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## Russian Federation: Country Dossier

December 2019



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

December 2019

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

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# Introduction

## World Watch List 2020

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017	Total Score WWL 2016
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	11.1	94	94	94	92	92
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.0	93	94	93	89	88
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.5	9.4	92	91	91	91	87
4	Libya	15.3	15.5	15.8	16.0	16.4	11.3	90	87	86	78	79
5	Pakistan	14.0	13.9	15.0	14.9	13.7	16.7	88	87	86	88	87
6	Eritrea	14.5	14.9	15.9	15.9	15.4	10.9	87	86	86	82	89
7	Sudan	14.2	14.6	14.5	15.7	16.1	10.4	85	87	87	87	84
8	Yemen	16.6	16.4	16.4	16.7	16.7	2.6	85	86	85	85	78
9	Iran	14.1	14.3	14.1	15.8	16.5	10.4	85	85	85	85	83
10	India	12.9	13.0	13.5	15.0	13.5	14.8	83	83	81	73	68
11	Syria	13.5	14.2	13.0	13.9	14.4	12.6	82	82	76	86	87
12	Nigeria	12.2	11.9	13.5	12.8	13.0	16.7	80	80	77	78	78
13	Saudi Arabia	15.1	14.9	14.1	15.5	16.5	2.4	79	77	79	76	76
14	Maldives	15.4	15.6	14.0	15.9	16.6	0.7	78	78	78	76	76
15	Iraq	14.0	14.6	13.9	14.5	13.6	5.6	76	79	86	86	90
16	Egypt	12.1	13.1	10.7	13.2	10.5	16.1	76	76	70	65	64
17	Algeria	13.5	14.3	10.4	12.8	13.2	9.3	73	70	58	58	56
18	Uzbekistan	15.1	12.9	14.1	12.2	15.7	3.0	73	74	73	71	70
19	Myanmar	11.8	11.9	13.5	12.5	12.2	10.7	73	71	65	62	62
20	Laos	12.8	9.9	14.1	14.4	14.9	5.6	72	71	67	64	58
21	Vietnam	12.3	8.5	12.9	13.6	14.5	9.8	72	70	69	71	66
22	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.2	13.8	13.3	15.7	1.9	70	69	68	67	66
23	China	11.6	8.4	11.6	12.8	15.1	10.2	70	65	57	57	57
24	Mauritania	13.9	14.0	13.0	13.7	13.4	0.2	68	67	57	55	50
25	Central African Republic	10.1	9.1	13.1	9.8	10.2	15.6	68	70	61	58	59
26	Morocco	12.4	13.3	10.8	11.7	14.1	4.1	66	63	51	49	47
27	Qatar	13.6	13.4	10.8	12.2	14.1	2.2	66	62	63	66	65
28	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	10.2	9.4	11.8	15.6	66	48	-	-	-
29	Mali	9.2	8.2	12.8	10.0	11.7	13.7	66	68	59	59	55
30	Sri Lanka	11.5	9.0	11.0	10.9	9.6	13.1	65	58	57	55	53
31	Tajikistan	13.9	12.3	11.9	12.4	13.1	1.1	65	65	65	58	58
32	Nepal	12.4	10.8	9.9	12.1	12.2	7.0	64	64	64	53	53
33	Jordan	13.1	14.1	10.7	11.7	12.5	1.7	64	65	66	63	59
34	Tunisia	12.0	12.8	10.3	10.8	12.3	5.4	64	63	62	61	58
35	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.5	10.7	12.4	14.0	1.7	64	63	63	56	55
36	Turkey	12.6	11.8	10.7	13.3	11.3	3.7	63	66	62	57	55
37	Brunei	13.8	14.3	10.7	10.3	13.5	0.6	63	63	64	64	61
38	Bangladesh	11.1	9.9	12.7	11.1	8.9	9.3	63	58	58	63	57
39	Ethiopia	10.0	9.2	10.6	10.8	10.4	11.9	63	65	62	64	67
40	Malaysia	12.1	14.6	12.7	12.0	9.6	1.5	62	60	65	60	58
41	Colombia	8.9	7.8	11.9	9.8	8.9	15.0	62	58	56	53	55
42	Oman	12.7	13.1	10.0	11.5	12.7	2.0	62	59	57	53	53
43	Kuwait	13.2	13.1	9.9	11.5	13.4	0.7	62	60	61	57	56
44	Kenya	11.7	10.5	10.9	8.3	10.9	9.1	61	61	62	68	68
45	Bhutan	12.8	10.9	11.8	11.6	13.9	0.0	61	64	62	61	56
46	Russian Federation	12.2	8.3	10.7	10.4	12.1	6.9	60	60	51	46	48
47	United Arab Emirates	12.9	13.0	9.5	11.1	12.6	1.1	60	58	58	55	55
48	Cameroon	8.8	7.2	11.6	7.0	10.4	15.0	60	54	38	-	45
49	Indonesia	10.9	11.1	11.6	10.2	9.5	6.5	60	65	59	55	55
50	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.3	7.2	11.1	9.3	60	52	45	47	53
51	Palestinian Territories	12.2	13.0	9.2	10.2	11.9	3.1	60	57	60	64	62
52	Mexico	8.4	6.8	12.2	10.6	10.0	11.5	60	61	59	57	56
53	Azerbaijan	13.0	10.0	9.3	11.1	12.4	1.5	57	57	57	52	57
54	Comoros	11.7	11.5	9.1	9.9	13.9	0.9	57	56	56	56	56
55	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.3	11.1	9.4	11.9	1.1	57	56	54	48	46
56	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	10.3	10.0	11.2	0.2	56	56	56	57	58
57	Democratic Republic of the Congo	5.6	6.7	10.6	7.4	10.4	15.6	56	55	33	-	53
58	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	5.9	56	48	40	-	51
59	Bahrain	12.1	12.3	9.1	10.1	10.5	0.9	55	55	57	54	54

60	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	7.0	55	52	53	59	57
61	Cuba	9.6	5.6	9.5	11.8	12.0	3.5	52	49	49	47	42
62	Uganda	8.1	4.6	6.7	6.7	9.1	13.0	48	47	46	53	45
63	Burundi	5.1	5.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.7	48	43	-	-	-
64	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	3.7	45	46	-	-	-
65	South Sudan	5.7	1.5	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.6	44	44	-	-	-
66	Mozambique	6.9	4.6	7.1	5.2	8.0	11.7	43	43	-	-	-
67	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	1.1	43	43	-	-	-
68	Angola	6.4	3.6	7.0	8.7	10.4	6.7	43	42	-	-	-
69	Venezuela	3.8	4.4	10.6	9.3	9.5	4.8	42	41	34	-	-
70	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	6.6	3.5	42	43	-	-	-
71	Rwanda	5.3	4.4	6.7	7.8	10.1	7.2	42	41	-	-	-
72	Nicaragua	5.8	4.2	8.5	9.8	9.0	4.1	41	41	-	-	-
73	Togo	8.6	6.7	8.5	7.1	8.4	1.1	41	42	-	-	-

## Copyright notice

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## Brief note on 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). The highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. The WWL 2020 reporting period was 1 November 2018 - 31 October 2019.

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).

# WWL 2020: Persecution summary / Russian Federation

## Brief country details

Pop 2019	Christians	Chr%
Russian Federation		
143,896,000	118,027,000	82.0

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2019).

World Watch List Russian Federation	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2020	60	46
WWL 2019	60	41
WWL 2018	51	-
WWL 2017	46	-
WWL 2016	48	-

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2016-2020 reporting periods.

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

Many ethnic Russians have left Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia due to the fighting and churches have seen the number of their members drop. However, of all the Christian communities it is the Russian Orthodox churches who experience the least problems from the government. It is the indigenous Christians with a Muslim background in the Muslim majority regions who are bearing the brunt of persecution both at the hands of family and friends and from the local community and in some areas have to keep their faith secret for fear of being executed. Unregistered churches active in evangelism may face obstructions in the form of surveillance and interrogation by the local authorities.

## Specific examples of persecution in the reporting period

- Authorities in the Russia-annexed Crimean Peninsula have released the head of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in the region after briefly detaining him. (Source: [Radio Free Europe](#), 3 March 2019)
- 4 Christian men who worked in Christian rehabilitation center for drug addicts were imprisoned for 5-8 years. (Source: Open Doors research)
- 5 missionaries in Chechnya were detained several times, harassed and later deported from Chechnya. (Source: Open Doors research)

## External Links - WWL 2020: Persecution summary

- Specific examples of persecution in the reporting period: Radio Free Europe - <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukrainian-orthodox-archbishop-arrested-in-crimea/29800830.html>

# WWL 2020: Keys to understanding / Russian Federation

## Link for general background information

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17839672>.

## Recent history

Russia stands out among the countries of Europe in that it never directly experienced the influences of the Renaissance, Reformation or the Enlightenment. Individualism, human rights, freedom of religion and other typical Western ideals are not indigenous to Russian culture and people. Slavery, or rather serfdom, was not abolished in Russia until 19 February 1861, but many farmers continued to have huge obligations to their landlords. Parliamentary democracy as it developed in Western Europe (and later in the USA) never took hold in Russia. Instead, the country has known only authoritarian forms of government ever since the early Middle Ages.

The demise of the USSR in 1991 is keenly felt as a loss of face for Russia which needs to be undone. States that had been conquered over the centuries all of a sudden became independent. This had a huge impact on Russian self-esteem. Russia has been and is working hard to restore its former position via all kinds of methods to rebuild its sphere of influence in its former empire.

Russia is taking on an increasingly dominant role in the area once covered by the Soviet Union - often under the cover of offering protection to ethnic Russians who are being threatened by “ultra-nationalists and fascists”. In March 2014 Russia annexed the Crimea peninsula after pro-Russian rebels had taken over the territory in February 2014 from Ukraine. This annexation has not been recognized by most countries. In May 2014 Russian rebels in the eastern Ukrainian provinces of Donetsk and Lugansk started an armed rebellion against the government in Kiev. Russia has always denied it is involved in the conflict, but the rebels could never have achieved so much without Russian support (in whatever form). Internationally, the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine has isolated Russia enormously.

At the international level, Russia’s participation in the Syrian conflict since 2017 meant a huge change to the situation in Syria. The stalemate between the government of President Assad and the various opposition groups was broken. In August 2018 President Assad had regained control over large parts of the country.

## Political and legal landscape

According to the [Constitution of Russia](#), the country is a federation and semi-presidential republic, with a president as the head of state and prime minister as head of government. According to the Russian constitution, elections for the presidency are held every four years. March 2018 saw the re-election of Vladimir Putin.



The Russian Federation is structured as a multi-party representative democracy, with the federal government composed of a legislative, executive and judicial branch. Leading political parties include United Russia (the party of both President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev), the Communist Party and the Liberal Democratic Party. There are notable opposition groups, however these are constantly obstructed and members have often been given prison sentences.

Since 2012, the Russian parliament (Duma) has passed a number of laws and amendments that imposed restrictions on society, including religion. On [13 July 2012](#), the State Duma overwhelmingly approved a bill concerning foreign-funded NGOs active in the political field. Christian charitable activities have suffered too from this. Before 2012 corruption, bureaucracy and taxes were hampering such work, but now Christian charities fully depend on donations from Russian citizens.

On 6 July 2016, President Putin signed [amendments](#) - referred to as “anti-terrorism” restrictions - to the country’s religion law which came into effect on 20 July 2016. These amendments are also known under the name of one of the authors: Irina Yarovaya. The first consequences of this new legislation could be seen in the charges brought against various Christians as reported by [Forum 18](#) on 26 August 2016. Since then the Yarovaya law has had growing impact on Russian Christians. It affects especially three areas: Religious literature, missionary activities and house meetings for prayer or Bible study. Hundreds of believers have been interrogated, most them Protestant Christians. There have been hundreds of court hearings and fines - the majority against Protestants. It has become practically impossible to carry out any religious activities outside church buildings including sharing information on social networks; special written permission is required for this. It has also become much more risky to work with children. After the Yarovaya law came into force, the state authorities began to investigate whether religious organizations were lawfully in possession of their property. These investigations also affected churches.

On 20 April 2017 [Russia's Supreme Court](#) in Moscow declared the Jehovah's Witness national headquarters in St Petersburg and all 395 local organizations "extremist", banned all their activity immediately, and ordered their property to be seized by the state. Russia's Catholic Church [condemned](#) the ban claiming the move represents a threat to religious freedom generally. In contrast, the ban was [welcomed](#) by representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church.

## Religious landscape

Russia is the biggest country on earth with a population of 146,896,000. 82% of them are Christians, according to the 2019 estimate by World Christian Database (WCD). The overwhelming majority of these Christians belong to the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) (96.5%). Despite decades of atheistic propaganda by the Communists during the Soviet era, most Russians consider themselves Christians. However, many Russians have not read the Bible and few attend church services. Outreach activities by non-Orthodox denominations are not welcomed.

The next biggest religious group in Russia - according to WCD - are Muslims – mostly Sunnis – with 12.4% of the population. They live mainly in the northern Caucasus (in southern Russia) and in the mid-Volga region around the city of Kazan, 800 kilometers east of Moscow. While the Muslims in the Caucasus region tend to be conservative and have been involved in armed fighting against the Russian army, the Muslims in the mid-Volga region are more moderate. A further group of Muslims not included in these statistics are the hundreds of thousands of migrant workers from the Central Asian countries. Most are living under bad conditions, are poorly paid and are regarded with suspicion (since they could be Muslim militants). While working abroad these migrant workers are much more open to outreach by Christians.

As mentioned above, the northern Caucasus is a Muslim region with a strong, radical Islamic culture. Many Christians fled from this region during the Chechen wars (1994-1996 and 1999-2009). Pressure on Christians who have converted from Islam is enormous and comes mainly from family, friends and the local community. Radical Islam is present in the region with two competing organizations: The so-called Caucasus Emirate and the Islamic State group (IS). Since June 2015 IS has been dominant.

Just over 4% of the Russian population consider themselves to be non-religious or atheist, the result of 70 years of atheist indoctrination by the Communists during the Soviet era. Another 0.4% of the Russian population are Buddhists, mainly living in Kalmykia (near the Caspian Sea) and Tuva Province (bordering on Mongolia).

Religious Context: Russian Federation	Numbers	%
Christians	118,027,000	82.0
Muslim	17,785,000	12.4
Hindu	42,900	0.0
Buddhist	541,000	0.4
Ethnoreligionist	1,002,000	0.7
Jewish	140,000	0.1
Bahai	19,400	0.0
Atheist	748,000	0.5
Agnostic	5,586,000	3.9
Other	4,960	0.0

*Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2019). OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.*

## Economic landscape

Russia has huge natural resources, mainly located in isolated regions like Siberia. Oil, gas, gold, uranium and many other materials abound. However, only after 1991 was the state in a position to exploit such wealth and open up new markets. Western Europe became dependent on (cheaper) Russian gas and oil – which also meant these countries could be manipulated. But the economic crisis of 2007-2013 dealt a serious blow to the Russian economy and things got worse when the fighting in the Crimea broke out in February-March 2014, with the USA and Western Europe imposing economic sanctions. The huge income Russia enjoyed from its exportation of natural gas and oil plummeted in 2015 as the oil price dropped from around 100 dollar per barrel to less than 50 dollars. The Russian economy began to decline and a speedy recovery is still not in sight.

## Social and cultural landscape

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

The [2010 census](#) recorded 81% of the population as being ethnically Russian, and 19% as belonging to other ethnicities: 3.7% Tatars; 1.4% Ukrainians; 1.1% Bashkirs; 1% Chuvashes; 11.8% others and unspecified - in total 82 people groups.

Due to the old Soviet educational system, practically all Russian citizens can read. As a result, Christian materials have a big market. There are hardly any restrictions on the printing and distribution of Christian materials in the Russian language in Russia. However, the availability of Christian literature in the languages of the 81 other people groups in the country is limited.

## Technological landscape

One of the greatest technological issues in Russia is the sheer size of the territory, making it very hard to cover the entire area with television, radio, telephone and Internet access. Many regions have to rely on satellite connections. In this context, the distribution of Christian materials can be quite a challenge too.

Russia is a modern country which aspires to be a world power. Technology is pushed by the regime, but they also try to control the flow of information as much as possible. Negative reporting from abroad is often countered by state propaganda – as was obvious in the reporting about Crimea and eastern Ukraine. This will also affect the use of the media by foreign Christians in particular.

The state secret service – FSB – is equipped with the latest technology. This organisation plays a prominent role in monitoring and infiltrating activities and especially those where foreigners are involved. They are a worthy successor of the infamous KGB and Christians need to be aware that they could be on the radar.

## Security situation

According to the UK [Foreign and Commonwealth Office \(FCO\)](#), areas of civil unrest or potential danger are currently:

- the border region with the Ukrainian Donetsk, Lugansk and Kharkiv Oblasts;
- Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan and the districts of Budyonnovsky, Levokumsky, Neftekumsky, Stepnovsky and Kursky in Stavropol Krai;
- North Ossetia, Karachai-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria (including the Elbrus area).

The conflict in eastern Ukraine (the Donbas area) where rebels supported by the Russian federation have created their own 'country' is not yet over. Fighting can break out any moment again.

The other areas mentioned are all located in the northern Caucasus region, where battles against Islamic militants still continue. More about this can be found in the section Geographical hotspots of persecution in WWL 2020: Persecution Dynamics.

## Trends analysis

- Some [commentators](#) believe that Russia is sliding back into the type of attitude that characterized the worst days of oppression under the Soviet regime, but this is clearly an overstatement. In the Soviet era, hundreds of Christians from all denominations found themselves in jail, psychiatric hospitals or labor camps. Churches and religious materials were confiscated and destroyed. Religious education and training was very restricted. Church leaders were controlled by the state and the media gave a very negative picture of Christian faith. This is not the situation in Russia today. But the banning of a very active religious group in April 2017 is definitely a clear and unwanted signal of possible difficulties awaiting non-ROC Christians in the future.
- The regime headed by President Vladimir Putin has not experienced any significant opposition in ruling Russia over the past years. Constitutional barriers to limit the number of terms a president could be in power were removed. No political changes are to be expected anytime soon.
- Islamic pressure on converts and Protestants who are actively promoting their faith will most likely remain very high in the Muslim majority regions of Russia.
- The government may well impose more restrictions on freedom of religion in the country. Opposition against this is likely to be very limited, with the ROC unlikely to oppose such measures at all.

## External Links - WWL 2020: Keys to understanding

- Link for general background information: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17839672>. - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17839672>
- Political and legal landscape: Constitution of Russia - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russia>
- Political and legal landscape: 13 July 2012 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/putin-signs-ngo-foreign-agents-law/24652130.html>
- Political and legal landscape: amendments - <http://www.icnl.org/research/library/files/Russia/Yarovaya.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: Forum 18 - [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2211](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2211)
- Political and legal landscape: Russia's Supreme Court - [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2274](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2274)
- Political and legal landscape: condemned - <http://www.newsweek.com/jehovahs-witnesses-ban-russia-catholic-593082>
- Political and legal landscape: welcomed - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Russian-Orthodox-against-Jehovah>
- Social and cultural landscape: 2010 census - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russia>
- Security situation: Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) - <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/russia>
- Trends analysis: commentators - <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/why-russias-new-ban-on-jehovahs-witnesses-is-so-troubling-72451/>

# WWL 2020: Church information / Russian Federation

## Christian origins

The official Christianization of Russia occurred in 988, when Prince Vladimir I of Kiev officially adopted Byzantine Rite Christianity as the state religion of Kievan Rus. The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has played a dominant role in Russian society and culture ever since.

Roman Catholicism reached Russia when Russia expanded westwards at the end of the 18th century, occupying the eastern part of Poland and later Lithuania. Catholicism remained the religion of ethnic minorities in Russia and the USSR and received much hostility from the ROC, who regarded Catholics as a threat to “Russianness”. Protestantism came even later to Russia - at the end of the 19th century – and was met with even more hostility. The ROC accused the Protestants of sheep-stealing and often appealed to the tsarist authorities to stop their activities.

When the Russian Revolution took place in November 1917, an atheist regime was established. Church leaders of all denominations were arrested and sent to labor camps. But during World War II Stalin changed this policy on religion. Churches were reopened and restored. The ROC was allowed to train and appoint new leadership. Baptists, Evangelical Christians and also Pentecostals were merged into a strong union. But a lot of distrust against the authorities remained, since there were still many thousands of Christians and church leaders in labor camps. The infamous KGB infiltrated church organizations, and they had informers in practically all churches and congregations. Some Christians refused to cooperate with the authorities, went underground and were ruthlessly persecuted. In 1988, when the ROC celebrated its 1000th anniversary, Open Doors knew of more than 300 Christians imprisoned for their faith at that time.

When the USSR collapsed in 1991, Communist rule ended. Atheism was no longer propagated and religious persecution from the state came to an end: All religious prisoners were freed; surveillance of churches and Christians stopped. It became normal for Russians to identify with religion again and even state officials were allowed to do this. The ROC has since tried to regain its dominant position in society, but Russia has officially remained a secular state.

## Church spectrum today

<b>Church networks: Russian Federation</b>	<b>Christians</b>	<b>%</b>
Orthodox	113,938,000	96.5
Catholic	739,000	0.6
Protestant	1,521,000	1.3
Independent	1,886,000	1.6
Unaffiliated	281,000	0.2
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-339,000	-0.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>118,026,000</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	1,280,000	1.1
Renewalist movement	3,380,000	2.9

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2019).

*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: Believers 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.*

# WWL 2020: Persecution Dynamics

## Reporting period

1 November 2018 – 31 October 2019

## Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 60 points, the Russian Federation ranked 46 in WWL 2020.

This is the same score as in WWL 2019 when it was at rank 41. Before WWL 2019, the Russian Federation was outside the Top 50 and remained a so-called Persecution Watch Country for years. Despite a drop in average pressure over all *spheres of life*, the WWL 2020 score was caused by higher levels of persecution in the *Church sphere of life* and a rise in the violence score caused partly by a greater number of churches being closed down.

## Persecution engines

Persecution engines: Russian Federation	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Clan and ethnic antagonism	CEA	Medium
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.*

### Islamic oppression (Strong):

In the Caucasus region, this is the most important Persecution engine. In the various republics on the northern slopes of the Caucasus range (Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia) Islamic militants are fighting against the Russian army to establish a Muslim emirate. Many ethnic Russians have left the area due to the violence. Churches have seen the number of their members drop. Christian converts with a Muslim background have to keep their faith secret for fear of being executed. *Islamic oppression* is also active in Tatarstan (with its capital city, Kazan, on the Volga river), a region 800 kilometres east of Moscow, where the influence of Islam is growing.

### Dictatorial paranoia (Strong):

Legislation in Russia is being adapted and restrictions are constantly being made. The government continues to favor the Russian Orthodox Church, at the expense of other religious Christian groups.

**Clan and ethnic antagonism (Medium):**

In the Muslim regions there is a very strong link between ethnicity and religion. Anyone who leaves Islam is not just an apostate, but also a traitor to the nation. This is blended with Islamic oppression.

**Christian denominational protectionism (Medium):**

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

**Drivers of persecution**

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

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



### Drivers of Islamic oppression (blended with Clan and ethnic antagonism):

- **Extended family (Very strong):** This is especially the case in the Muslim areas (northern Caucasus and mid-Volga), with converts being targeted most.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Strong):** There is a strong link between religion and nationalism in the Muslim regions of Russia: Conversion to Christianity is strongly opposed.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Muslim clerics will oppose conversion to Christianity.

### Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia:

- **Government officials (Strong):** State agents at various levels exert surveillance and impose restrictions. Legislation in Russia is being adapted and restricted constantly.
- **Normal citizens (Medium):** All over Russia, local communities oppose openly evangelistic activities carried out by Protestant Christians.
- **Political parties (Medium):** Although Russia has a parliament (with elections), it is completely dominated by the United Russia party of President Putin. They are constantly restricting existing legislation and imposing new restrictions.

### Drivers of Christian denominational protectionism:

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

## Geographical hotspots of persecution

While nationwide persecution is not at a high level (and is only caused by restrictions from the government), the situation is different in the northern Caucasus region. This is where conservative Islam (Wahhabism) has a stronghold and pressure on Christians is very high, especially in Chechnya and Dagestan. As a result, almost all Russian Christians have left these areas. Converts are under such pressure to recant that most have to hide their new faith. Some have been forced to flee or find refuge in safe houses.

## Christian communities and how they are affected

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

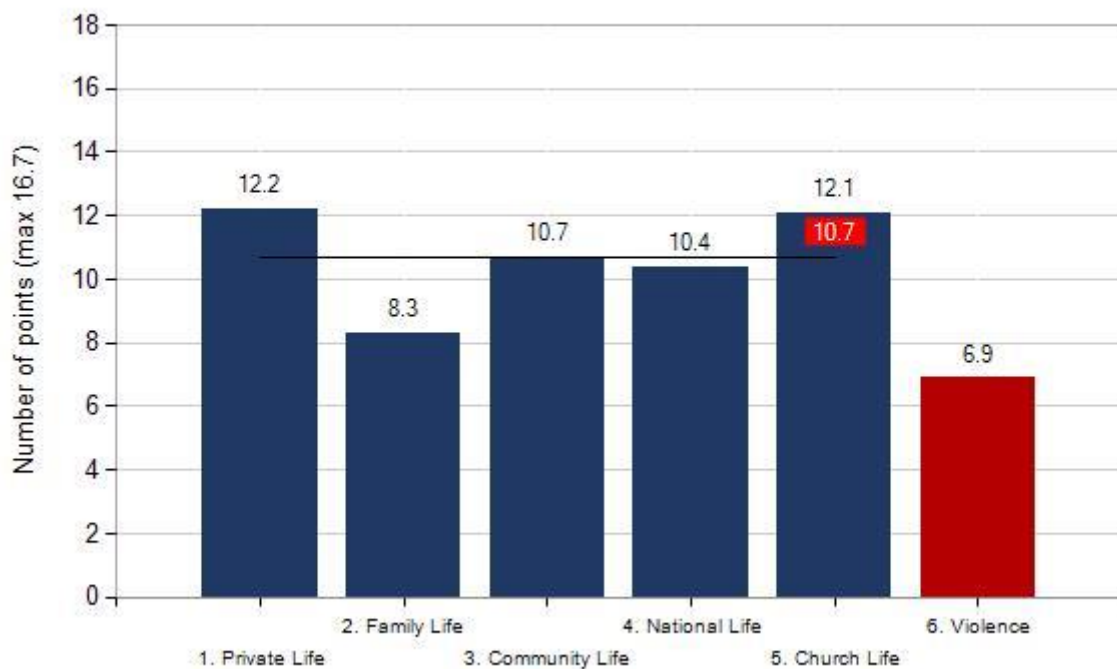
**Historical Christian communities:** After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the state lost its atheistic zeal and stopped persecuting Christians so severely. Religious prisoners were freed, and most churches belonging to Historical Christian communities could function more or less freely. This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

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

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

## The Persecution pattern

WWL 2020 Persecution Pattern for Russian Federation



The WWL 2020 Persecution pattern for the Russian Federation shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a high level (10.7 points), but decreased from 10.8 in WWL 2019. The marginal decrease occurred in all spheres of life (except the *Church sphere of life*); an indication that pressure from *Dictatorial paranoia* in Russia has worsened, while that of *Islamic oppression* seems to have improved slightly.
- The *sphere of life* with the highest level of pressure is the *Private sphere of life*, reflecting the very high pressure on converts exerted by their Muslim environment. It is closely followed by the score in the *Church sphere of life*, which indicates the pressure from the state.
- The score for violence has now reached the category "very high", increasing from 5.7 in WWL 2019 to 6.9 in WWL 2020. Despite the fact that no Christians were killed in the WWL 2020 reporting period, the number of closed churches has increased sharply. Apart from that, more Christians were arrested and sentenced.

## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, details are shown from four of the highest scoring block questions, with those items scoring highest listed first. 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 0 – 4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

### Private sphere:

- ***It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials (Block 1.3 / Score: 3.5 points):*** In the northern Caucasus, and to a lesser extent also in the mid-Volga, converts will avoid letting any Christian materials be discovered by their family or community. The possession of Christian materials is considered to be clear evidence of conversion. The legislation imposes restrictions on religious materials - so Christians can be fined for owning Christian materials that do not meet the state criteria. For certain groups that are forbidden (like the Jehovah Witnesses) owning religious materials is prohibited.
- ***It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of expression (Block 1.4 / Score 3.5 points):*** In the northern Caucasus, and to a lesser extent also in the mid-Volga, converts will avoid revealing their new faith because they fear the consequences. As a result, many live as secret believers. Protestants are wary of publicly expressing their faith in these regions as well. Religious legislation does not allow information to be posted about church and faith issues on social networking sites. Christians from registered churches in Russia openly share their beliefs, although the access to their web-pages would be restricted to a group of friends. However, Christians from non-registered churches tend not to use Facebook, mainly because they fear being accused of illegal missionary activities.

- **Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable (Block 1.1 / Score: 3 points):** Conversion is strongly opposed in the Northern Caucasus and less strongly in the mid-Volga region (Tatarstan and Bashkortostan) by the Muslim environment (family, friends, community, local imams). Officially, there is no hindrance to conversion - the laws are secular. In the European part of the Russian Federation, conversion to Catholic and all other non-Russian Orthodox denominations is opposed by Russian Orthodoxy and (local) government supporting Russian Orthodoxy. In Caucasian, Siberian and Far Eastern areas, conversion to Protestant, Catholic and non-Russian Orthodox denominations is opposed by local religious (Islamic or Buddhist) leaders or Russian Orthodoxy and (local) government supporting local religious tradition. Generally, the division between "Russians are Russian Orthodox" and "locals are Islamic or Buddhists" is upheld by all local secular and religious authorities.
- **It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family members (Block 1.8 / Score 3 points):** In the northern Caucasus, and to a lesser extent also in the mid-Volga, pressure from family, friends and community on converts obliges converts to live as secret believers. The hurdle to reveal one's new faith to guests is even bigger than to do this to family members as this will automatically be linked to shaming the family. Protestants are also careful not to talk about their faith in these areas since this will automatically be regarded as a form of evangelism. Generally, people discussing their faith in Russia will draw unwanted attention. But the state will not prevent this from happening.

#### Family sphere:

- **Christians have been hindered in celebrating a Christian wedding (Block 2.3 / Score: 3 points):** This is a problem for converts in the northern Caucasus, and to a lesser extent also in the mid-Volga. Muslim families will not tolerate any Christian influence in their lives. Local Muslims will also not allow openly Christian celebrations organized by Protestants. Family weddings will mostly be left alone by the state.
- **Christian baptisms have been hindered (Block 2.4 / Score: 2.75 points):** In the northern Caucasus, and to a lesser extent also in the mid-Volga, baptisms are regarded as the final farewell to the faith of the fathers - the final sign of conversion. Family, friends and community will oppose this fiercely. The state does not block baptisms, but if an unregistered group makes a high-profile event out of baptisms, they will face monitoring and possible interference.
- **Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs (Block 2.7 / Score: 2.75 points):** In the northern Caucasus, and to a lesser extent also in the mid-Volga, children of converts are almost always removed from the parents temporarily, if not permanently, by the extended family. Officially, however, Russia is a secular country and does not prevent Christians from raising their children according to their faith.
- **Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith (Block 2.9 / Score: 2.75 points):** In cases where children of converts remain in the northern Caucasus, and to a lesser extent also in the mid-Volga, they are often treated badly by family, friends and neighbors. It is usual for them to be put through a process of "retraining" by the family to make sure they know the right way to be Muslim. Children of Protestants can be bullied or ousted from the community.

### Community sphere:

- ***Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (Block 3.2 / Score: 3.5 points):*** In the northern Caucasus, and to a lesser extent also in the mid-Volga, converts and Protestants are constantly monitored by the Muslim community. According to the Yarovaya Law, it is the responsibility of every Russian citizen to report to police about every religious meeting, or cases of proselytism etc. Telephone and internet providers are obligated to keep records and contents of conversations and messages and provide these if needed by the police. Not executing this legal obligation is a criminal offence.
- ***Christians have been interrogated or compelled to report to the local police for faith-related reasons (Block 3.13 / Score: 3.5 points):*** In the northern Caucasus, and to a lesser extent also in the mid-Volga, converts and Christians active in evangelism are under constant surveillance by the Muslim community. After the implementation of the Yarovaya law hundreds of believers were interrogated, the majority of them Protestant Christians. Church pastors can be interrogated and fined if their church members are accused of illegal missionary activities.
- ***Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (Block 3.1 / Score: 3.25 points):*** In the northern Caucasus, and to a lesser extent also in the mid-Volga, converts are harassed and threatened by Muslim family, friends and community (including local imams). Protestants who are openly practicing their faith (and maybe even active in evangelism) will also be harassed by the Muslim community. Unregistered Protestants are vulnerable to state harassment. There is additional pressure from the Orthodox community who regard all non-Orthodox Russian Christians as traitors of their historical religion and culture.
- ***Christians have been fined for faith-related reasons (Block 3.12 / Score: 3.25 points):*** Fines are usually issued by the state. All over Russia, the local authorities may fine churches that operate without formal registration. After the implementation of the Yarovaya law there were hundreds of court hearings and heavy fines - the majority involving Protestant Christians. They can be fined for illegal missionary activities (e.g. inviting people to the church), possessing Christian literature (without full details of publisher) and for holding illegal religious meetings (e.g. house prayer meetings and Bible studies).

### National sphere:

- ***The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Block 4.1/Score: 3.5 points):*** The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, equal rights irrespective of religious belief, and the rights to worship and profess one's religion. The law states government officials may prohibit the activity of a religious association for violating public order or engaging in "extremist activity."

The law lists Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism as the country's four "traditional" religions and recognizes the special role of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). The law distinguishes between "religious groups," which have the right to conduct worship services but may not engage in certain other activities, and two categories of "religious organizations," which obtain legal status through registration with the government to conduct a full range of religious and civil functions. The implementation of the Yarovaya law completely undermines the principles of religious freedom of the Constitution. Islam has no impact on legislation in Russia. The influence of the Muslim community does not reach to this level.

- **Christians have been hindered in travelling (Block 4.4 / Score: 3.25 points):** Through its visa regulations, the government has increasingly limited the possibilities for non-Russian citizens to engage in religious activity. Religious work is no longer permitted on humanitarian or missionary visas. Those engaging in religious work now require both a contract with a legally registered religious organization and a work visa. (Source: US State Department's IRF 2017 report.) Russian Christians can travel freely inside Russia and abroad. The Muslim population only has a restricting influence in some local situations.
- **Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (Block 4.5 / Score: 3.25 points):** Protestants faced discrimination even before the Yarovaya law came into force; now that this law is in force, discrimination has become much worse. The government favors ROC. Protestants are considered sects and are treated differently.
- **Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public (Block 4.8/Score: 3.25 points):** Since the implementation of the Yarovaya law, it has become inadvisable for Christians to express their views or opinions in public even on social network sites. They can be fined for doing this. Speaking about God without written permission can be punished by fines and worse. In the northern Caucasus, and to a lesser extent also in the mid-Volga, converts and Protestants will experience problems in expressing their views and faith in public. There is no such Muslim influence at the national level, however.

#### Church sphere:

- **Activities of churches have been monitored, hindered, disturbed or obstructed (Block 5.1 / Score 3.5 points):** Since the implementation of the anti-terrorist Yarovaya laws, the level of surveillance of all non-Orthodox Christian churches has increased. Many meetings have been raided, and church leaders and Christian have been fined. In the northern Caucasus, converts will not even attempt to go to church meetings for fear of reprisals from the Muslim community.
- **Churches, Christian organizations, institutions or groups have been prevented from using mass media to present their faith (Block 5.16 / Score 3.5 points):** Access by Protestant and Evangelical churches to local or national radio and TV is hindered. The law explicitly prohibits evangelism via the Internet. Since the implementation of the Yarovaya law, Christians and Christian organizations are not allowed to share their faith openly with non-Christians.

- **Church or Christian organizations have been hindered in printing Christian materials or owning printing presses (Block 5.12 / Score 3.25 points):** Since the implementation of the Yarovaya law, printing Christian materials requires the publishers to include all information about the organization that printed them. If such information is not provided in full detail Christian materials can be confiscated and destroyed and pastors and Christians fined. This restriction even includes those Christian materials that were published and printed before the implementation of the Yarovaya law. Often this is very difficult because such materials were distributed without the information now required. The owners of such materials are thus in danger of being fined, if discovered. In the northern Caucasus, and to a lesser extent also in the mid-Volga, Muslims will not allow the printing of Christian materials.
- **Churches have been hindered in importing Christian materials (Block 5.13 / Score: 3.25 points):** Importing religious literature from abroad implies having contact with (religious) organizations abroad. All organizations that have (non-business) relations with foreign organizations are labeled as foreign agents by the government. In theory, it is not prohibited to import religious literature from abroad, but in practice it is problematic. In the northern Caucasus, and to a lesser extent also in the mid-Volga, the Muslim authorities will oppose any imported Christian materials (especially when it is in their own language) as they regard these as being intended for evangelistic purposes.

## Violence

*The following table is based on reported cases as much as possible. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures. In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10, 100 or 1000) is given. (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 1000 could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain.) In cases where it is clear that (many) more Christians are affected, but a concrete number could be given according to the number of incidents reported, the number given has to be understood as being an absolutely minimum figure.*

Russian Federation	Reporting period	Christians killed	Christians attacked	Christians arrested	Churches attacked	Christian-owned houses and shops attacked
WWL 2020	01 Nov 2018 - 31 Oct 2019	0	5	14	10	0
WWL 2019	01 Nov 2017 - 31 Oct 2018	6	10	4	2	0
WWL 2018	01 Nov 2016 - 31 Oct 2017	0	10	20	1	0

*Christians killed refers to the number of Christians killed for faith-related reasons (including state-sanctioned executions). Christians attacked refers to the number of Christians abducted, raped or otherwise sexually harassed, forced into marriage to non-Christians or otherwise physically or mentally abused (including beatings and death-threats) for faith-related reasons. Christians arrested refers to the number of Christians detained without trial or sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment or similar things for faith-related reasons. Churches attacked refers to the number of churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons. Christian-owned houses and shops attacked refers to the number of houses of Christians or other property (including shops and businesses of Christians) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons.*

For the WWL 2020 period:

- **Christians attacked:** Five missionaries were harassed in Chechnya during the WWL 2020 reporting period and were later deported from Chechnya.
- **Christians arrested:** At least 14 Christians were arrested, including four Christians who worked in a rehabilitation center for drug addicts and were sentenced to 5-8 years imprisonment.
- **Churches attacked:** At least 10 churches were attacked and/or forcibly closed.

## 5 Year trends

The following three charts show the situation for Christians in the Russian Federation over the last five reporting periods.

### Chart 1:

The chart below shows that the average pressure has risen from around the 9.0/9.1 point mark at the start of the five year period to the very high level of 10.7/10.8 points in the latest two WWL reporting periods.

WWL 2016 - WWL 2020 Persecution Pattern history: Russian Federation	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2020	10.7
2019	10.8
2018	9.9
2017	9.0
2016	9.1

### Chart 2:

With the exception of the scores for *Private* and *Family life* in WWL 2016, pressure steadily increased in the first four reporting periods and now appears to have levelled off in all spheres of life.



WWL 2016 - WWL 2020 Persecution Pattern for Russian Federation (Spheres of life)

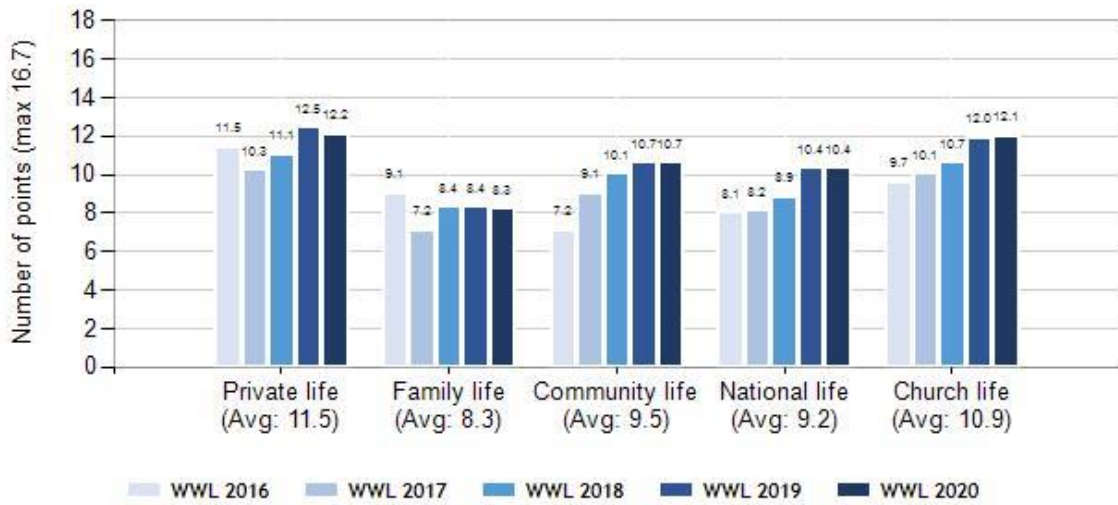
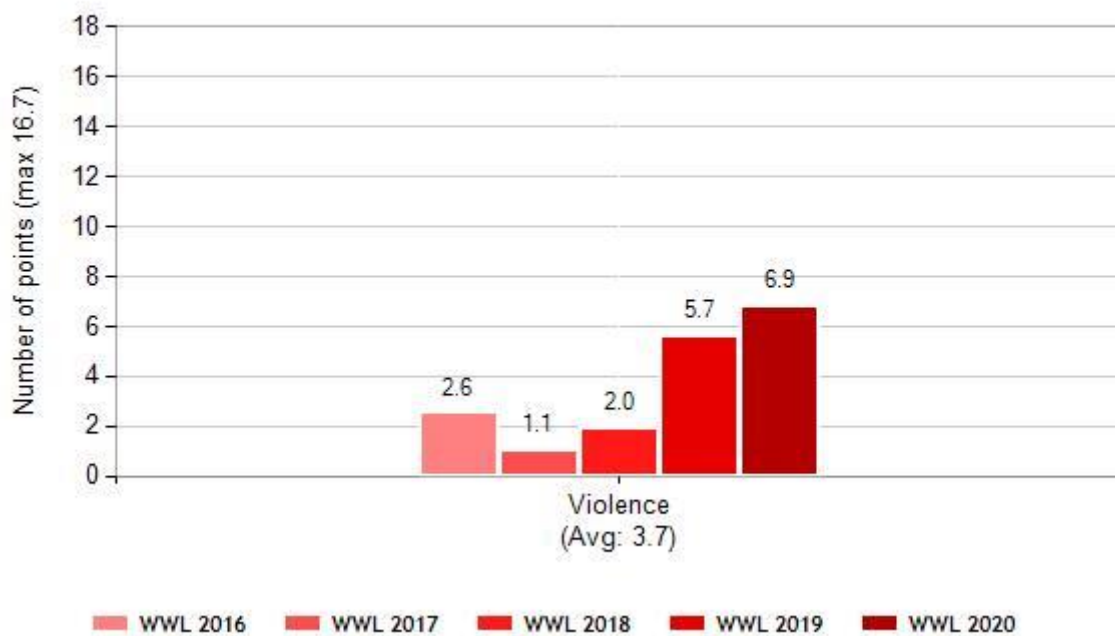


Chart 3:

The chart below shows that the violence score has increased sharply since WWL 2017 and is currently at the highest level of all 5 reporting periods.

WWL 2016 - WWL 2020 Persecution Pattern for Russian Federation (Violence)



## Gender profile of persecution

### Female Pressure Points:

- ***Abduction***
- ***Denied access to social community/networks***
- ***Denied inheritance or possessions***
- ***Economic harassment via work/job/business***
- ***Forced Divorce***
- ***Forced marriage***
- ***Incarceration by family***
- ***Incarceration by government***
- ***Violence – physical***
- ***Violence – psychological***
- ***Violence – sexual***
- ***Violence – verbal***

The most vulnerable Christian women in Russia are converts from a Muslim background. In Russia's Muslim regions, daily life is based on Islamic culture which gives women inferior status. Women are expected to show total submission to their parents and if married, to their husbands. This makes them more vulnerable to persecution, such as verbal and physical abuse, accusations, beatings, home detention, rejection, losing inheritance, threats, and losing employment. Traditional culture based on Islamic teaching puts women lower than men and requires obedience to men in the family. For that reason, a woman cannot freely choose her own religion and will be persecuted if she converts to Christianity. Young women who still need financial support can be stopped by their parents. Physical beatings and rape can also happen, but women will not disclose such information even with closest family as it is considered shameful and they will not find support. A married Christian woman may experience beatings from her husband and he can divorce her because of her faith. The law gives equal rights to men and women in general, although the laws regarding domestic abuse are considered to be highly prejudicial to women.

In the northern Caucasus, and to a lesser extent also in the mid-Volga region, female converts from Islam in conservative regions run the risk of being kidnapped and being married off to a Muslim. Often premarital arrangements were made before the conversion. In these cases, women sometimes find themselves isolated in two ways: 1) From the non-Christian partner not sharing faith-based life, and 2) From the local Russian Orthodox Church community that usually practices excommunication in the case of marriage to non-Christians. This social pressure can traumatize the further life of Christian women.

### Male Pressure Points:

- ***Abduction***
- ***Denied access to religious Christian literature***
- ***Denied communal resources***
- ***Denied inheritance or possessions***
- ***Discrimination/harassment via Education***

- ***Economic harassment via fines***
- ***Economic harassment via work/job/business***
- ***Violence – physical***
- ***Violence – psychological***
- ***Violence – verbal***

The many forms of persecution affecting Christian men in Russia mainly affects Christians from a Muslim background in the predominantly Muslim regions.

Men are considered the heads of their families and are also usually the main bread winners; this means that when a Christian man loses his job due to persecution for his faith – through being fined or imprisoned – his whole family will suffer. Businesses whose owners are Christians may also experience occasional problems. Also, hindrances, like frequent visits from officials making controls are not uncommon (e.g. from fire-brigades, health departments etc.).

Church leaders, who are mostly male in this context, are frequently the target of threats, verbal and physical abuse, rejection and job loss. This persecution facing church leaders often has a negative effect on whole congregations and can result in fear spreading among church members.

Due to the growth of patriotism in Russia (partly based on militarism and the memory of the Great Patriotic War - the Russian name for their involvement in WWII), it has become popular for young men to serve in the armed forces. Christians who choose community service as an alternative to military service risk being discriminated against.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, equal rights irrespective of religious belief, and the rights to worship and profess one's religion. The law states government officials may prohibit the activity of a religious association for violating public order or engaging in "extremist activity". The Supreme Court ruled to criminalize the activity of Jehovah's Witnesses as "extremist", effectively banning their activities and literature, and ordered their headquarters property to be liquidated. The authorities continue to detain and fine members of minority religious groups and minority religious organizations for alleged "extremism".

Examples:

- After more than 15 months in pre-trial detention following his October 2017 arrest by the Russian FSB security service, the Supreme Court in Russian-occupied Crimea has jailed 49-year-old local Muslim Renat Suleimanov for four years. He was punished on "extremism"-related charges for alleged leadership of a group of the Tabligh Jamaat Muslim missionary movement, which Russia has banned. He denied all accusations of "extremism". (Source: [Forum 18](#), 24 January 2019)

- Danish citizen Dennis Ole Christensen has become the first Jehovah's Witness in post-Soviet Russia to be sentenced to imprisonment for exercising his right to freedom of religion and belief. On 6 February 2019, after a trial lasting nearly twelve months, Judge Aleksei Rudnev of Railway District Court in the town of Oryol (south of Moscow) found Christensen guilty of "organising the activities of a banned extremist organisation" (Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1). The judge handed him a term of six years in a general-regime correctional colony. (Source: [Forum 18](#), 6 February 2019)
- In May 2019, officials sent bulldozers to demolish a mosque built on private farmland near the town of Chernyakhovsk in Russia's Kaliningrad exclave. Officials claimed the mosque and three other buildings on the site violated planning regulations. (Source: [Forum 18](#), 17 September 2019)

## Future outlook for the church

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

- **Islamic oppression:** There is a risk of militant Islamic activities continuing in the northern Caucasus republics of Chechnya and Dagestan.
- **Dictatorial paranoia:** As there will not be a change of government, what has happened in the past five years can be regarded as a guideline to what may be expected in the future, namely more legal restrictions (particularly on non-ROC churches) and an increasing nationalism.
- **Christian denominational protectionism:** The ROC already has a favored position under current legislation. Recent clashes between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Patriarch of Constantinople over the authority of the Orthodox community in Ukraine seem to be driving the ROC closer to the government of President Putin. The aversion against all non-Orthodox religious activities in Russia is likely to grow.

## External Links - WWL 2020: Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution of other religious minorities: Forum 18 - [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2444](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2444)
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Forum 18 - [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2450](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2450)
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Forum 18 - [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2508](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2508)

## Additional reports and articles

### WWR in-depth reports

A selection of in-depth reports is available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/> (password: freedom).

At the time of publication there were no items specifically for Russia.

### World Watch Monitor news articles

Articles are available at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/russian-federation>

### Recent country developments

Up-to-date articles are available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Russia> (password: freedom).