



TAJIKISTAN: Country Dossier

December 2018



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research Unit

December 2018

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World Watch List 2019

WWL 2019		1. Private life	2. Family life	3. Community life	4. National life	5. Church life	6. Violence score	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2019	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2018	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2017	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2016	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2015	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2014	
Rank	Country	(Max. score per block is 16.7)												
1	North Korea	16,7	16,7	16,7	16,7	16,7	10,9	94	94	92	92	92	90	
2	Afghanistan	16,7	16,7	16,7	16,7	16,7	10,6	94	93	89	88	81	78	
3	Somalia	16,3	16,7	16,6	16,5	16,4	8,9	91	91	91	87	90	80	
4	Libya	15,3	15,0	15,1	16,0	16,3	9,6	87	86	78	79	76	71	
5	Pakistan	14,3	14,1	13,9	15,0	13,2	16,7	87	86	88	87	79	77	
6	Sudan	14,7	15,0	14,6	15,6	16,1	10,6	87	87	87	84	80	73	
7	Eritrea	14,7	14,9	15,8	16,0	15,2	9,4	86	86	82	89	79	72	
8	Yemen	16,6	16,3	16,4	16,7	16,7	3,1	86	85	85	78	73	74	
9	Iran	14,0	14,3	14,3	15,8	16,5	10,4	85	85	85	83	80	77	
10	India	12,9	13,0	13,5	14,8	13,2	15,2	83	81	73	68	62	55	
11	Syria	13,6	14,0	13,1	13,8	14,2	13,0	82	76	86	87	83	79	
12	Nigeria	12,3	11,8	13,4	12,9	12,9	16,7	80	77	78	78	78	70	
13	Iraq	13,9	14,4	14,1	14,6	13,6	8,1	79	86	86	90	86	78	
14	Maldives	15,2	15,5	13,5	15,9	16,7	1,1	78	78	76	76	78	77	
15	Saudi Arabia	15,1	13,6	14,0	15,3	16,5	2,4	77	79	76	76	77	78	
16	Egypt	11,7	13,2	10,7	13,2	11,0	15,9	76	70	65	64	61	61	
17	Uzbekistan	15,4	12,9	13,9	12,3	15,9	3,1	74	73	71	70	69	68	
18	Myanmar	11,4	11,8	13,3	12,1	11,8	11,1	71	65	62	62	60	59	
19	Laos	13,0	9,1	14,2	14,7	14,9	4,6	71	67	64	58	58	62	
20	Vietnam	12,7	8,2	12,7	13,5	14,2	9,1	70	69	71	66	68	65	
21	Central Africa Republic	10,2	9,7	11,9	10,6	11,1	16,1	70	61	58	59	67	67	
22	Algeria	13,1	14,2	10,1	11,8	12,7	7,6	70	58	58	56	55	54	
23	Turkmenistan	14,6	10,8	13,8	13,3	15,1	1,3	69	68	67	66	63	62	
24	Mali	11,4	10,1	11,5	9,2	9,9	15,4	68	59	59	55	52	54	
25	Mauritania	13,9	14,0	12,2	13,0	13,3	0,6	67	57	55	(not in Top 50)	50	51	
26	Turkey	12,4	11,1	10,7	13,2	10,9	7,2	66	62	57	55	52	(not in Top 50)	
27	China	10,4	8,0	10,3	11,8	14,5	10,0	65	57	57	57	57	51	
28	Ethiopia	10,0	10,0	10,3	10,8	10,4	13,5	65	62	64	67	61	65	
29	Tajikistan	13,8	11,9	11,6	12,1	12,9	2,4	65	65	58	58	50	47	
30	Indonesia	10,6	11,1	11,3	10,2	9,3	12,0	65	59	55	55	50	46	
31	Jordan	13,0	13,1	11,8	11,5	12,2	3,0	65	66	63	59	56	56	
32	Nepal	12,4	11,4	10,6	10,9	11,9	7,0	64	64	(not in Top 50)				
33	Bhutan	12,9	11,1	12,3	12,4	14,0	0,9	64	62	61	56	56	54	
34	Kazakhstan	13,2	10,8	10,3	12,2	13,5	3,1	63	63	56	55	51	49	
35	Morocco	12,2	13,3	9,6	12,0	14,4	1,5	63	(not in Top 50)	47				
36	Brunei	13,4	14,3	10,5	10,3	13,4	0,7	63	64	64	61	58	57	
37	Tunisia	12,1	13,2	10,7	11,2	12,0	3,3	63	62	61	58	55	55	
38	Qatar	13,0	12,6	10,3	11,0	14,1	1,1	62	63	66	65	64	63	
39	Mexico	8,3	7,5	12,2	10,2	9,7	13,5	61	59	57	56	55	(not in Top 50)	
40	Kenya	11,7	10,6	10,1	8,3	11,5	8,3	61	62	68	68	63	48	
41	Russian Federation	12,5	8,4	10,7	10,4	12,0	5,7	60	(not in Top 50)					
42	Malaysia	11,8	14,2	12,1	11,7	8,6	1,5	60	65	60	58	55	49	
43	Kuwait	13,2	12,2	10,1	10,5	12,2	1,5	60	61	57	56	49	50	
44	Oman	12,9	12,5	9,8	9,6	12,8	1,7	59	57	53	53	55	56	
45	United Arab Emirates	12,8	12,0	9,1	10,5	12,2	1,9	58	58	55	55	49	51	
46	Sri Lanka	11,0	8,3	10,5	11,5	10,0	7,0	58	57	55	(not in Top 50)	51	55	
47	Colombia	7,9	7,6	11,8	9,4	8,5	12,6	58	56	53	55	55	56	
48	Bangladesh	11,0	9,1	11,6	10,5	7,8	7,8	58	58	63	57	51	46	
49	Palestinian Territories	11,4	12,3	9,0	10,6	11,8	2,4	57	60	64	62	58	53	
50	Azerbaijan	13,2	9,9	9,3	11,1	12,4	1,5	57	57	(not in Top 50)	57	50	(not in Top 50)	

World Watch List 2019: Persecution watch countries (PWC) - Countries scoring 41 points or more, but not reaching the Top 50

WWL 2019		1. Private life	2. Family life	3. Community life	4. National life	5. Church life	6. Violence score	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2019	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2018
Rank	Country	(Max. score per block is 16.7)							
51	Comoros	11,7	11,5	9,1	9,9	13,9	0,4	56	56
52	Kyrgyzstan	12,7	9,9	10,9	9,2	11,9	1,9	56	54
53	Djibouti	12,3	12,3	10,3	10,0	11,2	0,0	56	56
54	Congo DR (DRC)	5,6	6,7	9,3	7,4	10,3	16,1	55	(Below 41 points)
55	Bahrain	11,9	12,2	8,6	10,2	10,2	1,5	55	57
56	Cameroon	9,9	7,3	10,0	7,8	7,5	11,3	54	(Below 41 points)
57	Tanzania	9,3	10,8	10,3	8,6	8,8	4,8	52	53
58	Niger	11,5	9,7	8,1	8,1	10,0	4,8	52	45
59	Cuba	8,8	4,4	9,1	10,5	11,8	3,9	49	49
60	Chad	11,5	8,2	9,0	8,0	8,7	3,0	48	(Below 41 points)
61	Burkina Faso	9,0	8,0	8,8	6,6	7,9	7,2	48	(Below 41 points)
62	Uganda	11,4	8,0	7,7	6,9	9,6	3,7	47	46
63	Guinea	10,3	7,5	8,3	7,0	8,1	5,0	46	(Below 41 points)
64	South Sudan	5,7	1,5	7,5	5,8	8,0	15,0	44	(Below 41 points)
65	Mozambique	6,7	4,3	6,0	6,9	6,0	13,3	43	(Below 41 points)
66	Gambia	7,7	8,2	8,2	8,3	8,8	1,9	43	(Below 41 points)
67	Ivory Coast	9,8	8,7	8,2	5,5	6,4	4,3	43	(Below 41 points)
68	Burundi	5,1	5,8	9,7	9,2	9,6	3,3	43	(Below 41 points)
69	Angola	6,4	3,6	7,1	8,7	10,4	6,1	42	(Below 41 points)
70	Togo	8,8	6,7	8,5	7,1	8,4	2,0	42	(Below 41 points)
71	Venezuela	3,3	3,8	10,5	9,0	8,8	5,9	41	(Below 41 points)
72	Nicaragua	2,4	3,6	6,4	8,9	7,9	11,9	41	(Below 41 points)
73	Rwanda	5,3	4,4	6,7	7,8	10,1	6,7	41	(Below 41 points)

TAJKISTAN – Country Dossier (December 2018)

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Introduction

This country report is a collation of documents based around [Open Doors World Watch List \(WWL\)](#)¹ including statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations, and people

¹ See: <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/countries/>

groups prepared by the World Christian Database ([WCD](#))². Further news and analysis is supplied by [World Watch Monitor](#)³ and WWR staff.

World Watch List Tajikistan	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2019	65	29
WWL 2018	65	22
WWL 2017	58	35
WWL 2016	58	31
WWL 2015	50	45

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country was among the fifty highest scoring countries (Top 50) in the WWL 2015-2019 reporting periods.

Please note: 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”.

² WCD website: <http://www.brill.com/publications/online-resources/world-christian-database>

³ See: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/>

WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Tajikistan

Link for general background information

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16201032>

Recent country history

Tajikistan gained its independence during the break-up of the Soviet Union on 9 September 1991 and promptly fell into civil war from 1992–1997 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 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 troops in to assist. The government is currently worried by the possible return of hundreds of Tajiks who went abroad to fight for the Islamic State group and other militant groups.

The religious landscape

Tajikistan is the Central Asian country with the highest percentage of Muslims: According to the World Christian Database (WCD 2018) 97.6% of the population is Muslim – predominantly Sunni. 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 72%) 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.

One of the major problems for Christians in Tajikistan (and the other countries in Central Asia) is the fact that there is little cooperation and much division between the various denominations. Unfortunately there are but few exceptions to this and it plays into the hands of the government.

The political 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 of Tajikistan 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 new religion law was implemented in August 2011 prohibiting all religious youth work to citizens under 18 years of age. This had a huge impact on the Church since it is believed that youth form about 50% of all Christians. 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 stress on secularism was aimed against the IRPT and against Islamic militants fighting both in the Middle East and also in Central Asia. In January 2016 the country's constitution was amended to enable President Rahmon to establish a presidential dynasty. (Source: [Radio Free Europe](#))

The socio-economic landscape

Tajikistan is the poorest of all former Soviet Union States since it lacks natural resources like ore, gold, oil and gas. 35.6% of the Tajik population is living below the poverty line. Officially, only 2.5% of the Tajik population has no job, but the actual unemployment figure is much higher. Since the economy is underdeveloped, many Tajiks are forced to work abroad. According to a World Bank study, Tajikistan is the country depending most on remittances by migrant workers in the whole world. The money these migrants are making ensures that about 60% of the population can afford their basic daily needs. Without this money, the country's economy would break down. There are positive effects: While working abroad Tajiks are much more open to outreach by Christians.

Tajikistan is a country that received a high warning ranking in the [2017 Fund for Peace Fragile State Index](#). This is mainly due to a lack of economic reforms, widespread corruption, economic mismanagement, seasonal power shortages and a huge external debt burden. (Source: [CIA World Factbook](#))

Drug trafficking is a major illegal source of 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 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 that of parts of Iran and Afghanistan too. 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. Due to the old Soviet educational system, practically all Tajik citizens are literate. This offers great opportunities for Christian literature to be read. A Tajik Bible translation has been available since the 1990s.

Concluding remarks

Tajikistan continues to depend on Russia, both economically and militarily. Without Russian assistance, Tajikistan is vulnerable to invasion from Afghanistan. Without the option to move to Russia as migrant workers, many Tajik families would have very little money to live on.

As in other countries in Central Asia, Tajikistan's government is increasingly taking on a dictatorial character. All real political opposition has been banned and the president has more or less succeeded in establishing a dynasty.

External Links - WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Tajikistan

- The political landscape: Radio Free Europe
<http://www.rferl.org/content/tajikistan-presidential-dynasty-constitutional-amendments/27503530.html>
- The socio-economic landscape: 2017 Fund for Peace Fragile State Index
<http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/2017/05/14/fragile-states-index-2017-annual-report/>
- The socio-economic landscape: CIA World Factbook
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ti.html>

WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

How many Christians?

Pop 2018	Christians	Chr%
9,107,000	61,700	0.7

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

How did Christians get there?

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.

What church networks exist today?

Church networks: Tajikistan	Christians	%
Orthodox	44,500	72.1
Catholic	270	0.4
Protestant	10,000	16.2
Independent	6,300	10.2
Unaffiliated	710	1.2
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
Total	61,780	100.1
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	2,200	3.6
Renewalist movement	6,200	10.0

Please note: 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.

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

The communities of expatriate Christians are not involuntarily isolated groups and so have not been counted as a separate category in WWL analysis.

The historical Christian communities are by far the largest group of Christians - more than 92% of all Christians – in Tajikistan. The biggest denomination in this group is the Russian Orthodox Church. Other denominations are the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran church (mostly German).

The numbers of converts to Christianity are very small. Christians from a Muslim background experience a great deal of pressure from family, friends and community. Open Doors does not have statistics available concerning the number of converts. However, according to Operation World 2010 there are about 1,000 Tajik believers, while the US State Department noted in its 2006 report that there are about 3,000. Most of them now attend non-traditional Protestant churches, many of them being home fellowships.

The non-traditional Christian communities are also small, but they are the most active in outreach. Their numbers have increased over the past 25 years through ministry both among existing Christians (the majority) and the Muslim population. In all, Christians in this category number a few thousand.

Religious context

Religious Context: Tajikistan	Numbers	%
Christians	61,700	0.7
Muslim	8,892,000	97.6
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	5,200	0.1
Ethnoreligionist	7,700	0.1
Jewish	1,100	0.0
Bahai	3,600	0.0
Atheist	22,400	0.2
Agnostic	111,000	1.2
Other	2,700	0.0

Please note: OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

According to the [2010 census](#) Tajiks form 84.3% of Tajikistan’s population, Uzbeks 13.8%, Kyrgyz 0.8%, Russians 0.5%, and 0.7% others.

According to World Christian Database, 97.6% of the population is Muslim. Tajik culture has been dominated by Islam (approximately 90% of the population are 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.

Most Christians belong to ethnic minorities - mainly Russian. The number of Christians decreased sharply in the 1990's due to the wave of emigration from Tajikistan in the early independence period.

Notes on the current situation

- Starting in 2011, Tajikistan began introducing far-reaching restrictions on the freedom of religion. In August 2011 a new law was implemented that prohibits persons under the age of 18 from participating in public religious activities. This is a big problem for the churches since more than 50% of all Christians are in this category. Another law, dating from July 2012, prohibits Tajik citizens from going abroad to receive religious education, preach, teach or to establish ties with foreign religious organizations.
- In January 2016 the country's constitution was amended so that President Emomali Rahmon could establish a presidential dynasty. Thus, Rahmon, a 64-year-old former collective-farm head who has ruled Tajikistan since 1992, would be able to run for re-election an indefinite number of times. (Source: [Radio Free Europe](#))
- During 2015, police in Tajikistan shaved the beards of almost 13,000 men, closed more than 160 shops selling traditional Muslim ware and convinced over 1,700 women to stop wearing head-scarves in a bid to fight against "foreign influences" (Source: [Christian Today](#)).

External Links - WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

- Religious context: 2010 census
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Tajikistan
- Notes on the current situation: Radio Free Europe
<http://www.rferl.org/content/tajikistan-presidential-dynasty-constitutional-amendments/27503530.html>
- Notes on the current situation: Christian Today
<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/tajikistan.shaves.13000.mens.beards.in.fight.against.radicalism/77321.htm>

WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

With a score of 65 points Tajikistan ranks 29th in the WWL 2019.

What type of persecution dominates?

- **Dictatorial paranoia:** No religious activities beyond state-run and state-controlled institutions are allowed and there have been raids on meetings and interrogations. It is very common that members of any Protestant church are regarded as followers of an alien sect intending to undermine the current political system.
- **Islamic oppression:** If indigenous Muslims 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.

Who is driving persecution?

Most of the persecution of Christians in Tajikistan comes from government officials ranging from the country's central government (that imposes restrictive legislation) to local authorities and police who raid church meetings, detain Christians and confiscate religious materials. A further driver of persecution is the Muslim environment (family, friends, community and local imams) that object to Christians evangelizing among Muslims.

What it results in

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 persecution 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 affected religious minorities) in legal limbo as it is not clear what is still allowed.

Violence

The following table is based on reported cases. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures.

World Watch List Tajikistan	Reporting period	Christians killed	Christians attacked	Christians arrested	Churches attacked	Christian-owned houses and shops attacked
WWL 2019	01 Nov 2017 - 31 Oct 2018	0	17	11	1	0

WWL 2018	01 Nov 2016 - 31 Oct 2017	0	20	5	5	0
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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.

Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period

- In June 2018, a young convert explained about the Christian faith to his mother and his Muslim relatives heard about it. The convert's elder brother beat him severely demanding that he return to their native religion and used a hot iron to burn his hands. The convert fled and is no longer safe at his family home. (Source: OD Research)
- In August 2018, a group of 9 Christians in the south of Tajikistan were arrested. Police took away documents and cell-phones and questioned them harshly. (Source: OD Research)

WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 65 points Tajikistan ranks 29th in the WWL 2019. After the country saw a marked deterioration in the situation for Christians in WWL 2018, there have been no major changes and thus the overall score remains the same.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines: Tajikistan	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	EA	Not at all
Denominational protectionism	DPR	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

Please note: 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 (long version).

Dictatorial paranoia (Very strong):

No religious activities beyond state-run and state-controlled institutions are allowed. Pressure from the authorities has been stepped up since 2015; there have been more raids on meetings, and believers have been interrogated. It is very common that members of any Protestant church are regarded as followers of an alien sect with only one goal, namely to spy on and destroy the current political system. From this perspective they need to be not only controlled, but if necessary, even eradicated. Another area of crackdown involves religious education, no matter what religion is concerned.

Islamic 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 mullahs 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

Drivers of Persecution: Tajikistan	IO	RN	EA	DPR	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG	-	-	-	-	-	VERY STRONG	-
Government officials	Medium	-	-	-	-	-	Very strong	-
Ethnic group leaders	Strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	Very weak	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong	-	-	-	-	-	Medium	-
One's own (extended) family	Very 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 (long version).

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia:

- *Police, government officials:* Police raid homes and churches and confiscate Christian books, DVDs, 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.
- *Normal citizens* are members of the Muslim majority; they also report Christian activities to the authorities.
- *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.

Drivers of Islamic oppression:

- At the local level *government officials* have connections to the Muslim community. This produces problems for converts and Protestants.
- *Tajik ethnic leaders* see conversion as an assault against the Tajik identity.

- *Muslim clerics* may resort to physical violence to make the convert recant his/her new faith.
- *Normal citizens* at the community level will exert additional pressure on converts to return to Islam. In the case of conversion, converts are persecuted severely by the local community and religious leaders.
- *Muslim family members*, especially in the countryside, will exert high pressure on converts to Christianity, often involving threats, beatings, house arrest and ostracism.

Context

Tajikistan is the only Central Asian country with a Persian national language; culturally Tajikistan has more affinity with Iran and Afghanistan than the other countries in Central Asia. Tajikistan is one of the poorest countries in the region and relies heavily on remittances – an estimated 20% of the whole population work in Russia and Kazakhstan. On the positive side, these remittances ensure that about 60% of the population can cover their daily needs; on the negative side, there is a high social cost as families are torn apart and children are growing up with few male relatives.

Tajikistan shares a 1,200-kilometer (750-mile) frontier with Afghanistan. This has several repercussions: a) there is a huge flow of drugs from Afghanistan via Tajikistan to the West; b) Tajiks (also living in Afghanistan) are involved in Islamic fighting; c) What happens across the border has great impact on Tajikistan. Now that most Western troops have withdrawn from Afghanistan, Tajikistan has sought help from Russia. They have offered the use of military bases in exchange for border control by Russian soldiers.

On 1 March 2015 parliamentary elections were held in Tajikistan. Until then Tajikistan was the only country in the region that had a recognized political opposition party – a religiously based one: the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT). Soon after the elections, which were as expected won by the supporters of President Emomali Rahmon, a distinct shift occurred in the country. Within a few months the IRPT was banned. More and more restrictive legislation was imposed - including on matters of religion. Tajikistan can now be considered to be much more in line with the other dictatorial regimes in Central Asia.

Christian communities and how they are affected

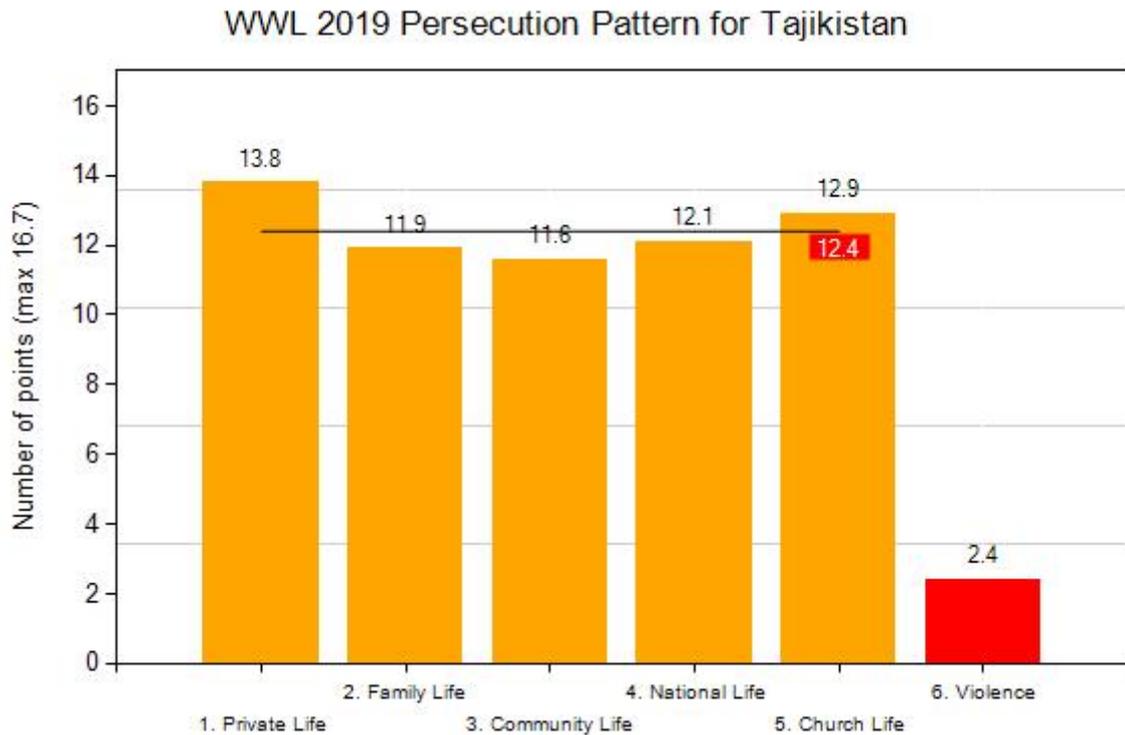
Communities of expatriate Christians: These are not involuntarily isolated groups and so have not been counted as a separate category in WWL analysis.

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. And 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.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence



The WWL 2019 Persecution pattern for Tajikistan shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (12.4), rising from 12.2 in WWL 2018. Pressure increased in the *Private*, *Family* and *National spheres of life*, while it decreased slightly in the *Community sphere of life*. Pressure in the *Church sphere* of life remained the same. In all, the picture shows stability regarding pressure.
- Four *spheres of life* show very high levels of pressure, but pressure is extreme in the *Private sphere*. This reflects how the Muslim environment is imposing many restrictions on (convert) Christians.
- The score for violence went down from 4.3 in WWL 2018 to 2.4 in WWL 2019.

Private sphere:

There is no legal obstacle to conversion, but punishment for conversion is unavoidable, especially from family members. Conducting acts of Christian worship privately is very risky for converts from Islam and converts are known to have suffered beatings and forced renunciations of faith. Converts usually hide Christian literature and symbols because of possible reprisals within the family, but other Christians must also be careful as owning such literature and displaying Christian symbols can be regarded as a form of evangelism. Converts have to be very

careful when accessing Christian radio, television or websites that they are not discovered by their family, friends and community. It is also very risky for converts to talk about their new faith with members of the family and others because the family will do its utmost (sometimes in the form of house arrest) to have converts return to their former faith.

Family sphere:

A person's religious affiliation is not registered in official documents, but occasionally local authorities (run by Muslims from the local community) may obstruct the registration of births, weddings or deaths of converts. Celebrations of a convert's wedding or baptism will also be opposed by family and local community. Since August 2011 any religious activity for persons under the age of 18 has become strictly forbidden. All Christian youth work must now be done in secret and there have been raids on summer camps for children. Children and teens are not allowed to visit Sunday school or receive religious training. Islamic topics are part of the school curriculum and all children are required to attend them. Children of Christians are often humiliated at schools in front of all the other children. Some wives or husbands of converts have been forced to separate because of threats. Christians with a Muslim background may also lose inheritance rights.

Community sphere:

At the community level, converts and Protestants are monitored constantly: Converts experience high levels of pressure (in the form of threats and harassment) to give up their new faith. Protestants need to be very careful in evangelism or they may face violence. Marriages are usually arranged by the parents and female converts run the risk of being kidnapped and married off to a Muslim. For all converts there is pressure to take part in Islamic ceremonies and feasts. At the community level children of converts face problems in education. They are often ridiculed by their teachers and fellow pupils. Known Christians will have far fewer career opportunities, and employment at offices of the local authorities is impossible. Local communities and authorities will also hinder known Christians (and most certainly a convert) from running their own businesses. Paying bribes or protection money is quite common in Tajikistan, but this is not specifically aimed at Christians. Local police regularly interrogate Christians.

National sphere:

The state declares itself to be secular. The Constitution protects religious freedom, but in practice the government enforces policies which restrict religious freedom. Some local and regional leaders create administrative barriers for Christians which can affect the registration of churches. There is no alternative for military service and those refusing end up in prison. A law introduced in July 2012 prohibits Tajik citizens from going abroad in order to receive religious education, to teach or to establish ties with foreign religious organizations. Protestants are barred from working for the government as they are seen as an untrustworthy foreign influence that threatens the Tajik community. Since March 2015 there has been a crackdown on all non-government organizations. Activities related to church ministry, including youth work and the publication of religious materials, have been curtailed and censored by the government. State

agents and community members can harass, detain and interrogate Christians with impunity. Christians suffer from biased treatment against them in court cases.

Church sphere:

All Christian activity is monitored. Only registered groups are legally entitled to exist, own a building, hold meetings or own religious materials. Getting registration is extremely difficult and without it a group is illegal and will be raided by police. The August 2011 laws prohibit any youth work. Since youth form about 50% of all Christians, this has major consequences. The Council for Religious Affairs must approve sermons as well as religious materials. The religious training of leaders can only be done by registered groups (and these are few). Sometimes, unregistered groups do this under the umbrella of the registered ones. All media are state-controlled and thus inaccessible for Christian input. Internet access is only possible via state providers. The government does not allow Christians to establish their own schools, organizations or institutions, nor do they allow Christian charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural associations. All foreign contacts with domestic religious groups are prohibited as part of the government's crackdown on radical religious activity.

Violence:

At least 1 house-church was raided by the authorities in the WWL 2019 reporting period. There were doubtless more such incidents - underreporting remains a problem. At least 10 Christians were briefly detained by the police for distributing literature. An estimated 17 Christians were attacked and beaten. 15 Christian converts went into hiding from their Muslim husbands and relatives or from the police, but no Christians were forced to leave Tajikistan.

For a summary of the statistics on violence and examples, please see the Short and Simple Persecution Profile section above.

5 Year trends

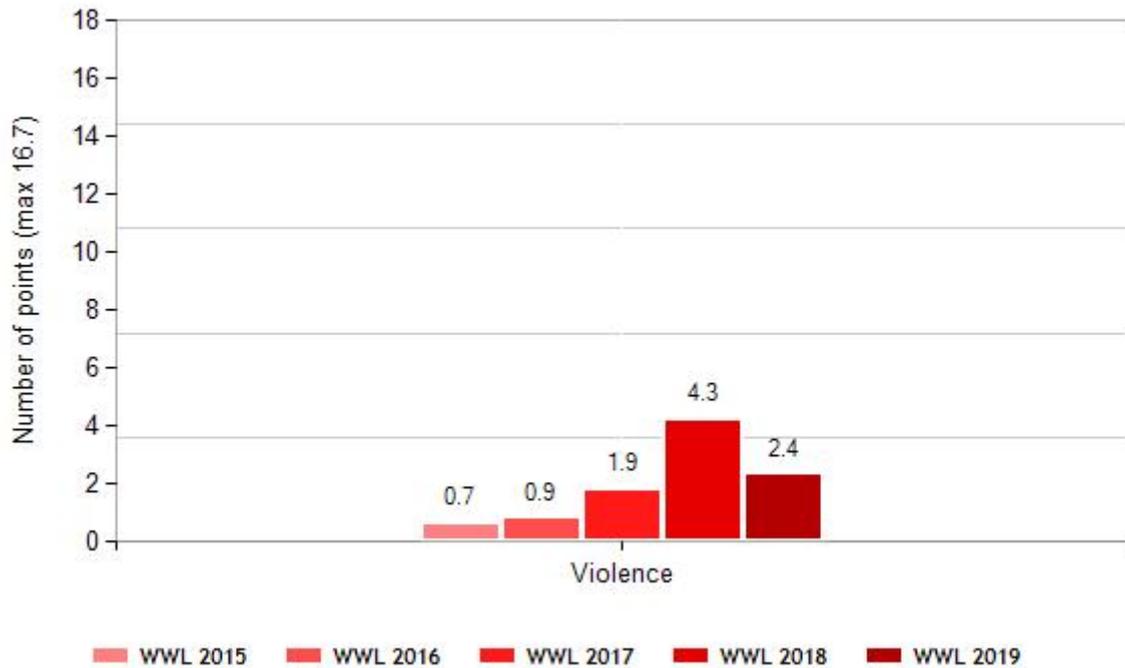
The three graphics below illustrate how the situation for Christians in Tajikistan has deteriorated over the last five reporting periods. The levels of pressure in all *spheres of life* have gone up over the years (first chart), most markedly in the *Family sphere of life*. The highest scores for pressure have nearly always been in *Private life*, followed by *Church life*. The scores for *Church life* appear to be levelling off at a very high level (12.9). Overall, since WWL 2015 the average pressure (second chart) has been rising, with a relatively large jump from WWL 2017 to WWL 2018. The scores for violence (third chart) show that the number of violent incidents is usually low, with the exception of the WWL 2018 reporting period.

WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Profile for Tajikistan (Spheres of life)



WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Pattern history: Tajikistan	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2019	12.4
2018	12.2
2017	11.1
2016	11.3
2015	9.8

WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Profile for Tajikistan (Violence)



Gender specific persecution

Female:

In Tajikistan the daily life of indigenous people is based on Islamic culture which puts women in an inferior position compared to men. Total submission is expected from women to their parents and - if married - to their husbands. This makes them more vulnerable to persecution, both as Christians and as women who challenge the existing order. The state authorities in Tajikistan prohibit the use of religious clothes or symbols, also of those worn by female Christians. In the case of Islamic women, the hijab is also prohibited. 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 potentially, it could also become a case for arrest. No cases have yet been reported, however.

Male:

Church leaders are normally men, and men are also normally the head of their family and the main bread winner. When a Christian man becomes a target of persecution (e.g. fined or imprisoned), his whole family will suffer. Losing jobs and income will affect the whole family. If a man is a church leader his persecution will affect his church and cause levels of fear to rise. Persecution from the state includes raids, searches, detention, interrogation, confiscation, fines and imprisonment. When detained by the police, Christian men suffer verbal and physical abuse, threats, beatings, and also pressure to become an informer. 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. At the hands

of his own Muslim family, a Christian convert may face beatings, threats, home detention, verbal and physical abuse, humiliation and divorce.

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. Among violations documented by Forum 18 News Service are: A ban on all exercise of freedom of religion or belief without state permission; severe limitations on the numbers of mosques permitted and activities allowed inside those mosques; arbitrary official actions, including the arrests of Jehovah's Witnesses and bans on the Jehovah's Witnesses and some Islamic and Protestant movements; the banning of Central Asia's only legal religious-based political party, the Islamic Renaissance Party, and the arrest as prisoners of conscience of its senior party figures; forcing imams in state-controlled mosques (the only sort permitted) to preach state-dictated sermons; forcible closure of all madrassas (Islamic religious schools); a ban on all public exercise of freedom of religion or belief, apart from funerals, by people under the age of 18; and state censorship of and bans on some religious literature and websites. (Source: [Forum 18, Religious Freedom Survey, January 2016](#)). 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.

Examples:

- In January 2018, local authorities closed almost 100 mosques in the northern part of Tajikistan. (Source: [Jamestown Foundation](#)).
- In February 2018 Jehovah's Witness prisoner of conscience, Daniil Islamov, was preparing to appeal for the last time to Tajikistan's Supreme Court against a six-month jail term imposed in October 2017 for refusing compulsory military service. (Source: [Forum 18](#))

Future outlook

The political outlook: Since 2015 the regime of Tajik President Rahmon has been quite successful in 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 outlook for Christians - 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 persecutors of Christians in Tajikistan. They have imposed all kinds of legal restrictions, monitor all religious activities, raid meetings and block religious materials. This is likely to continue.
- **Islamic oppression:** Islam is not the state religion. It 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 will change soon are as good as non-existent.

Conclusion: Due to the very high level of stability of the two most important Persecution engines in Tajikistan, the Church in this country will have to brace itself for living under a continued and considerable level of surveillance and pressure.

External Links - WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution of other religious minorities: Forum 18, Religious Freedom Survey, January 2016
http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2138
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Jamestown Foundation
<https://jamestown.org/program/tajikistan-muslim-country-central-asia-struggles-rein-islam/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Forum 18
http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2357

Additional Reports and Articles

WWR in-depth reports

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

Open Doors article(s) from the region

A selection of articles is available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/articles/> (password freedom).

World Watch Monitor news articles

Use the country search function at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/>

Recent country developments

Use the country search function at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/> (password: freedom).