

World
Watch
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Tajikistan: Country Dossier

December 2019



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Introduction

World Watch List 2020

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017	Total Score WWL 2016
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	11.1	94	94	94	92	92
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.0	93	94	93	89	88
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.5	9.4	92	91	91	91	87
4	Libya	15.3	15.5	15.8	16.0	16.4	11.3	90	87	86	78	79
5	Pakistan	14.0	13.9	15.0	14.9	13.7	16.7	88	87	86	88	87
6	Eritrea	14.5	14.9	15.9	15.9	15.4	10.9	87	86	86	82	89
7	Sudan	14.2	14.6	14.5	15.7	16.1	10.4	85	87	87	87	84
8	Yemen	16.6	16.4	16.4	16.7	16.7	2.6	85	86	85	85	78
9	Iran	14.1	14.3	14.1	15.8	16.5	10.4	85	85	85	85	83
10	India	12.9	13.0	13.5	15.0	13.5	14.8	83	83	81	73	68
11	Syria	13.5	14.2	13.0	13.9	14.4	12.6	82	82	76	86	87
12	Nigeria	12.2	11.9	13.5	12.8	13.0	16.7	80	80	77	78	78
13	Saudi Arabia	15.1	14.9	14.1	15.5	16.5	2.4	79	77	79	76	76
14	Maldives	15.4	15.6	14.0	15.9	16.6	0.7	78	78	78	76	76
15	Iraq	14.0	14.6	13.9	14.5	13.6	5.6	76	79	86	86	90
16	Egypt	12.1	13.1	10.7	13.2	10.5	16.1	76	76	70	65	64
17	Algeria	13.5	14.3	10.4	12.8	13.2	9.3	73	70	58	58	56
18	Uzbekistan	15.1	12.9	14.1	12.2	15.7	3.0	73	74	73	71	70
19	Myanmar	11.8	11.9	13.5	12.5	12.2	10.7	73	71	65	62	62
20	Laos	12.8	9.9	14.1	14.4	14.9	5.6	72	71	67	64	58
21	Vietnam	12.3	8.5	12.9	13.6	14.5	9.8	72	70	69	71	66
22	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.2	13.8	13.3	15.7	1.9	70	69	68	67	66
23	China	11.6	8.4	11.6	12.8	15.1	10.2	70	65	57	57	57
24	Mauritania	13.9	14.0	13.0	13.7	13.4	0.2	68	67	57	55	50
25	Central African Republic	10.1	9.1	13.1	9.8	10.2	15.6	68	70	61	58	59
26	Morocco	12.4	13.3	10.8	11.7	14.1	4.1	66	63	51	49	47
27	Qatar	13.6	13.4	10.8	12.2	14.1	2.2	66	62	63	66	65
28	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	10.2	9.4	11.8	15.6	66	48	-	-	-
29	Mali	9.2	8.2	12.8	10.0	11.7	13.7	66	68	59	59	55
30	Sri Lanka	11.5	9.0	11.0	10.9	9.6	13.1	65	58	57	55	53
31	Tajikistan	13.9	12.3	11.9	12.4	13.1	1.1	65	65	65	58	58
32	Nepal	12.4	10.8	9.9	12.1	12.2	7.0	64	64	64	53	53
33	Jordan	13.1	14.1	10.7	11.7	12.5	1.7	64	65	66	63	59
34	Tunisia	12.0	12.8	10.3	10.8	12.3	5.4	64	63	62	61	58
35	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.5	10.7	12.4	14.0	1.7	64	63	63	56	55

36	Turkey	12.6	11.8	10.7	13.3	11.3	3.7	63	66	62	57	55
37	Brunei	13.8	14.3	10.7	10.3	13.5	0.6	63	63	64	64	61
38	Bangladesh	11.1	9.9	12.7	11.1	8.9	9.3	63	58	58	63	57
39	Ethiopia	10.0	9.2	10.6	10.8	10.4	11.9	63	65	62	64	67
40	Malaysia	12.1	14.6	12.7	12.0	9.6	1.5	62	60	65	60	58
41	Colombia	8.9	7.8	11.9	9.8	8.9	15.0	62	58	56	53	55
42	Oman	12.7	13.1	10.0	11.5	12.7	2.0	62	59	57	53	53
43	Kuwait	13.2	13.1	9.9	11.5	13.4	0.7	62	60	61	57	56
44	Kenya	11.7	10.5	10.9	8.3	10.9	9.1	61	61	62	68	68
45	Bhutan	12.8	10.9	11.8	11.6	13.9	0.0	61	64	62	61	56
46	Russian Federation	12.2	8.3	10.7	10.4	12.1	6.9	60	60	51	46	48
47	United Arab Emirates	12.9	13.0	9.5	11.1	12.6	1.1	60	58	58	55	55
48	Cameroon	8.8	7.2	11.6	7.0	10.4	15.0	60	54	38	-	45
49	Indonesia	10.9	11.1	11.6	10.2	9.5	6.5	60	65	59	55	55
50	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.3	7.2	11.1	9.3	60	52	45	47	53
51	Palestinian Territories	12.2	13.0	9.2	10.2	11.9	3.1	60	57	60	64	62
52	Mexico	8.4	6.8	12.2	10.6	10.0	11.5	60	61	59	57	56
53	Azerbaijan	13.0	10.0	9.3	11.1	12.4	1.5	57	57	57	52	57
54	Comoros	11.7	11.5	9.1	9.9	13.9	0.9	57	56	56	56	56
55	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.3	11.1	9.4	11.9	1.1	57	56	54	48	46
56	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	10.3	10.0	11.2	0.2	56	56	56	57	58
57	Democratic Republic of the Congo	5.6	6.7	10.6	7.4	10.4	15.6	56	55	33	-	53
58	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	5.9	56	48	40	-	51
59	Bahrain	12.1	12.3	9.1	10.1	10.5	0.9	55	55	57	54	54
60	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	7.0	55	52	53	59	57
61	Cuba	9.6	5.6	9.5	11.8	12.0	3.5	52	49	49	47	42
62	Uganda	8.1	4.6	6.7	6.7	9.1	13.0	48	47	46	53	45
63	Burundi	5.1	5.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.7	48	43	-	-	-
64	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	3.7	45	46	-	-	-
65	South Sudan	5.7	1.5	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.6	44	44	-	-	-
66	Mozambique	6.9	4.6	7.1	5.2	8.0	11.7	43	43	-	-	-
67	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	1.1	43	43	-	-	-
68	Angola	6.4	3.6	7.0	8.7	10.4	6.7	43	42	-	-	-
69	Venezuela	3.8	4.4	10.6	9.3	9.5	4.8	42	41	34	-	-
70	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	6.6	3.5	42	43	-	-	-
71	Rwanda	5.3	4.4	6.7	7.8	10.1	7.2	42	41	-	-	-
72	Nicaragua	5.8	4.2	8.5	9.8	9.0	4.1	41	41	-	-	-
73	Togo	8.6	6.7	8.5	7.1	8.4	1.1	41	42	-	-	-

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Brief note on sources and definitions

This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD). The highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. The WWL 2020 reporting period was 1 November 2018 - 31 October 2019.

The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”.

This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.

The latest update of WWL Methodology including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

WWL 2020: Persecution summary / Tajikistan

Brief country details

Pop 2019	Christians	Chr%
Tajikistan		
9,292,000	70,100	0.8

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

World Watch List Tajikistan	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2020	65	31
WWL 2019	65	29
WWL 2018	65	22
WWL 2017	58	35
WWL 2016	58	31

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

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Tajikistan: 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, Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Government officials

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

Brief description of persecution situation

The government puts heavy pressure on all “deviating” groups by tightening existing laws and by enforcing them strictly. Indigenous Christians with a Muslim background bear the brunt of 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 religious minorities) in legal limbo as it is not clear what is still allowed.

Specific examples of persecution in the reporting period

Please note that specific examples of persecution in Tajikistan are hardly reported by any source – including Forum 18. This does not mean that incidents do not occur, but that Tajik Christians do not report them to foreign organizations for publication.

- During the WWL 2020 reporting period 11 members of an illegal house-church were detained in a raid by police (Source: Open Doors research).

WWL 2020: Keys to understanding / Tajikistan

Link for general background information

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

Recent 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 has begun to repatriate Tajiks who went abroad to fight for the Islamic State group and other militant groups.

Political and legal landscape

Tajikistan is a presidential republic, whereby the president is both head of state and head of government. Legislative power is vested in both the executive branch and the two chambers of parliament. Emomali Rahmon has held the office of president 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 law regulating religious affairs was implemented in August 2011 prohibiting all religious youth work to citizens under 18 years of age. This had a huge impact on the Church since it is estimated that about 50% of all Christians are in this category. In a speech on 19 March 2015, President Rahmon said his country must "be mainly focused on the development of secularism and national and secular thinking". The emphasis on secularism was aimed at the IRPT and Islamic militants fighting both in the Middle East and 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](#))

On 10 January 2018, [amendments to the law on religion](#) entered into force. These amendments:

- i) allow the state to restrict manifestations of freedom of religion or belief on a wide range of grounds not permitted under international human rights obligations;
- ii) increase religious organizations' requirements to report all their activities to the state;
- iii) require state approval for the appointment of all imams;
- iv) increase state control both on religious education at home, and on those travelling abroad for such education.

Religious landscape

Tajikistan has the highest percentage of Muslims in Central Asia: According to the World Christian Database (WCD 2019) 97.7% 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 0.8% of the population. The overwhelming majority (over 76%) of them are Russian Orthodox (i.e. ethnic Russians). As in many other countries in Central Asia Christian numbers are shrinking due to the emigration of Russians. This is not compensated by the increase in numbers of converts to Christianity, who number about 3,000. Converts experience huge pressure from family, friends and the local community to return to the faith of their ancestors, believing that a true Tajik can only be Muslim.

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, which all plays into the hands of the government.

Religious Context: Tajikistan	Numbers	%
Christians	70,100	0.8
Muslim	9,078,000	97.7
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	5,000	0.1

Ethnoreligionist	7,500	0.1
Jewish	1,000	0.0
Bahai	3,500	0.0
Atheist	19,800	0.2
Agnostic	104,000	1.1
Other	2,600	0.0

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

Economic landscape

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 are living below the poverty line. Officially, only 2.5% of the Tajik population are unemployed, but the actual unemployment figure is much higher. Since the economy is underdeveloped, many Tajiks are forced to work abroad, above all in Russia. Without this possibility, many Tajik families would have very little money to live on. According to a World Bank study, Tajikistan is the most dependent country in the world as far as remittances from migrant workers is concerned. The money these migrant workers are earning 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 also other 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.

Social and cultural landscape

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 has provided good opportunities for Christian literature to be read. A Tajik Bible translation has been available since the 1990s.

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, 97.7% 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.

Technological landscape

Thanks to foreign investment, Tajikistan has managed to update its fixed line telephone system – the entire network changed from analogue to digital in 2012. Cell phone usage has increased immensely in recent years: Already in 2012 there were about 6.5 million cell phones in the country which means that more than 80% of the population had a cell phone. Coverage by the cell phone system extends to all major cities and towns. Internet access (though strictly monitored and censored by the regime) is also widely available. This means that foreign Christian websites (e.g. in Russia) are mostly accessible.

Satellite dishes provide a good alternative to access international information, but they are expensive and few Tajiks can afford them. Nonetheless, there are many options for Christians to present the Christian faith via (foreign) websites, via SD cards in smartphones, and via radio and television programmes on satellite dishes. These modern possibilities are popular, since Christian publications in book format (also magazines and DVDs) are likely to be confiscated during police raids and searches.

Security situation

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

On [29 July 2018](#), 7 tourists from Western countries were cycling near Dangara in southern Tajikistan when a car deliberately drove into them. Four of the 7 cyclists were killed by the vehicle's impact and wounds sustained in a subsequent knife attack carried out by the occupants of the car. The Islamic State group claimed responsibility. Tensions in the regional capital, Khorog, have risen since September 2018 and there have been a number of [clashes](#) between Tajik and Kyrgyz border guards and civilians in 2019.

Trends analysis

- Tajikistan continues to depend on Russia, both economically and militarily.
- As in other countries in Central Asia, Tajikistan's government is increasingly taking on a dictatorial character. Since 2015, President Rahmon's regime has been expanding its control over the country. All political opposition - most importantly from the Islamic Renaissance Party - has been dismantled. This means that political changes are unlikely to occur in Tajikistan. The president has more or less succeeded in establishing a dynasty.
- Due to the very high level of stability of the two strongest Persecution engines in Tajikistan (*Dictatorial paranoia* and *Islamic oppression*), Christians will continue to live under a considerable level of surveillance and pressure.

External Links - WWL 2020: Keys to understanding

- Link for general background information: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16201032>. - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16201032>
- Political and legal landscape: Radio Free Europe - <http://www.rferl.org/content/tajikistan-presidential-dynasty-constitutional-amendments/27503530.html>
- Political and legal landscape: amendments to the law on religion - <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/coe/tajikistans-new-religion-law-represents-total-control/>
- Economic landscape: 2017 Fund for Peace Fragile State Index - <http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/2017/05/14/fragile-states-index-2017-annual-report/>
- Economic landscape: CIA World Factbook - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ti.html>
- Social and cultural landscape: 2010 census - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Tajikistan
- Security situation: 29 July 2018 - <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/tajikistan>
- Security situation: clashes - <https://www.rferl.org/a/deadly-clashes-on-tajik-kyrgyz-border/30167378.html>

WWL 2020: Church information / Tajikistan

Christian origins

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

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

Under Joseph Stalin many Russians, Germans, Ukrainians, Belarusians and Poles that were deemed unreliable were sent to Tajikistan in the 1930s. This meant a huge growth in the number of Christians in Tajikistan.

Church spectrum today

Church networks: Tajikistan	Christians	%
Orthodox	53,500	76.3
Catholic	330	0.5
Protestant	9,700	13.8
Independent	5,900	8.4
Unaffiliated	700	1.0
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
Total	70,130	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	2,100	3.0
Renewalist movement	5,200	7.4

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

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

WWL 2020: Persecution Dynamics / Tajikistan

Reporting period

1 November 2018 – 31 October 2019

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 65 points, Tajikistan ranked 31 in WWL 2020.

In WWL 2019, the country also scored 65 points, ranking 29. 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
Clan and ethnic antagonism	CEA	Not at all
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Not at all
Communist and post - Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Very strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Not at all

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

Dictatorial paranoia (Very strong):

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

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia:

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

Drivers of Islamic oppression:

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

Geographical hotspots of persecution

There are no hotspots of persecution in Tajikistan, but pressure from the Muslim environment on converts is greater outside the major cities.

Christian communities and how they are affected

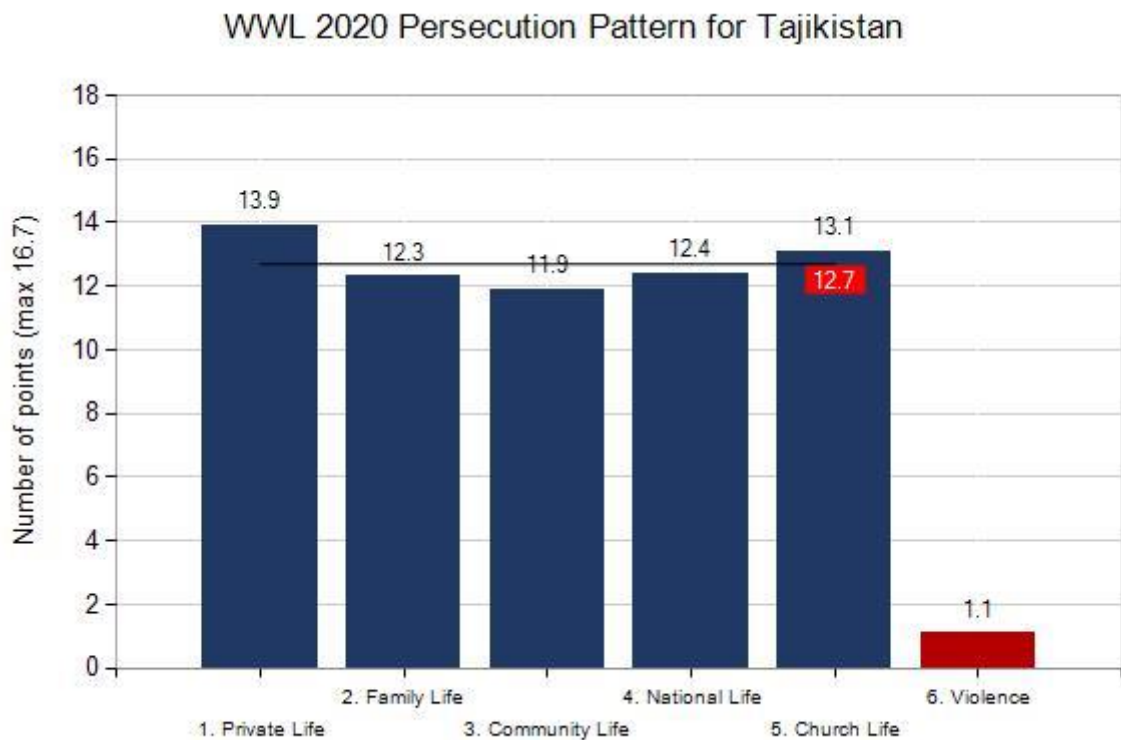
Communities of expatriate Christians: These are not involuntarily isolated groups and so have not been counted as a separate category in WWL analysis.

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

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

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

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2020 Persecution pattern for Tajikistan shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (12.7 points), rising from 12.4 in WWL 2019. Pressure increased slightly in all five *spheres of life*.
- Four spheres of life show very high levels of pressure, but pressure is extreme in the *Private sphere of life*. This pattern reflects how both the Muslim environment and the Tajik government is imposing many restrictions on (convert) Christians.
- The score for violence went down from 2.4 in WWL 2019 to 1.1 in WWL 2020. Very few violent incidents were reported.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, details are shown from four of the highest scoring block questions, with those items scoring highest listed first. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale 0 – 4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Private sphere:

- ***It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than family (Block 1.8 / Score 3.75 points):*** Converts will avoid sharing their new faith with members of their communities. It can be risky for Protestants when they discuss their faith with Muslim people. Sharing your faith with other people will be interpreted as an instigation of religious hatred and then state agents will come into action.
- ***Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable (Block 1.1 / Score 3.5 points):*** Conversion is viewed as betrayal of the family and culture, as well as Islam. When people convert, they place themselves outside the community. Family, friends and community will try to make the converts recant their faith. This could lead to physical violence too. Officially, there is no hindrance to conversion - Tajikistan is a secular country. But the government prefers that conversions do not take place as they can lead to tension among the population.
- ***It has been risky for Christians to conduct acts of worship (Block 1.2 / Score 3.5 points):*** This is very risky for converts from Islam. Even at this very private level, persecution is quite severe if they are found simply worshipping on their own. There have been reports of families beating converts attempting to force a renunciation of faith. Although the state tries to regulate religious activities as much as possible, it does not have influence at this private level.
- ***It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols (Block 1.5 / Score 3.25 points):*** Converts have a problem in this respect as openly showing their new faith will draw negative reactions from their families, friends and the community. However, any Christian wearing Christian symbols would draw attention from the Muslim environment and increasingly from the state too.

All questions but one scored 3 points or more in the Private sphere. Christians in Tajikistan have also experienced difficulties in revealing their faith, speaking about their faith to the family and meeting with other Christians. This indicates that life in the Private sphere in Tajikistan, especially for converts, is difficult.

Family sphere:

- ***Christian children have been pressured to attend anti-Christian teaching (Block 2.8 / Score 3.75 points):*** The Muslim environment (family, friends, community) will pressurize children of converts in particular to receive Islamic teaching - sometimes even against the wishes of their parents. "History of Religions" is a subject at high school which all children are required to attend and is taught from a Sunni Muslim perspective.

- **Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs (Block 2.7 / Score 3.5 points):** Family members will oppose converts raising their children according to Christian faith and values. They will try to take custody of the children in order to raise them according to Islamic principles. The law is very restrictive regarding the religious education of children. It allows parents to bring up children according to their religious beliefs but at the same time the parents should not allow their children (up to the age of 18) to participate in the activities of religious organizations (e.g. churches and mosques).
- **Christian baptisms have been hindered (Block 2.4 / Score 3.25 points):** Baptism is regarded as the final step in becoming a Christian and leaving the previous faith. Family, friends and community will oppose this. Baptisms are regarded by the state with hostility as they are automatically connected to evangelism and conversion - two activities opposed by the state.
- **Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against (Block 2.9 / Score 3.25 points):** Christian children experience slander and Muslim children are kept from communication with Christian children. Children of converts are seen as outsiders and are frequently harassed by other children as a result. This is not done by the state.

Community sphere:

- **Christians have been pressured by their community into renouncing their faith (Block 3.7/Score 3.5 points):** Pressure on converts from their community to recant their new faith is usually very strong. Several tactics will be applied - threats, beatings, house arrest, forced marriages and ostracism. Protestant Christians are also under pressure from the community as they are considered dangerous sects. If this occurs, this is caused by the Muslim environment, not by the state.
- **Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives (Block 3.1 / Score 3.25 points):** Converts are harassed and threatened by family, friends and community (including the local imam). Local state officials harass, threaten and obstruct Christians belonging to unregistered church groups.
- **Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (Block 3.2 / Score 3.25 points):** Known converts will be monitored by members of their family and community. Local state officials closely monitor all activities of non-Orthodox Christians. This is one of the strongest forms of persecution in the country as the state closely monitors (including phone-tapping) non-Orthodox Christians. Likewise, there have been numerous incidents in the WWL 2020 reporting period of locals reporting Christians to the authorities. Converts are of course also monitored by the family and surrounding community.
- **Christians have been interrogated or compelled to report to the local vigilante/police (Block 3.13 / Score 3.25 points):** Known converts are harassed and interrogated harshly by their family and community. From time to time, the police will disrupt church meetings and interrogate the Christians present.

National sphere:

- ***Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered (Block 4.9 / Score 4.0 points):*** It is impossible to establish such organizations or parties in Tajikistan; this is banned in the Tajik Constitution. Muslims will quickly regard Christian organizations as an attempt to convert people to Christianity. They will block this with all available means.
- ***The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Block 4.1 / Score: 3.75 points):*** The Constitution protects religious freedom; however, other laws and policies restrict religious freedom, and, in practice, the government has enforced some of those restrictions. The Religion Law of 2009/2011 (with its amendments of January 2018) requires compulsory registration of all religious organizations. Any church activities by non-registered groups are illegal. At the same time, it is very difficult to get state registration. There is a ban on unlicensed religious education and there is also a requirement for censorship of any religious materials. The law on parents' responsibilities prohibits young people up to 18 years of age from participating in the activities of religious organizations.
- ***Christians have been forced by law or in practice to act against their conscience (Block 4.3 / Score: 3.5 points):*** Military service is compulsory in Tajikistan. Refusing military service is punishable by law.
- ***Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished (Block 4.14 / Score 3.25 points):*** Authorities who persecute Christians do so with the backing of the law and generally interpret their enforcement of the law as they deem acceptable. The authorities can generally expect to act with utter impunity and even beyond the legal limits of the allowed levels of persecution. There is nothing to suggest that the government takes any steps to stop cases of persecution by punishing the perpetrators, bearing in mind that most of the Christian persecution that occurs is in fact supported by the government. Any action against converts is done with impunity and the blessing of the Muslim community.

Church sphere:

- ***Work among youth has been restricted (Block 5.6 / Score 4 points):*** The August 2011 laws prohibit any church youth work. The law is consistently enforced by state officials who carry out church raids. Church raids have been defended by citing this law and the need to protect children. Since about 50% of Tajik Christians are classified as youth, the impact of the law and its enforcement have major consequences. Muslims oppose Christian activities aimed at youth and will deliberately block events and summer camps and report all they discover to the police.
- ***Churches have been hindered in establishing, managing, maintaining and conducting schools, or charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural organizations, institutions and associations (Block 5.18 / Score 4 points):*** The government does not allow Christians to establish such institutions or associations at all. Muslims would immediately connect these kinds of activities with evangelism and block them.

- **Churches have been hindered in printing Christian materials or owning printing presses (Block 5.12 / Score 3.75 points):** The government must approve the production, importation, export, sale and distribution of religious materials by registered religious groups, which is in effect a ban on all religious materials used by unregistered religious groups. Permission to registered groups is rarely given. The Muslim community will oppose the production and public distribution of any Christian materials (especially when it is in their own language) as they assume they will be used for evangelistic purposes.
- **Churches have been hindered in their interaction with the global church (Block 5.19 / Score 3.75 points):** There are restrictions on foreign Christians visiting Tajikistan. They need a special visa which is very difficult to obtain. Tajik Christians can visit other countries and attend conferences only after getting permission. The state clearly monitors who is applying for such trips. The Muslim community objects to foreign Christians preaching in Tajikistan, especially when the language used can be understood by Muslims.

Christians in Tajikistan have also experienced difficulties in getting registration and in importing Christian materials.

Violence

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

Tajikistan	Reporting period	Christians killed	Christians attacked	Christians arrested	Churches attacked	Christian-owned houses and shops attacked
WWL 2020	01 Nov 2018 - 31 Oct 2019	0	8	12	0	0
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

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

For the WWL 2020 reporting period:

- **Christians attacked:** 8 converts from Islam were attacked by their Muslim relatives.
- **Christians arrested:** 11 members of an unregistered church were detained. Pastor Bakhrom Kholmatov in Khudzhand remains in prison after being sentenced in July 2017 to 3 years in prison for "inciting religious hatred". He will probably be released in April 2020.

5 Year trends

The following three charts illustrate how the situation for Christians in Tajikistan has deteriorated over the last five reporting periods.

Chart 1:

The average pressure on Christians has been rising steadily since WWL 2018, after previously (WWL 2016-WWL2017) being stable at a lower level of just over 11 points.

WWL 2016 - WWL 2020 Persecution Pattern history: Tajikistan	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2020	12.7
2019	12.4
2018	12.2
2017	11.1
2016	11.3

Chart 2:

Apart from a small decrease in two *spheres* in WWL 2017, the levels of pressure in all *spheres of life* have gone up over the years, most markedly in the *Private and Family spheres of life*. The highest scores for pressure have nearly always been in *Private life*, followed by *Church life*. The scores for *Private life* appear to be levelling off at an extreme level (around the 13.8/13.9 point mark; the scores for *Church life* have been the most stable staying within the very high range of 12.6-13.3 points.

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

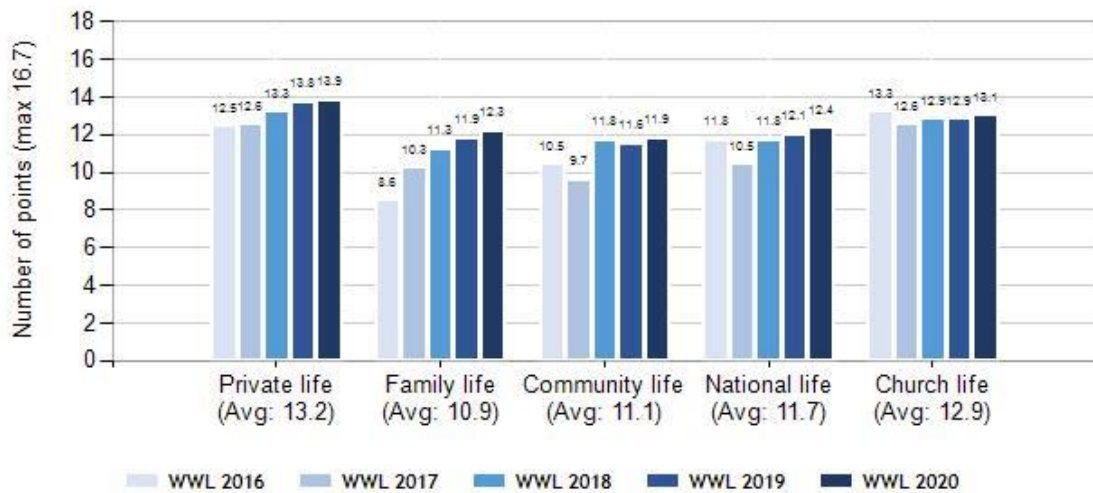
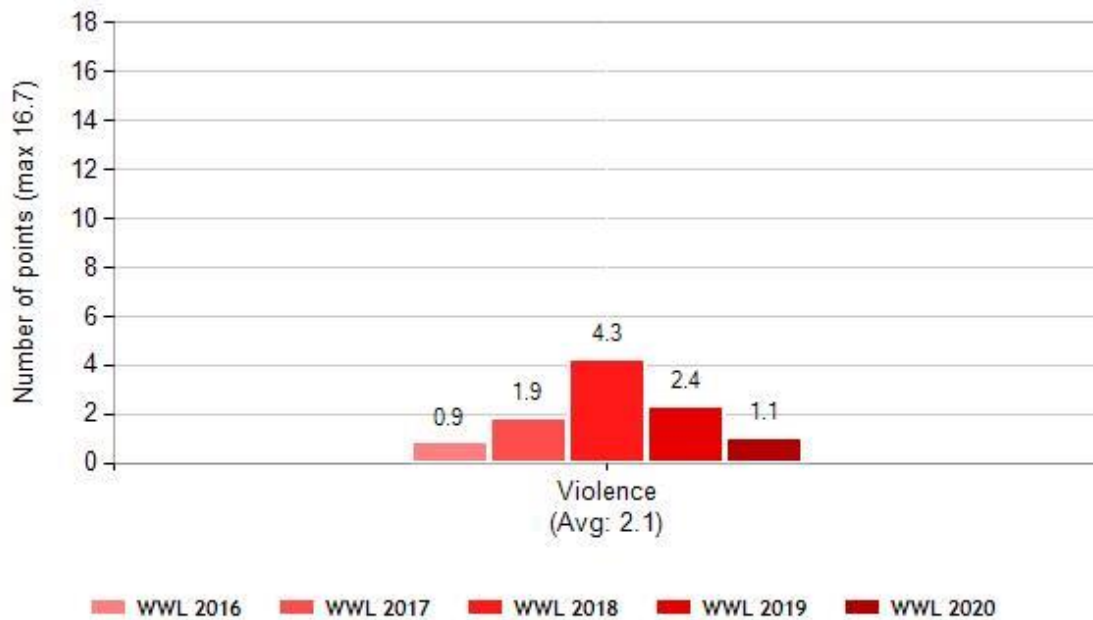


Chart 3:

The scores for violence show that the number of violent incidents is usually low, with the exception of the WWL 2018 reporting period.

WWL 2016 - WWL 2020 Persecution Pattern for Tajikistan (Violence)



Gender profile of persecution

Female Pressure Points:

- ***Abduction***
- ***Denied inheritance or possessions***
- ***Economic harassment at work/job/business***
- ***Forced marriage***
- ***Forced divorce***
- ***Incarceration by family***
- ***Violence – physical***
- ***Violence – verbal***

Although in Tajikistan the law gives equal rights to men and women, traditional culture puts women in an inferior position compared to men and requires them to be obedient to men in the family. According to a [UNICEF](#) project officer reporting in 2004: “Gender roles in Tajik society are influenced both by the old Soviet system, with its strong emphasis on gender equality in the public sphere and traditional Tajik values where women played a central role in the private, family sphere....” Additionally, “being in the centre of family life doesn’t mean that women have equal rights with their male family members. They remain under the authority of their husband, father or brother, who possess the major decision-making authority.”

For that reason, women cannot choose their own religion and will be persecuted if they convert from Islam to Christianity. If their conversion is discovered, female converts run the risk of being locked up, beaten, rejected, harassed, forced to divorce and losing all inheritance. In short, they are put under immense pressure to recant their new faith.

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

Male Pressure Points:

- ***Abduction***
- ***Denied access to Christian religious material***
- ***Economic harassment via work/job/business***
- ***Economic harassment via fines***
- ***Incarceration by the government***
- ***Incarceration by family/house arrest***
- ***Military/militia conscription/service against conscience***
- ***Travel bans/restriction of movement***
- ***Violence – physical***
- ***Violence – verbal***

Like other parts of Central Asia, men in Tajikistan normally hold leadership roles within the family and within the churches. As such, there is more pressure on men from the police. From time to time, police officers disrupt meetings and interrogate the Christians attending. The local authorities often impose fines on Christians because of their faith and for legal reasons such as gathering without a permit, possessing and printing religious material without a permit, or perceived proselytization. Persecution from the state includes 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. If a man is a church leader his persecution will affect his church and cause levels of fear to rise.

At the hands of the local community, Christian men can lose their jobs and suffer beatings, threats, verbal and physical abuse, discrimination, ostracization and pressure aimed at their family members. Men are the main family breadwinners and if they lose employment it affects the whole family. Known converts will be harassed and interrogated harshly by non-Christian members of their family and community. At the hands of his own Muslim family, a Christian convert may face beatings, humiliation, home detention, rejection and loss of inheritance. For young men who are students and still needing financial support, such financial dependency can be the means parents use to prevent conversion going ahead.

Persecution of other religious minorities

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

Among the violations documented by the 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 interference by officials, including the arrests of Jehovah's Witnesses and bans on the Jehovah's Witnesses and some Islamic 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 for citizens under 18 years of age (apart from funerals); and state censorship of and bans on some religious literature and websites. (Source: [Forum 18, Religious Freedom Survey, January 2016](#)).

Examples:

- November 2018: Muslim prisoners were killed when officers and special forces suppressed a riot in high-security Labour Camp 3/3 in Khujand [Khojand] in the northern Sogd Region in the night of 7-8 November 2018. They were not allowed to be buried according to Muslim rites. (Source: [Forum 18](#), 19 December 2018)

- September 2019: A court in Tajikistan's northeastern city of Khujand has sentenced a Jehovah's Witness to 7 1/2 years in prison after finding him guilty of inciting religious hatred. The court also ruled that after serving his term, Shamil Hakimov, will be barred from working in religious organizations for three years. (Source: [Radio Free Europe](#), 11 September 2019)

Future outlook for the church

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

- **Dictatorial paranoia:** The current government exerts a very high level of control over the country. Government officials at all levels are the strongest persecutors of Christians in Tajikistan. They have imposed all kinds of legal restrictions, monitor all religious activities, raid meetings and block the use of religious materials. This is likely to continue.
- **Islamic oppression:** 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 Islamic culture will change are as good as non-existent.

External Links - WWL 2020: Persecution Dynamics

- Gender profile of persecution: UNICEF - <http://http://at.yorku.ca/c/a/m/l/67.htm>
- 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: Forum 18 - http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2439
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Radio Free Europe - <https://www.rferl.org/a/tajik-jehovahs-witness-given-unjust-prison-sentence-for-religious-hatred/30158540.html>

Additional reports and articles

WWR in-depth reports

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

World Watch Monitor news articles

Articles are available at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/tajikistan>.

Recent country developments

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