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## Uzbekistan: Country Dossier

December 2020



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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# Introduction

## World Watch List 2021

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	11.1	94	94	94	94	92
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.2	94	93	94	93	89
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.3	9.8	92	92	91	91	91
4	Libya	15.6	15.4	15.9	16.3	16.3	12.4	92	90	87	86	78
5	Pakistan	13.9	14.2	15.1	14.9	13.5	16.7	88	88	87	86	88
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.9	15.9	15.4	11.1	88	87	86	86	82
7	Yemen	16.6	16.6	16.5	16.7	16.7	3.9	87	85	86	85	85
8	Iran	14.5	14.5	13.9	15.7	16.5	10.6	86	85	85	85	85
9	Nigeria	13.3	13.2	13.9	14.1	14.1	16.7	85	80	80	77	78
10	India	13.0	12.9	13.5	14.9	13.7	15.4	83	83	83	81	73
11	Iraq	13.6	14.6	14.2	14.8	13.8	11.5	82	76	79	86	86
12	Syria	13.3	13.9	13.5	14.5	14.0	12.0	81	82	82	76	86
13	Sudan	13.4	13.4	13.7	13.6	15.7	9.1	79	85	87	87	87
14	Saudi Arabia	15.1	13.9	14.4	15.8	16.6	2.2	78	79	77	79	76
15	Maldives	15.4	15.5	13.9	15.8	16.6	0.4	77	78	78	78	76
16	Egypt	12.5	13.2	11.5	12.7	11.0	14.1	75	76	76	70	65
17	China	12.6	9.7	12.0	13.2	15.4	11.1	74	70	65	57	57
18	Myanmar	11.9	12.0	13.1	12.9	12.3	11.9	74	73	71	65	62
19	Vietnam	12.1	8.8	12.7	14.0	14.5	10.0	72	72	70	69	71
20	Mauritania	14.3	14.0	13.5	14.1	13.6	1.9	71	68	67	57	55
21	Uzbekistan	15.1	12.9	14.1	12.2	15.7	1.3	71	73	74	73	71
22	Laos	12.1	10.2	13.6	13.5	14.3	6.9	71	72	71	67	64
23	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.8	13.3	15.7	1.5	70	70	69	68	67
24	Algeria	13.9	13.9	11.5	13.1	13.4	3.9	70	73	70	58	58
25	Turkey	12.5	11.5	10.8	13.3	11.6	9.3	69	63	66	62	57
26	Tunisia	12.0	13.1	10.4	11.5	13.2	7.4	67	64	63	62	61
27	Morocco	12.6	13.5	11.2	12.4	14.1	3.7	67	66	63	51	49
28	Mali	9.4	8.2	12.7	10.3	11.5	15.4	67	66	68	59	59
29	Qatar	14.0	13.9	10.8	13.1	14.1	1.5	67	66	62	63	66
30	Colombia	11.4	8.8	12.4	11.0	9.7	13.9	67	62	58	56	53
31	Bangladesh	11.5	10.3	13.0	11.3	10.1	10.6	67	63	58	58	63
32	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.0	9.4	11.8	14.3	67	66	48	-	-
33	Tajikistan	14.0	12.3	11.9	12.5	13.2	2.2	66	65	65	65	58
34	Nepal	12.4	9.7	9.9	13.0	12.3	8.5	66	64	64	64	53
35	CAR	9.0	8.6	13.1	9.6	9.9	15.6	66	68	70	61	58
36	Ethiopia	9.9	8.5	10.7	10.3	10.8	14.4	65	63	65	62	64
37	Mexico	10.3	8.1	12.4	10.7	10.3	12.6	64	60	61	59	57
38	Jordan	13.1	13.9	11.4	11.6	12.4	2.0	64	64	65	66	63
39	Brunei	13.9	14.6	10.7	10.9	13.5	0.7	64	63	63	64	64
40	DRC	8.0	7.9	11.2	9.4	11.6	16.1	64	56	55	33	-
41	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.5	11.0	12.5	13.4	2.4	64	64	63	63	56
42	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.0	12.3	15.7	64	60	54	38	-
43	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	11.9	12.7	13.8	0.0	64	61	64	62	61
44	Oman	13.2	13.5	10.3	12.5	13.0	0.9	63	62	59	57	53
45	Mozambique	9.3	7.6	11.3	7.9	11.1	16.1	63	43	43	-	-
46	Malaysia	12.1	14.3	12.9	11.5	10.0	2.4	63	62	60	65	60
47	Indonesia	11.5	11.4	12.4	10.7	9.3	7.8	63	60	65	59	55
48	Kuwait	13.2	13.5	9.9	12.2	13.2	1.1	63	62	60	61	57
49	Kenya	11.7	9.2	10.5	8.0	10.3	12.8	62	61	61	62	68
50	Comoros	12.5	11.1	11.4	11.3	14.2	1.9	62	57	56	56	56

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017
51	Cuba	10.9	7.7	11.8	12.9	13.4	5.4	62	52	49	49	47
52	Sri Lanka	12.2	9.1	11.7	12.2	9.7	7.0	62	65	58	57	55
53	UAE	13.4	13.3	9.7	12.0	12.4	1.1	62	60	58	58	55
54	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.3	7.2	11.6	10.6	62	60	52	45	47
55	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.3	11.2	10.4	12.0	1.3	58	57	56	54	48
56	Palestinian Territories	12.5	13.3	9.1	10.4	11.7	0.9	58	60	57	60	64
57	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	10.2	58	55	52	53	59
58	Russian Federation	12.3	8.0	10.2	10.5	12.1	3.9	57	60	60	51	46
59	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	10.3	10.0	11.2	0.0	56	56	56	56	57
60	Bahrain	12.1	12.5	9.1	10.7	10.5	0.9	56	55	55	57	54
61	Azerbaijan	12.8	9.8	9.4	11.1	12.6	0.0	56	57	57	57	52
62	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	3.7	53	56	48	40	-
63	Nicaragua	6.9	4.6	9.9	11.3	10.0	8.1	51	41	41	-	-
64	Burundi	5.1	5.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.9	48	48	43	-	-
65	Uganda	8.1	4.6	6.7	6.7	9.1	12.0	47	48	47	46	53
66	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	5.9	47	45	46	-	-
67	Honduras	6.8	5.0	10.6	7.6	9.0	7.6	46	39	38	-	-
68	Angola	6.4	3.6	7.0	10.1	11.4	7.2	46	43	42	-	-
69	South Sudan	5.7	1.5	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.0	43	44	44	-	-
70	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	0.6	43	43	43	-	-
71	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	9.8	0.7	43	41	42	-	-
72	Rwanda	5.3	4.4	6.7	7.8	10.1	8.1	42	42	41	-	-
73	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	6.6	3.3	42	42	43	-	-
74	El Salvador	6.6	4.9	9.8	4.2	8.7	7.8	42	38	30	-	-

## Copyright notice

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## Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- 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 2021 reporting period was 01 October 2019 - 30 September 2020.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

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

In the WWL 2021 reporting period, travel restrictions and other measures introduced by the governments of various countries to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic did cause delays and create the need for restructuring grass-roots research in some cases. Through the agile cooperation of Open Doors field networks, research analysts, external experts and an increased use of technological options, Open Doors is confident that the WWL 2021 scoring, analysis and documentation has maintained required levels of quality and reliability.

## External Links - Introduction

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

## WWL 2021 Short country profile / Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan: Population (2020 UN estimate)	Christians	Chr%
33,236,000	345,000	1.0

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020)

Uzbekistan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	71	21
WWL 2020	73	18
WWL 2019	74	17
WWL 2018	73	16
WWL 2017	71	16

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2017-2021 reporting periods

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

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

## Brief description of the persecution situation

All categories of Christian communities are experiencing some form of pressure and violence on grounds of their faith. Russian Orthodox churches experience the least problems from the government as they do not usually attempt to make contact with the Uzbek population. It is the indigenous Christians with a Muslim background who are bearing the brunt of persecution both at the hands of the state and from family, friends and community. Where churches have not been registered, Christians suffer repeatedly from police raids, threats, arrests and fines.

## Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

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

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

- Christians are killed for their faith (ICCPR Art. 6)
- Churches from non-traditional denominations are raided, services disrupted and attenders arbitrarily arrested (ICCPR Arts. 9; 18 and 21)
- Ownership and consultation of religious literature is severely restricted beyond international permitted limitations (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)
- Christians and their activities are monitored by the authorities and surrounding community (ICCPR Art. 17)
- Christian female converts run the risk of being abducted and forcibly married to Muslim men (ICCPR Art. 23; CEDAW Art. 16 and ICESCR Art. 10)

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

This year saw no reports of violent incidents published in the media. WWL sources provided information, but due to security reasons no details can be given.

- In November 2019, a group of six Baptists were stopped at the border on their return from Kazakhstan. They were questioned for four hours about who gave them 10 copies of "Learn the Bible" they were carrying. After confiscating the books, they were released by the customs officials.
- A female Christian has been repeatedly beaten by her Muslim husband and divorced. To prevent her meeting with other Christians he repeatedly comes to visit and beats both her and their two sons.
- A pastor and his family were expelled from home by Muslim relatives and threatened with death if they would not renounce their faith and stop their church work.

## Specific examples of positive developments

- Roman Catholic priests broadcast church services, moments of prayer and biblical meetings on online platforms during the COVID-19 lockdown measures. This was the first time the churches had made use of such technology. (Source: [Fides, 29 May 2020](#))
- A "Telegram channel" was set up to unite all the various faiths present in Uzbekistan to join in prayer for the nation. (Source: [Fides, 7 April 2020](#))

## External Links - Short country profile

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Fides, 29 May 2020 - [http://www.fides.org/en/news/68012-ASIA\\_UZBEKISTAN\\_The\\_pandemic\\_slows\\_down\\_the\\_registration\\_of\\_a\\_new\\_parish\\_but\\_the\\_life\\_of\\_the\\_Church\\_continues\\_thanks\\_to\\_technology](http://www.fides.org/en/news/68012-ASIA_UZBEKISTAN_The_pandemic_slows_down_the_registration_of_a_new_parish_but_the_life_of_the_Church_continues_thanks_to_technology)
- Specific examples of positive developments: Fides, 7 April 2020 - [http://www.fides.org/en/news/67705-ASIA\\_UZBEKISTAN\\_A\\_Telegram\\_channel\\_to\\_unite\\_the\\_various\\_religious\\_faiths\\_in\\_times\\_of\\_coronavirus](http://www.fides.org/en/news/67705-ASIA_UZBEKISTAN_A_Telegram_channel_to_unite_the_various_religious_faiths_in_times_of_coronavirus)

# WWL 2021: Keys to understanding / Uzbekistan

## Links for general background information

- [Uzbekistan country profile - BBC News](#)

## Recent history

On 20 June 1990, Uzbekistan declared its state sovereignty and on 31 August 1991 its independence. 1 September was proclaimed National Independence Day. Presidential elections were held for the first time in Uzbekistan on 29 December 1991 and Islam Karimov was elected as the first president of Uzbekistan. He stayed in power until his death on 2 September 2016. Under Karimov religious freedom was increasingly restricted.

In the presidential elections on 4 December 2016, Uzbekistan's interim president, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, became the second president of Uzbekistan. While the new government opened up towards its neighbors and Russia, the restrictions on religious freedom hardly changed.

Uzbekistan had been designated as a Country of Particular Concern by the US Secretary of State from 2006-2017 and was moved in November 2018 to the Special Watch List category after the Secretary determined that the government had made substantial progress in improving respect for religious freedom. That progress was achieved is only partially true. Officially registered churches like the Russian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the registered



Baptists have indeed noted slight improvements. But for other Christians, especially for Christians with a Muslim background, the situation has not changed significantly and Christians have continued to be targets for raids, arrests and oppression.

Since President Mirziyoyev became president in December 2016, Uzbekistan's foreign policy has changed in many respects. It contacted [China](#) in 2019 for economic cooperation (Jamestown Foundation, 4 September 2019). On 6 March 2020, the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan approved the decision to apply for observer status with the [Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union](#) (EEU) (Jamestown Foundation, 23 March 2020). The move brought to a close months of speculation about whether Tashkent would end the previous president's policy of eschewing all Moscow-led integration processes.

## Political and legal landscape

Uzbekistan has a constitution and parliament, but in fact all power lies in the hands of the president. All opposition movements and independent media are essentially banned.

In the decades of President Karimov's rule (1991-2016), Uzbekistan withdrew from a number of regional bodies, such as the Eurasian Economic Union, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Economic Cooperation Organization. Uzbekistan was wary of too much influence from Russia, but the developments in Ukraine since 2014 have made the regime realize that it cannot act as independently as it would like to. Russia wrote off a large amount of Uzbekistan's debt in December 2014, but such actions are, of course, always linked to Russian expectations.

Parliamentary elections were held on [22 December 2019](#) under the slogan "New Uzbekistan, New Elections". The Liberal Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (LDPU) emerged as winner but observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) noted "serious irregularities" amid changes allowing "greater tolerance of independent voices". The elections were the first since Shavkat Mirziyoev was elected president in December 2016.

After the death of Islam Karimov and the end of his authoritarian rule of nearly three decades, President Mirziyoev announced reforms. In March 2020, [Bertelsmann Stiftung](#) wrote that from January 2017 to January 2019, a large number of laws and presidential decrees were adopted, which could create a breakthrough in domestic and foreign policy. One of the main strategic documents that sheds light on the government's future direction is the "Action strategy on five priority areas of development of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2017 to 2021", which was adopted in February 2017. It prioritizes the following five areas:

- 1) Improving the system of state and public construction;
- 2) Ensuring the rule of law and further reforms of the legal system;
- 3) Economic development and liberalization;
- 4) Social development; ensuring security, interethnic cohesion and religious tolerance;
- 5) Implementing a balanced, mutually beneficial and constructive foreign policy.

President Mirziyoyev's unprecedented reforms have created a new political, social and economic climate both in the country and in the region.

The [1992 Constitution](#) provides for freedom of religion or belief and separation of government and religion. A religious freedom "roadmap" approved by parliament in 2018 to implement all 12 of the recommendations of UN Special Rapporteur on Religion or Belief Ahmed Shaheed, simplified rules for registering religious organizations and their reporting requirements, but the underlying law on religion continued to make it difficult for religious groups to register.

In June 2019, President Mirziyoyev announced he had granted amnesty or reduced the sentences of 575 prisoners charged with religious extremism or related crimes; however, some non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives said the government continued to torture persons arrested and jailed on suspicion of religious extremism or of participating in underground Islamic activity. The government did not provide the number of individuals arrested during the year and how many were in custody at year's end. The government registered eight churches; according to religious groups, there were 20 known churches that still wished to register. According to religious groups, there were no police raids of unregistered religious group meetings during the year, compared with 114 in 2018 and 240 in 2017. Members of religious groups whose registration applications the government denied remained unable to practice their religious beliefs without risking criminal prosecution. (Source: [IRF 2019](#))

On 28 April 2020 [USCIRF](#) stated that in 2019, religious freedom conditions in Uzbekistan were making positive improvements. The government took notable steps to address some of the long-standing and significant religious freedom concerns that had previously led USCIRF to recommend Uzbekistan's designation as a "country of particular concern" CPC, under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), every year since 2005, including in April 2019. Throughout 2019, the government by and large successfully enforced a ban on law enforcement authorities raiding and harassing religious communities, and in August 2019 announced the closure of the notorious Jasliq Prison, a course of action USCIRF had recommended. The government also continued to engage closely with the USA and other international partners to improve religious freedom.

In 2019 and 2020 many people expected that a new religion law would be published in Uzbekistan. (Source: [Forum 18, 9 June 2020](#)). In August 2020, Forum 18 reported that practically all restrictions remained in the new draft law. (Source: [Forum 18, 24 August 2020](#)) As of November 2020, the new law is still under discussion: Lawmakers in Uzbekistan have approved the first reading of legislation that would, among other things, end a ban on the wearing of religious clothing in government offices and places of learning. While gestures like these look designed to make it easier for people to openly express adherence to their faith, religious freedom advocates say the draft bill preserves many repressive and limiting features of existing legislation. (Source: [ADF, 17 September 2020](#))

There were many which issues saw little or no improvement at all. Thousands of religious prisoners - mostly conservative Muslims - are still imprisoned on fabricated charges of "religious extremism" or for being members of a banned religious group. Many religious prisoners were subjected to multiple arbitrary extensions of their prison terms under the previous government and claim to have experienced [torture](#), which remains widespread and routine (Human Rights Watch, 2020 World Report).

## Religious landscape

Uzbekistan: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	345,000	1.0
Muslim	31,926,000	96.1
Hindu	800	0.0
Buddhist	45,200	0.1
Ethno-religionist	62,000	0.2
Jewish	4,000	0.0
Bahai	900	0.0
Atheist	200,000	0.6
Agnostic	650,000	2.0
Other	1,640	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020)

Although Uzbekistan's main religion is Islam – predominantly Sunni - it would be wrong to call Uzbekistan a Muslim country. 70 years of atheism during the Soviet era have left a deep influence. The government (the heirs of the atheist Soviets) is staunchly secular and keeps Islam under tight control, with citizens following Islamic culture rather than adhering strictly to Islamic teachings.

People in Uzbekistan still revere their glorious Islamic past when the universities and madrassas of Samarkand and Bukhara were famous for their scientific research and attracted people from all over the world. Their three Muslim kingdoms (khanates) once controlled huge tracts of Central Asia (a much greater geographical area than the present Uzbekistan).

The 2.6% agnostic and atheist part of the population is the result of 70 years of atheist propaganda by the Soviet authorities.

Evangelistic activities by Protestant Christians in Uzbekistan are not appreciated and immediately draw the attention of the authorities. Muslims oppose such activities as well. Converts from Islam face opposition from their families, friends and communities. The pressure

is highest in the region of Uzbekistan that is known for its most conservative Muslim population - the Fergana Valley.

The small Christian minority is weak due to much division and little cooperation between the various denominations. There are few exceptions to this and it plays into the hands of the government.

## Economic landscape

According to [World Bank's April 2020 update](#) overview/data:

- **GDP (current US\$):** 50.39 billions (in 2019)
- **GDP growth (annual):** 5.4% - Uzbekistan's GDP growth has been declining since 2010

The Uzbek economy is characterized by high levels of unemployment, poverty and inflation. As it is impossible to provide jobs for all people within Uzbekistan itself, there is massive labor migration - approximately 7-8 million male Uzbek citizens are working abroad, mainly in Russia and Kazakhstan. The money they send home (some US \$ 5.67 billion per year) make up 16.3% of Uzbekistan's annual income. Migrant workers are vulnerable but there are also positive effects, since Uzbeks working abroad are much more open to outreach by Christians.

The Uzbek economy is dependent on the growth of cotton. Everything is sacrificed to increase the yield of this crop. Teachers, students, civil servants, schoolchildren, prisoners and many others are forced to help bring in the harvest each year. The use of pesticides is enormous and has affected public health negatively. Water is being drained from the two major rivers (Amy Darya and Syr Darya) to irrigate the cotton fields in such quantities that there are regular water shortages which has led to a constant sinking of Aral Sea water levels.

Uzbekistan holds a strategic position in the East-West connection between China and the West. A new version of the Silk Road is under construction, which is being pushed by both China and Turkey. This means that there are huge construction activities in progress building highways for trucks and tracks for trains.

The 2020 COVID-19 crisis had a huge impact on the Uzbek economy. Many migrant workers abroad lost their jobs. More than a [thousand](#) Uzbeks were stranded in Kazakhstan's southern region of Turkistan because they were unable to travel back home due to travel restrictions (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 3 July 2020).

Christians in Uzbekistan suffer from the same economic problems as the rest of the population, for instance: High unemployment and poverty.

## Social and cultural landscape

According to the [UNDP 2019 report](#) (page 300) and the [Word Fact Book](#) (December 2019):

- **Main ethnic groups:** Uzbek 83.8%, Tajik 4.8%, Kazakh 2.5%, Russian 2.3%, Karakalpak 2.2%, Tatar 1.5%, other 4.4% (2017 est.).
- **Main languages:** Uzbek (official) 74.3%, Russian 14.2%, Tajik 4.4%, other 7.1%.
- **Urban population:** 50.4 % of total population (2019 est.)

- **Literacy rate:** 100% (2016 est.)

According to the [UN Global Human Development Indicators](#) (2019):

- **HDI score and ranking:** 0.710, ranking 108.
- **Total population:** 32.5 million
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 71.6 years
- **Expected years of schooling:** 10.9
- **Employment to population ratio (% ages 15 years and older):** 62.1

Corruption is endemic at all levels of administration and government. The power groups within the regime have no interest in losing the opportunity of making money. The changes in government since December 2016 do not seem to have brought any action against this.

Another social phenomenon is that more than one quarter of the Uzbek population is younger than fourteen. This so-called youth-bulge puts massive pressure on the government to create new job opportunities every year. It also means that Uzbekistan will be facing significant changes in the not too distant future as the majority of the population will no longer have any affinities with the Soviet past.

Thanks to the former Soviet educational system, practically every citizen in Uzbekistan is literate. This means that people who are interested in the Christian message can read materials in their own language. The restrictions imposed by the government (all materials must be approved and only registered groups may be active) mean that most distribution must be done unofficially.

## Technological landscape

According to [World Internet Stats](#) (accessed June 2020):

- **Internet usage:** 51.3% penetration - survey date: December 2018
- **Facebook usage:** 2.3% penetration – survey date: December 2018

According to [World Bank's country profile](#) (2018):

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 41.2 per 100 people

Key technological developments according to [BuddeComm Research](#) (updated May 2020):

- For many years Uzbekistan has been struggling to bring its telecommunications system up to the standard found in developed countries. Over the last two decades the situation has been gradually transforming. Consequently, over the past decade there has been a positive trend in the country's telecom market, with increased investment in infrastructure, expanding subscriber bases and rising revenues.
- The fixed line market in Uzbekistan remains underdeveloped. A major reason for this is the dominance of the mobile segment. Fixed broadband penetration in Uzbekistan remains low mainly due to a limited number of fixed lines and the dominance of the mobile platform. The introduction of prepaid internet has also contributed to the rise in home internet usage.

- Uzbekistan’s mobile market is relatively underdeveloped on international comparison and has experienced slow to moderate growth over the last five years. Only moderate growth is predicted due to the low income of most of the population. The mobile broadband market is still at an early stage of development. Continuous growth is predicted over the next five years to 2024.

According to Freedom House’s [Freedom on the Net Report 2019](#):

- While ongoing reforms under President Mirziyoyev have led to improvements in some areas, including a modest reduction in media repression and reforms that mandated more female legislative candidates, Uzbekistan remains an authoritarian regime with little movement toward democratization. No opposition parties operate legally. The legislature and judiciary effectively serve as instruments of the executive branch, which initiates reforms by decree, and the media remains tightly controlled by the state. Reports of torture and other ill-treatment remain common, although highly publicized cases of abuse continue to result in dismissals and prosecutions for some officials and small-scale corruption has been meaningfully reduced.

All media, including the Internet, are under strict state control and are censored. As a result, Christians in Uzbekistan do not have their own media platform, and have difficulty in accessing foreign Christian media. As all digital communication is monitored, Christians have to be careful in using social media and email.

## Security situation

Since independence from the Soviet Union, the relationship with neighboring republics Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan has at times been tense and there have been ethnic clashes between Uzbeks, Tajiks and Kyrgyz in the past few years. The main reason for political tension is the water supply. Uzbekistan depends greatly on water from the Syr-Darya and Amu-Darya rivers for its cotton harvest. These rivers enter Uzbekistan via Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and both countries are considering making use of the rivers for energy by constructing dams. Uzbekistan fears this will severely damage its main crop and has threatened with war should water be diverted away from Uzbekistan. However, since Mirziyoyev took over as president, relations with neighboring states have improved. Nevertheless, in May-June 2020, there were several border incidents between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan and between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan ([CICA Analyst, 16 July 2020](#)). These incidents - none of which have escalated into wider conflicts - reveal once again the transboundary lifestyle of Central Asian people and the artificial character of the borders that separate independent states from each other.

Although Islam in Uzbekistan is generally of a traditional and moderate character, the country has experienced attacks in the past from radical Islamic groups such as the *Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan* (IMU) and the *Islamic Jihad Union*, both connected with the al-Qaeda network. So far, the government has been able to expel them from the country. The Fergana Valley in Uzbekistan's south-east is known for the presence of radical Islamic groups.



- Economic landscape: World Bank's April 2020 update - <https://data.worldbank.org/country/uzbekistan?view=chart>
- Economic landscape: thousand - <https://www.rferl.org/a/uzbek-tajik-migrant-workers-stranded-in-kazakhstan/30704986.html>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNDP 2019 report - <http://www.hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2019.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: Word Fact Book - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/attachments/summaries/UZ-summary.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: UN Global Human Development Indicators - <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/UZB>
- Technological landscape: World Internet Stats - <https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#uz>
- Technological landscape: World Bank's country profile - [https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report\\_Name=CountryProfile&id=b450fd57&tbar=y&dd=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=DJI](https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&id=b450fd57&tbar=y&dd=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=DJI)
- Technological landscape: BuddeComm Research - <https://www.budde.com.au/Research/Uzbekistan-Telecoms-Mobile-and-Broadband-Statistics-and-Analyses>
- Technological landscape: Freedom on the Net Report 2019 - <https://freedomhouse.org/country/uzbekistan/freedom-world/2020>
- Security situation: CICA Analyst, 16 July 2020 - <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13632-border-problems-in-central-asia-dividing-incidents-uniting-solution.html>

## WWL 2021: Church information / Uzbekistan

### Christian origins

The first Christians to enter Central Asia (including Uzbekistan) were Nestorian missionaries in the 4th century. The Nestorian church experienced a period of decline starting in the 14th century, when the Mongol rulers of the region finally decided to convert to Islam. Thereafter, [Nestorian Christianity](#) was largely confined to Upper Mesopotamia and the Malabar Coast of India (Encyclopaedia Britannica, accessed 25 June 2020).

The current presence of Christians in Uzbekistan dates from the 19th century. In 1867 the Russian Empire expanded its territory into Central Asia through a number of military campaigns, bringing in ethnic Russians who mostly belonged to the Russian Orthodox Church. During the Second World War, Joseph Stalin ordered the deportation of large numbers of ethnic Germans, Ukrainians, Poles and Koreans from Russia to Central Asia, fearing they would otherwise present a security risk. With them, other Christian denominations found their way into Uzbekistan. After Uzbekistan became an independent country in 1991, non-traditional Christian communities became active among the Uzbek population.

### Church spectrum today

Uzbekistan: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	200,000	58.0
Catholic	3,500	1.0



Protestant	40,000	11.6
Independent	88,600	25.7
Unaffiliated	13,000	3.8
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>345,100</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	14,000	4.1
Renewalist movement	85,000	24.6

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020)

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

The following is a selection of the largest official church denominations in Uzbekistan as recorded by World Christian Database (accessed in February 2020):

- Russian Orthodox Church
- Armenian Apostolic Church
- Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kiev)

## External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: Nestorian Christianity - <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Nestorianism>

# WWL 2021: Persecution Dynamics / Uzbekistan

## Reporting period

1 October 2019 - 30 September 2020

## Position on the World Watch List

Uzbekistan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	71	21
WWL 2020	73	18
WWL 2019	74	17
WWL 2018	73	16
WWL 2017	71	16

*Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2017-2021 reporting periods*

The score is two points lower than in WWL 2020, due mainly to a drop in the violence score from 3.0 in WWL 2020 to 1.3 in WWL 2021. The situation for Christians in Uzbekistan remains serious with extreme levels of pressure in the *Private, Community and Church spheres of life*. It is still too early to see whether there are any changes in policy under President Mirziyoyev which will affect Christians positively.

## Persecution engines

Uzbekistan: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Not at all
Christian Denominational protectionism	CDP	Very weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all

Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Not at all

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

### Dictatorial paranoia (Strong):

No religious activities beyond state-run and state-controlled institutions are allowed. Protestants are frequently branded as "extremists" for their practice of religion outside state-sanctioned structures. It is very common that members of Protestant churches are regarded as followers of an alien sect that has 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. Security forces have stepped up monitoring measures in order to find "extremists". This has also affected Christians and churches.

### 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, most converts will do their best to hide their faith – they become so-called secret believers.

## Drivers of persecution

Uzbekistan:									
Drivers of persecution per engine	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG	-	-	-	VERY WEAK	-	-	STRONG	-
Government officials	Medium	-	-	-	-	-	-	Strong	-
Ethnic group leaders	Strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	-	Very weak	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	Very weak	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	Medium	-

Uzbekistan:										
Drivers of persecution per engine	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC	
	STRONG	-	-	-	VERY WEAK	-	-	STRONG	-	
One's own (extended) family	Very strong	-	-	-	Very weak	-	-	-	-	
Political parties	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Strong	-	
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Organized crime cartels or networks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	

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

#### Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia:

- **Government officials (Very strong):** The law prohibits all unregistered religious activity and religious propagation in any form. Religious literature can only be used by registered religious associations within its registration area. Protestant groups are regarded as suspect and are forbidden from distributing Christian material. Many Christians have been arrested for trying to convert local Muslims. Non-Orthodox Christians are known to be detained, fined and beaten for simply possessing Christian materials or simply participating in illegal religious groups (which most non-Orthodox groups are deemed). The authorities frequently confiscate (or steal) Christian property and possessions. A clever way of prohibiting proselytization is that it is illegal to preach in the Uzbek language; one can only do it in Russian. However, Russian is only spoken by the older generation, making church growth more difficult.
- **Political parties (Strong):** Few parties are allowed in Uzbekistan but the ruling party which controls the government of President Mirziyoyev by definition participates in persecution insofar as much of the pressure and violence targeting Christians is government-sanctioned.
- **Normal citizens (Medium):** Especially at the local level, mobs with support from the government have been known to interrupt Christian religious festivals and celebrations.

#### Drivers of Islamic oppression:

- **Extended family (Very strong):** Pressure from family, friends and community are extremely high on converts, especially in rural areas. This can lead to threats, beatings, house arrest or ostracism.
- **Ethnic leaders (Strong):** With the support of the authorities, leaders of [Mahalla community groups](#) have been given government authorization to prohibit Christian missionary activity (Global Informality Project, updated 17 May 2019).
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Most Muslim clerics are open in their hostility towards non-Orthodox Christians - particularly towards converts from Islam.

- **Normal citizens (Strong):** Converts to Christianity are treated severely by the local community.
- **Government officials (Medium):** At the community level there is a link between local officials and Muslim pressure. Often, active Muslims and local officials know each other. Therefore, the pressure on converts is stronger at the community level than at the state level (where officials claim to be secular).

## Areas where Christians face most difficulties

The level of persecution by government officials in Uzbekistan is the same all over the country. Pressure from family, friends and community on converts is stronger outside the urban areas, especially in the Fergana Valley.

## Christian communities and how they are affected

**Communities of expatriate Christians:** Expatriate Christians in Uzbekistan are not forced into isolation. This category is therefore not included for scoring in the WWL analysis.

**Historical Christian communities:** The Russian Orthodox Church has accustomed itself to the limitations provided by the government and is therefore left more or less undisturbed. Church services may be monitored, but they are conducted unhindered and members can meet without fear of arrest. However, the printing or importing of Christian materials is restricted.

**Converts to Christianity:** Christian converts from a Muslim background bear the brunt of the persecution in Uzbekistan. Apart from suffering at the hands of the state, they are also under strong pressure from family, friends and community. For them, the latter are by far the more powerful.

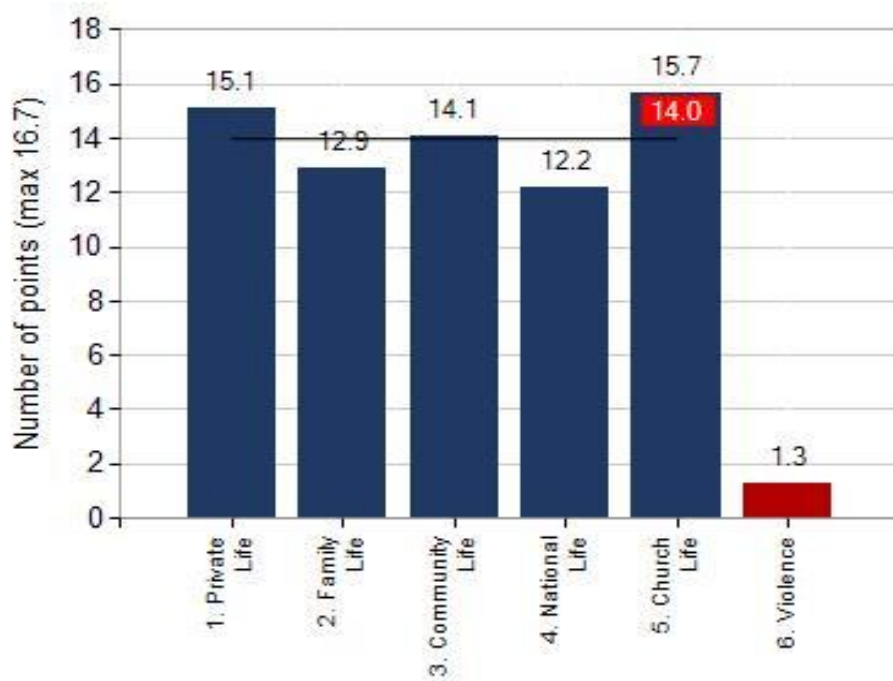
**Non-traditional Christian communities:** After converts, this category of Christians is the second most persecuted group - and especially when the churches have not been registered. Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal groups suffer from raids, threats, arrests and fines.

## The Persecution pattern

The WWL 2021 Persecution pattern for Uzbekistan below shows:

- The average pressure on Christians was at an extremely high level (14.0 points), the same level as WWL 2020. This is a clear indication that very little has changed in Uzbekistan over the last year.
- Three *spheres of life* have extremely high scores (*Community, Private and Church spheres* - in ascending order). The fact that the highest score is still in the *Church sphere* reflects the extreme pressure the state is continuing to impose through many restrictions.
- The score for violence decreased from 3.0 in WWL 2020 to 1.3 in WWL 2021.

## WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern for Uzbekistan



### Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

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

### Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

**Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (4.00 points)**

It is already very risky for a convert to talk about his new faith with members of the family and the latter will make it virtually impossible for the convert to do this with non-family members. The shame and honor culture will make sure that the family will try to prevent this at all costs. Also, the state views such behavior as an attempt at evangelism and will oppose it by arresting these Christians.

**Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (3.75 points)**

In the case of converts, persecution comes most of all from their family or community if they find Christian materials. Christian materials are considered as hard evidence for conversion.

Discovery can lead to fierce reactions. Pressure from the government is also high since it is illegal to possess religious materials. Even a Bible must bear a stamp indicating that it was published in Uzbekistan. It is illegal to have more than one Bible per person. It is illegal to carry a Bible outside your home. It is illegal to read the Bible or any religious literature in public. A family was once fined for a Christian poem found on a piece of paper in the bed of a boy who was memorizing it for Sunday school.

**Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.75 points)**

From the Muslim perspective, this has two sides to it: First, converts who reveal their new faith will instantly draw the ire of their family, friends and community; and secondly, other Christians will immediately be suspected of carrying out evangelism. As the state opposes evangelism, Christians must be very careful in this respect. Any Christian who reveals his/her faith publicly will immediately draw the attention of the state and its agents.

**Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (3.75 points)**

Converts run the risk of drawing unwanted attention from their social environment when they meet with other Christians. Many Uzbek Christians only meet one to one as it is less dangerous and often change places where they meet. Worship must be silent or very quiet. Due to the very high level of surveillance in Uzbekistan all non-Orthodox Christians are very careful in this respect. Religious activities can officially only occur in buildings of registered churches. No such activities are allowed to happen in house churches, for instance.

## Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

**Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (4.00 points)**

The Muslim environment (family, friends, community) will pressurize children of converts in particular to receive Islamic teaching - sometimes even against the wishes of their parents. Anti-religious propaganda at schools and universities happens on a regular basis, for instance in the form of lectures. Attendance at such lectures is compulsory.

**Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (3.75 points)**

The pressure on converts not to go through with baptism is immense, as it is often regarded as the ultimate sign that one has left Islam. The Muslim environment will go to extremes to prevent baptisms of converts. The state will oppose baptisms of converts as they fear this could lead to tensions and problems in the community. Also, the state will oppose unregistered groups in all their activities, including baptisms. Baptisms are not, however, legally forbidden.

**Block 2.6: Christian couples have been hindered in adopting children or serving as foster parents because of their faith. (3.75 points)**

Muslim families and communities will block the adoption of an ethnic Central Asian child if it is known that the adopting person is a convert or other Christian. The government imposes no

restrictions regarding adoption. However, a case was recorded of a boy being taken back to the orphanage after reporting to a social worker that his adopted parents had been teaching him about the Christian faith.

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

The extended family of converts will try to bring the children of converts back to Islam and raise them accordingly. The school system also contributes to this since - as Uzbekistan is officially a secular state - no religious teaching is provided in schools. The only place for parents to provide Christian teaching is at home, since all youthwork for churches has been made illegal. Parents must be careful that they do not draw too much attention from both family and the local authorities by doing this.

## Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

**Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (3.75 points)**

Converts are constantly monitored by family and the surrounding community. At the community level, Muslims also monitor the activities of Protestant groups closely and report on their activities to the local police. Government agents at all levels are constantly monitoring Christian activities - all but the Russian Orthodox Church are on their radar.

**Block 3.12: Christians have been fined for faith-related reasons (e.g. jizya tax, community tax, protection money). (3.75 points)**

Fines are issued by state agents for a long list of possible offences, e.g. for meeting illegally, for the possession of religious literature, for having Christian songs on their smartphones, etc. Even technically legal groups (such as Baptists) face this kind of persecution.

**Block 3.13: Christians have been interrogated or compelled to report to the local vigilante/police for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points)**

Known converts will be harassed and interrogated (sometimes harshly) by their family and community. When meetings or houses are raided (which is a common thing), all those present face interrogation. Known converts will be required to go to the local police station from time to time, to keep them intimidated. They can also be stopped in the street, searched and interrogated.

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

Converts are threatened by family, friends and community (including the local imam). Local Muslim communities will also harass Protestants who they accuse of evangelism. Evangelicals also face harassment, threats, discrimination etc. from the authorities.



## Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

### **Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (4.00 points)**

The law requires religious groups to register with the government and declares religious activities of unregistered groups to be illegal. The law restricts public speech and proselytism, censors religious literature and limits the possession of religious materials of all types and formats in private homes. Raids on Christians' homes have resulted in a combination of fines, corrective labor and prison sentences.

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

There are no Christian political parties or Christian civil society organizations in Uzbekistan. The fact of applying for registration could be sufficient to be arrested by the police on the grounds of trying to establish an extremist organization. Any Christian organization will be regarded as an attempt to convert people to Christianity and will be blocked.

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

This is very dangerous for non-Orthodox Christians and will cause threats of reprisals from both the government and the local Uzbek community. The level of persecution is so intense that converts and non-Orthodox Christians must keep their religion effectively secret. Any public expression of their faith is likely to be perceived by the government as proselytization. Russian Orthodox Christians normally do not speak about their religious beliefs in public. Muslims consider Christian preaching and evangelism undesirable and will obstruct this with all means available.

### **Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (3.75 points)**

When the authorities act against Christians, they do so with the backing of the law and generally interpret their enforcement of the law as they deem acceptable. The authorities can generally expect to act with utter impunity. Harm caused to converts and Christians accused of evangelism by the Muslim community (mostly at the local and provincial level) will almost certainly happen with impunity as well.

## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

### **Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (4.00 points)**

Any Christian activities outside the buildings of registered churches are prohibited. The Muslim community would anyway immediately oppose any such action and report it to the authorities.

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

Religious work among youth and minors - including Sunday schools and youth summer camps - are prohibited. The Muslim community will report any sign of youth events and summer camps taking place to the authorities.

**Block 5.7: Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts. (4.00 points)**

The criminal code punishes proselytism - the attempt to convert persons belonging to a certain religion to another religion - with up to three years in prison (Source: International Religious Freedom Report for 2017 Uzbekistan ). It is therefore dangerous for churches to openly accept converts. Conversion is vehemently opposed, especially by Muslims in rural areas.

**Block 5.13: Churches have been hindered in importing Christian materials from abroad. (4.00 points)**

All religious materials must be approved by the government. Very few items are able to pass this hurdle. Even the Bible Society is having problems doing this. Muslims will report to the authorities if they discover Christians are importing religious materials illegally.

## Violence

*Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible. 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. The symbol "x" denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security considerations.*

<b>Uzbekistan: Violence Block question</b>	<b>WWL 2021</b>	<b>WWL 2020</b>
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	1
6.2 How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	6	15
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	0

Uzbekistan: Violence Block question	WWL 2021	WWL 2020
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	0	1
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	0
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	21	10
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	1
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	1
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	4	3
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	4

For the WWL 2021 reporting period:

- **Christians attacked:** According to sources, at least 21 converts were abused and beaten by their families and villagers.
- **Christians detained:** (See the section *Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period* above.)
- **Christians forced to leave their homes:** (See the section *Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period* above.)

## 5 Year trends

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

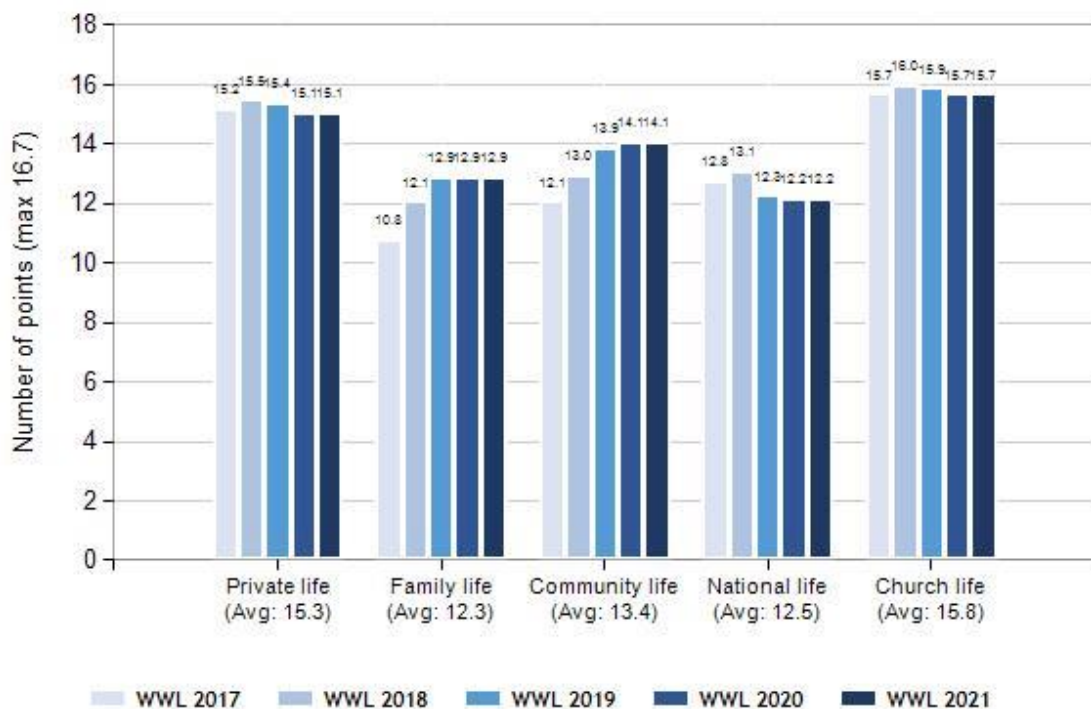
### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

As can be seen from the table below, the average pressure has remained extremely high and stable - around the 14.0 point mark - for the last four reporting periods. This is a clear indication of how little the situation in the country has changed in recent years.

Uzbekistan: WWL 2017 - WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2021	14.0
2020	14.0
2019	14.1
2018	13.9
2017	13.3

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

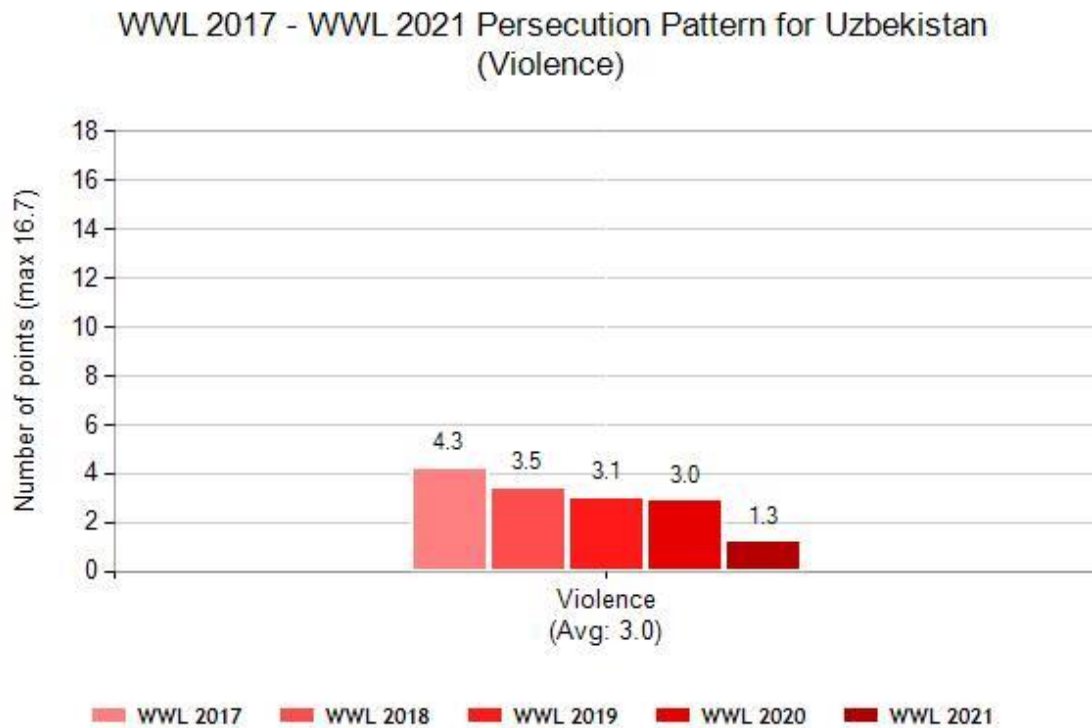
WWL 2017 - WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern for Uzbekistan (Spheres of life)



Over the past five years the scores in the five spheres of life in Uzbekistan have not changed dramatically. This means that the situation for Christians in the country has been quite stable, with few changes occurring. The highest levels of pressure on Christians have continued to be recorded in *Private* and *Church life*, which reflect the operation of the two main Persecution engines in Uzbekistan: *Dictatorial paranoia* ( in the *Church sphere of life*) and *Islamic oppression*

(in the *Private sphere*).

## 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



Over the past five years the score for violence targeting Christians has decreased steadily – indicating that the number of reported incidents has been falling each year. This decline in violence is the major reason for the lower total score of Uzbekistan.

## Gender-specific religious persecution Female

### Female Pressure Points

Abduction

Denied access to social community/networks

Forced divorce

Forced marriage

Incarceration by family (house arrest)

Violence – death

Violence – physical

Violence – psychological
Violence – sexual
Violence – Verbal

While laws in Uzbekistan give equal rights to men and women, traditional Islamic culture places women lower than men and subservient to them within the family context. Total submission is expected from women to their parents, or if married, to their husbands. Whilst women have begun to [fight back](#) against Uzbekistan’s strong patriarchal society (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 15 September 2020), perpetrators of violence against women commonly go unpunished, in part due to the [lack of legislation](#) addressing domestic violence (Open Democracy, 4 July 2019).

Within this patriarchal context, women are not free to choose their own religion and will face severe opposition upon conversion to Christianity. Persecutors target women both to inflict harm upon them, but also as an instrument to cause psychological harm for their husbands and wider family members. Incarceration by a convert's family (i.e. house arrest) remains a common and socially accepted form of putting female converts under pressure. As a country expert notes, “women are expected to be much more submissive, and are thus more likely to be detained by their own family or harassed by the local community”. Access to social networks, specifically Christian networks, is restricted in the hope that the convert will return to Islam.

Female converts, particularly those in conservative regions, run the risk of being kidnapped by their own communities and married off to a Muslim. Families, too, arrange such marriages in the hope that the convert will return to Islam. Sexual violence within those marriages is an often unacknowledged component that becomes normalized under the legitimization that marriage gives. If already married at the point of conversion, Muslim husbands commonly divorce their wives and deny them their possessions.

Christian women and girls suffer from numerous daily pressures within the family unit, including verbal, physical, psychological and sexual violence. For women in rural settings, the lack of social and municipal infrastructure renders them entirely reliant on their families, with [few prospects](#) for non-home-based jobs (ADB, 2018). The violation of rights of women and girls also creates fear and anxiety within families and church communities.

## Gender-specific religious persecution Male

Male Pressure Points
Discrimination/harassment via education
Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Economic harassment via fines
Imprisonment by government
Military/militia conscription/service against conscience
Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Violence – physical
Violence – psychological
Violence – Verbal

Church leaders, most of whom are men, are common targets for violations of rights. Typically, they will be fined, detained, denied exit visas to leave the country, or put under house arrest. They can be fined for such offences as meeting illegally, possession of religious literature, having Christian songs on their smartphones, etc.. The persecution of church leaders is a deliberate tactic, as targeting them causes a ripple effect, spreading fear and anxiety throughout their congregations. Pastors and lay leaders of unregistered churches in particular have been insulted, beaten and humiliated.

Christian men continue to face inequalities in every area of their lives. Some men will be denied promotion at work, while others may lose their job altogether. Christian businessmen face constant state monitoring to see if they are involved in any illegal activities, as well as pressure from the local Muslim community who will often obstruct their business activities; this occurs mainly at the local level, rather than at the national level. As the man is normally the provider, this form of economic harassment has a crippling effect on the whole family. Family members feel fear, anger and anxiety. To avoid this, many Christian businessmen choose to keep their Christian faith secret.

Converts to Christianity also suffer from verbal, physical and psychological abuse, regularly being mocked in their places of work and study and coming under greater pressure from police officials. In addition, the obligation to fulfil military service also exposes Christian men to hostile situations and harassment.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the [US State Department's IRF 2019 report](#):

- Members of religious groups whose registration applications were denied by the government have remained unable to practice their religious beliefs without risking criminal prosecution. According to media reports, public controversy over government policies on beards and the wearing of hijabs continued, including reports of police forcibly shaving the beards of men in Tashkent. The Ministry of Education maintained a dress code prohibiting the wearing of religious garments and symbols, such as skullcaps, crosses, and hijabs in schools. In reaction to a social media outcry following the expulsion of two female university students for wearing hijabs, in April 2019 the government agreed to allow female students to wear headscarves in the traditional Uzbek ikat style with a knot tied behind their heads. Police detained two bloggers who called for the government to allow girls to wear hijabs, men to grow beards, and children to attend mosques, although reportedly other bloggers who criticized the government faced no backlash. According to press reports, the Tashkent District Department of Public Education continued to instruct educators to schedule school activities on Fridays to prevent the release of pupils for prayers. Media reported the government continued to block access to some websites containing religious content, including Christian and Islamic-related news. The government published a list of illegal websites it stated were linked to Islamic extremist activity. According to the international religious freedom NGO Forum 18, it remained difficult for some individuals to participate in the Hajj without resorting to inside contacts or bribery, and religious authorities continued generally to limit access to the Hajj to persons older than age 45.

All religious groups, including Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews and Bahai all suffer under a very high level of state surveillance and oppression. The Council for Religious Affairs (CRA) is pivotal in this.

Examples of persecution of other religious groups:

- Uzbekistan imposes severe restrictions on haj pilgrims, including using blacklists to bar devout Muslims, arbitrarily restricting who can go on the pilgrimage. Controls are complex and multilayered, involving the SSS secret police, the Muftiate, and the government's Religious Affairs Committee. The system's complexity facilitates corruption. (Source: [Forum 18](#), 8 November 2019)
- Tashkent City Criminal Court jailed three Muslims for between five and six years, after undercover police contacted them about supporting terrorist action. Despite telling the Court that their "confessions" were extorted by torture "this was totally ignored". Another trial of eight men on similar charges is to take place at the same Court. (Source: [Forum 18](#), 3 June 2020)
- A Muslim who asked his sister to visit him "for the last time", is serving a 16-year sentence for studying the Quran and holding Islamic prayers without authorization. (Source: [AsiaNews](#), 5 September 2020)



## Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

### **Dictatorial paranoia:**

The current government exerts a very high level of control over the country. Little has changed since President Mirziyoyev succeeded his predecessor Karimov, despite the claims of both the US State Department and USCIRF. Government officials at all levels are the strongest drivers of pressure and violence targeting Christians in Uzbekistan. They have imposed all kinds of legal restrictions, monitor all religious activities, raid meetings and block the availability of religious materials. A special committee has been established to control the restrictions on religion - the Council for Religious Affairs (CRA). The chances that this situation will change in the near future are slim.

### **Islamic oppression:**

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

## External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Drivers of persecution description: Mahalla community groups - [https://informality.com/wiki/index.php?title=Mahallah\\_\(Uzbekistan\)](https://informality.com/wiki/index.php?title=Mahallah_(Uzbekistan))
- Persecution of other religious minorities: US State Department's IRF 2019 report - <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/UZBEKISTAN-2019-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Forum 18 - [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2520](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2520)
- Persecution of other religious minorities: 3 June 2020 - [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2575](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2575)
- Persecution of other religious minorities: AsiaNews, 5 September 2020) - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Muslim-prisoner-of-conscience-denied-family-visits-50953.html>

## Further useful reports

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

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