5,500	8.4

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

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

Most Christians belong to ethnic minorities - Russian and Ukrainian. Not surprisingly, the two largest denominations in Tajikistan are the Russian Orthodox and Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The number of Christians decreased sharply in the 1990's due to the wave of Russian and Ukrainian emigration from Tajikistan in the early independence period.

## WWL 2022: Persecution Dynamics / Tajikistan

### Reporting period

01 October 2020 - 30 September 2021

### Position on the World Watch List

Tajikistan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	65	45
WWL 2021	66	33
WWL 2020	65	31
WWL 2019	65	29
WWL 2018	65	22

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2018-2022 reporting periods

The score for Tajikistan in WWL 2022 went down by one point in comparison to WWL 2021, from 66 to 65 points. It was the lower score for violence that caused the drop of one point. Pressure is highest in the *Private* and *Church spheres of life*. The two main Persecution engines in Tajikistan (*Dictatorial paranoia* and *Islamic oppression*, the latter blended with *Clan oppression*) are active in all *spheres of life*, but *Islamic oppression* (blended with *Clan oppression*) dominates in the *Private* and *Family spheres of life*, while *Dictatorial paranoia* dominates in the *National* and *Church spheres of life*. Both engines 'meet' each other in the *Community sphere of life*. Muslim families, friends and villagers exert pressure on converts in particular, while the government imposes many restrictions on church activities.

## Persecution engines

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

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

### Dictatorial paranoia (Very strong)

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

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

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

## Drivers of persecution

Tajikistan: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG	-	-	STRONG	-	-	-	VERY STRONG	-
Government officials	Medium	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	Very strong	-
Ethnic group leaders	Medium	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	Medium	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	Very weak	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong	-	-	Strong	-	-	-	Medium	-
One's own (extended) family	Strong	-	-	Strong	-	-	-	-	-
Political parties	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Strong	-
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Organized crime cartels or networks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

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

### Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

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

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

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

### **Areas where Christians face most difficulties**

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

### **Christian communities and how they are affected**

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

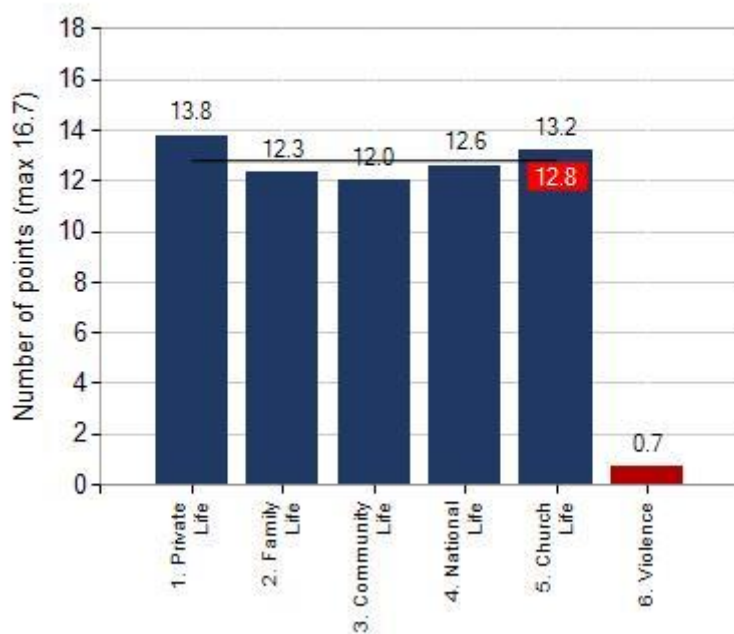
**Historical Christian communities:** These groups, the largest of which is the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), are not involved in evangelism among Tajiks. They can function without much interference since the Tajik regime does not consider them a threat. What is more, the Tajik government has no interest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

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

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

## The Persecution pattern

WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern for Tajikistan



The WWL 2022 Persecution pattern for Tajikistan shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (12.8 points), scoring the same as in WWL 2021. Pressure decreased very slightly in the *Private* and *Family* spheres of life, and it increased very slightly in the *Community*, *National* and *Church* spheres of life.
- Pressure is highest and at an extreme level in the *Private sphere of life* (13.8 points), followed by the *Church sphere of life* (13.2 points). This is an indication that pressure on Christians in Tajikistan comes from two main sources: *Islamic oppression* blended with *Clan oppression* in the *Private sphere of life*, and *Dictatorial paranoia* in the *Church sphere of life*.
- The score for violence is very low, decreasing from 2.2 points in WWL 2021 to 0.7 points in WWL 2022. As in most countries in Central Asia, violent incidents targeting Christians are seldom reported.

## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

*In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2021 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).*



## Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

### **Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.75 points)**

Family members will oppose converts raising their children according to Christian faith and values. They will try to take custody of the children in order to raise them according to Islamic principles. The law is very restrictive regarding the religious education of children. It allows parents to bring up children according to their religious beliefs but at the same time the parents should not allow their children (up to the age of 18) to participate in the activities of religious organizations (e.g. churches and mosques).

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

**Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.50 points)**

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

**Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (3.50 points)**

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

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

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

the state.

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

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

## Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

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

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

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

### **Block 5.18: Churches have been hindered in establishing, managing, maintaining and conducting schools, or charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural organizations, institutions and associations. (3.75 points)**

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

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

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

## Violence

Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following 5 points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:

**1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced.** Possible reasons for this may be:

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

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

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

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

**4. The use of symbolic numbers:** In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10\*, 100\* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10\* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100\* could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1,000\* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000\*, 100,000\* and 1,000,000\*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

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

Tajikistan: Violence Block question	WWL 2022	WWL 2021
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
6.2 How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	1
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	0	3
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	1
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	0	0
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	0
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	37	18
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	1	13
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	0

See above: *Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period.*

## 5 Year trends

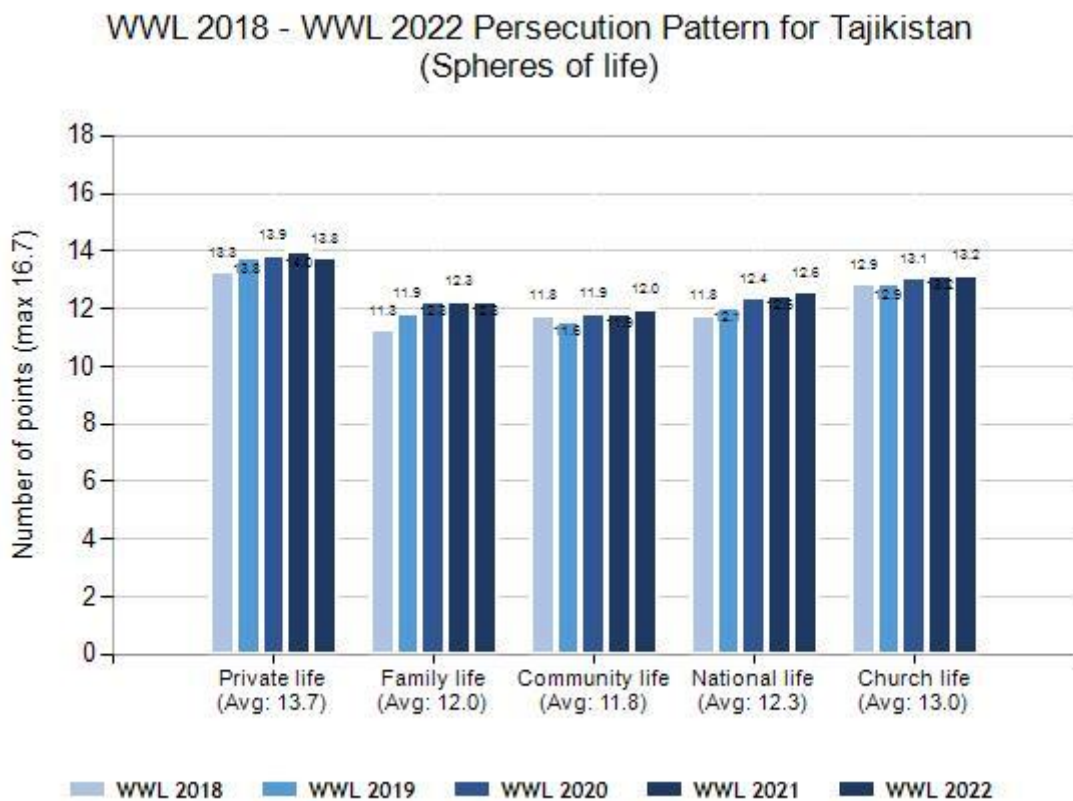
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

As can be seen in the table below, the average pressure on Christians in Tajikistan has increased slowly since WWL 2018 and has now levelled off at the very high level of 12.8 points, indicating the regime's stable attitude towards Christians.

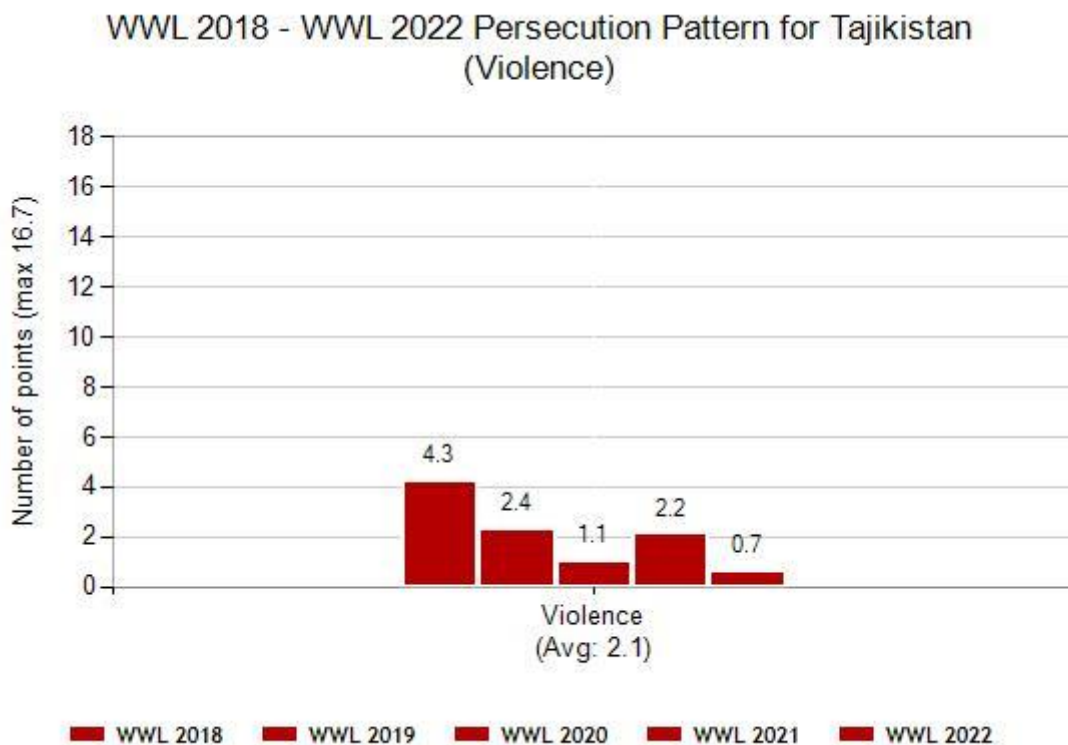
Tajikistan: WWL 2018 - WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2022	12.8
2021	12.8
2020	12.7
2019	12.4
2018	12.2

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



Over the past five WWL reporting periods, the scores in *Community*, *National* and *Church spheres of life* have increased, but not very dramatically. Until WWL 2022 this was also the case for the *Private* and *Family spheres of life*. This indicates that the situation for Christians in Tajikistan is more or less stable with a very high level of pressure. *Private* and *Church life* have consistently scored highest, typical for the two main Persecution engines in operation.

## 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



As in many other former Soviet republics, the number of reported violent incidents in Tajikistan tends to be relatively low. Over the past five WWL reporting periods, the score has varied, but never gone beyond 4.3 points. In WWL 2022, the score was the lowest of all 5 reporting periods.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

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

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



As Tajikistan is a predominately Muslim nation, female converts from Islam are particularly vulnerable to intolerance, discriminating pressure and violent persecution. Because Islamic teaching expects women to submit in all ways to the men in the family, in practice, women do not have the independence or freedom to choose their own religion. If their conversion is discovered, female converts run the risk of being locked up, beaten, rejected, sexually assaulted, or forced to marry a Muslim. As a country expert explains: “Forced marriages and bride abductions are culturally characteristic of the region and can affect converts significantly.” In particular, women and girls who had a premarital arrangement before their conversion will be forced to marry. Although there were no reported cases in the WWL 2022 reporting period, this remains an ongoing risk for converts. If a woman was already married before becoming a Christian, she will likely experience beatings from her husband and be forcibly divorced. In short, female converts are put under immense pressure to recant their new faith.

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

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

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

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

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

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

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

## Persecution of other religious minorities

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

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2020 - Executive Summary):

- "The law restricts Islamic prayer to specific locations, regulates the registration and location of mosques, and prohibits persons younger than the age of 18 from participating in public religious activities."
- "The government continued to detain and prosecute Jehovah's Witnesses for refusal to serve in the military. In some cases, there were allegations of physical abuse. Jehovah's Witnesses have unsuccessfully sought registration since 2007, and some adherents have claimed harassment by authorities."

According to USCIRF 2021 (Key findings):

- "State repression of the country's Muslim majority persisted as in prior years. Since 2017, authorities have closed more than 2,000 mosques, converting many into cafes, garment factories, and other public facilities. Remaining mosques are frequently outfitted with security cameras that allow government surveillance of attendance and the content of sermons. In January, the government ordered the conversion of a popular mosque in Khujand, the nation's second-largest city, into a movie theater due to the region's relative lack of cinemas. In February, the head of the Department of Women's and Family Issues publicly linked hijabs with terrorism and vowed that the government would do everything in its power to 'preserve the national culture' and 'defend the people' from the threat posed by female religious clothing. The authorities continued to torment former members of the banned opposition Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) under the guise of a struggle against religious extremism and terrorism, harassing and even imprisoning their

family members. In June, one alleged IRPT member was sentenced to 20 years in prison after his illegal extradition from Austria."

- "Social tolerance for religious minority communities continued to decline. For example, in January [2020] a Shi'a Muslim was imprisoned and allegedly tortured for sharing his faith, an act authorities characterized as spreading 'extremist ideas'. Jehovah's Witnesses have been illegal in Tajikistan since 2008; there are currently two members imprisoned for their faith, including a 70-year-old man who is serving a five-and-a-half-year sentence."

Examples:

- Rustamjon Norov, a 22-year-old Jehovah's Witness from Dushanbe, is in Khujand Investigation Prison facing prosecution for refusing compulsory military service on grounds of conscience. He faces two to five years' imprisonment if convicted. He denies accusations of falsifying his medical history to evade military service. On 1 November, conscientious objector Jovidon Bobojonov was freed under presidential prisoner amnesty after serving nine months of his two-year jail term. (Source: [Forum 18, 5 November 2020](#))
- Despite his offer to perform alternative civilian service, Khujand Military Court today (7 January) jailed Rustamjon Norov for three and a half years, the longest known sentence. The court claimed the 22-year-old Jehovah's Witness conscientious objector falsified his medical history to evade compulsory military service, charges he denies. While held in a military unit in October 2020, he was threatened with torture if he did not put on a military uniform. (Source: [Forum 18, 7 January 2021](#))
- On 4 June 2021, a court in Kulob jailed Imam Mahmadsodyk Sayidov, with Abdugafor Rajabov and Aslamkhon Karimov, for five years for allegedly participating in a religious 'extremist' organization. This is thought to be a reference to the now-banned opposition Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP). The 28-year-old Imam Sayidov was the state-appointed imam of the Nonvoyi Poyon [residential district] Mosque in Kulob, which the other two men attended. (Source: [Forum 18, 10 August 2021](#))

## Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

### **Dictatorial paranoia**

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

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

Islam is not the state religion but is the traditional religion of most of the population. Muslim pressure on Christians in Tajikistan does not come from radical Islamic movements but from the far-reaching influence of family, friends and community on converts. The chances that this Islamic culture will change are as good as non-existent.

## External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: MNN, Oct 2020 - <https://www.mnnonline.org/news/suicides-rising-among-women-in-tajikistan/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Forum 18, 5 November 2020 - [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2615](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2615)
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Forum 18, 7 January 2021 - [https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2629](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2629)
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Forum 18, 10 August 2021 - [https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2678](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2678)

## Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on World Watch Research's Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) and on the World Watch Monitor website:

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