

# FINAL WWL 2019 COUNTRY DOSSIER

## RUSSIAN FEDERATION

### LEVEL 3/EMBARGO

(Reporting period: 1 November 2017 – 31 October 2018)

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## Introduction

### Copyright Notice

### Introduction

<b>World Watch List Russian Federation</b>	<b>Points</b>	<b>WWL Rank</b>
WWL 2019	60	41
WWL 2018	-	-
WWL 2017	-	-
WWL 2016	-	-
WWL 2015	-	-

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

**Please note:** The highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”.

## WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Russian Federation

### Link for general background information

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

### Recent country history

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

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

Russia is taking on an increasingly dominant role in the area once covered by the Soviet Union - often under the cover of offering protection to ethnic Russians who are under threat of "ultra-nationalists and fascists". In May 2014 Russian rebels in the eastern Ukrainian provinces of Donetsk and Lugansk started an armed rebellion against the government in Kiev. Russia has always denied it is involved in the conflict, but the rebels could never have achieved so much without Russian support (in whatever form). Internationally, the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine has isolated Russia enormously.

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

### The religious landscape

Russia is the biggest country on earth with a population of 143,965,000. 82.1% of them are Christians, according to the 2018 estimate by World Christian Database (WCD). The overwhelming majority of these Christians are Russian Orthodox believers (96.6%). Despite decades of atheistic propaganda by the Communists during the Soviet era, most Russians consider themselves Christians. However, most Russians have not read the Bible and few attend church services. Outreach activities by non-Orthodox denominations are not welcomed.

The next biggest religious group in Russia - according to WCD - are Muslims – mostly Sunnis – with 12.2% of the population. They live mainly in the northern Caucasus (in southern Russia) and in the mid-Volga region around the city of Kazan, 800 kilometers east of Moscow. While the Muslims in the Caucasus region tend to be conservative and have been involved in armed fighting against the Russian army, the Muslims in the mid-Volga region are more moderate. A further group of Muslims not included in these statistics are the hundreds of thousands of migrant workers from the Central Asian countries. Most are living under bad conditions, are poorly paid, and are regarded with suspicion (they might be Muslim militants). While working abroad these migrant workers are much more open to outreach by Christians.

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

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

## The political landscape

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

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

Since 2012, the Russian parliament (Duma) has passed a number of laws and amendments that imposed restrictions on society, including religion.

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

## The socio-economic landscape

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

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

## Concluding remarks

Many [people](#) believe that Russia is sliding back into the type of attitude that characterized the worst days of oppression under the Soviet regime, but this is clearly an overstatement. In the Soviet era, hundreds of Christians from all denominations found themselves in jail, psychiatric hospitals or labor camps. Churches and religious materials were confiscated and destroyed. Religious education and training was very restricted. Church leaders were controlled by the state and the media gave a very negative picture of Christian faith. This is not the situation in Russia today. But the banning of a very active religious group in April 2017 is definitely a clear and unwanted signal of possible difficulties awaiting non-ROC Christians in the future.

## External Links - WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Russian Federation

- The political landscape: Constitution of Russia  
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russia>
- The political landscape: Russia's Supreme Court  
[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2274](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2274)
- The political landscape: condemned  
<http://www.newsweek.com/jehovahs-witnesses-ban-russia-catholic-593082>
- The political landscape: welcomed  
<http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Russian-Orthodox-against-Jehovah>
- Concluding remarks: people  
<http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/why-russias-new-ban-on-jehovahs-witnesses-is-so-troubling-72451/>

## WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

### How many Christians?

Pop 2018	Christians	Chr%
143,965,000	118,127,000	82.1

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

### How did Christians get there?

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

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

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

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

### What church networks exist today?

Church networks: Russian Federation	Christians	%
Orthodox	114,063,000	96.6
Catholic	725,000	0.6
Protestant	1,704,000	1.4
Independent	2,230,000	1.9
Unaffiliated	181,000	0.2
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-776,000	-0.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>118,127,000</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		

Evangelical movement	1,139,000	1.0
Renewalist movement	3,574,000	3.0

*Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. Roman Catholics: All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. Protestants: Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world’s 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. Independents: Believers who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). Unaffiliated Christians: Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. Doubly-affiliated Christians: Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. Evangelical movement: Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. Renewalist movement: Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal. Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)*

**The communities of expatriate Christians** are not involuntarily isolated in Russia, hence this category is not included for WWL analysis.

**The historical Christian communities** are by far the largest group in Russia (96.6% of all Christians according to WCD). The biggest denomination in this group is the ROC which alone accounts for just under 80% of the Russian population. The ROC experienced a revival in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, when the state dropped its ideological drive for atheism and most churches could function more or less freely. The current government favors the ROC, which means that other Christian denominations experience occasional problems.

**Converts to Christianity** are experiencing by far the biggest pressure of all Christians in Russia. The origin of the pressure lies within the Muslim community. Here all Christians are facing violence and pressure, but those with a Muslim background bear the brunt of it and often have to flee from their homes and spend time in safe houses. Converts living for example in Chechnya and Dagestan are considered to be traitors to their national identity since Christianity is associated with the Russian occupiers. Some sources claim that there are thousands of Christians with a Muslim background in Russia – well under 1% of the total population.

**The non-traditional Christian communities** have frequently been targeted by the ROC for so-called sheep-stealing – robbing the Orthodox Church of its members – and for false teaching. The state regards these groups as un-Russian, Western spies. In Muslim areas, these Christians are often targeted because they are suspected of being active in evangelism. The non-traditional Christian communities number about 2% of the total population in Russia.

## Religious context

Religious Context: Russian Federation	Numbers	%
Christians	118,127,000	82.1
Muslim	17,585,000	12.2
Hindu	43,000	0.0
Buddhist	543,000	0.4
Ethnoreligionist	1,014,000	0.7
Jewish	150,000	0.1
Bahai	19,600	0.0
Atheist	799,000	0.6
Agnostic	5,678,000	3.9
Other	5,270	0.0

*OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.*

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

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

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

There are two Muslim majority regions in Russia. The first one is the northern Caucasus (with areas such as Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia), and the second one is the region around the city of Kazan in central Russia (800 km east of Moscow). The northern Caucasus is a region well-known for its strict interpretation of Islam, while the Kazan region is more tolerant and relaxed. It is interesting to note that Islam reached Russia well before the country became Christian in 988.

## Notes on the current situation

- Since 2012, a number of legal restrictions and have been imposed in Russia. As there is a trend towards greater state control, it is likely that more such legislation will be passed in the coming years. As the country's ties to Western countries are becoming more strained, the Russian Federation may become increasingly isolated. This will particularly affect those Christians who belong to denominations regarded as Western. There continue to be outbursts of violence from radical Muslims. In particular for Christians with a Muslim background, the Caucasus and the region around the city of Kazan are expected to continue being difficult to live in.
- Russia is becoming less open. Although it has never been a Western-style, open democracy, new legislation is causing some freedoms that were gained after the collapse of the Soviet Union to be cut back. It is true that the regime is targeting the opposition (and Western influence), but there is a realistic chance that non-ROC Christians, will become increasingly affected too.
- On 20 April 2017 [Russia's Supreme Court](#) declared the Jehovah's Witness national headquarters in St Petersburg and all 395 local branches "extremist", banned all their activity immediately, and ordered their property to be seized by the state.

## External Links - WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

- Religious context: 2010 census  
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russia>
- Notes on the current situation: Russia's Supreme Court  
[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2274](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2274)

## WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

### Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

For the first time since WWL 2011 the Russian Federation made it into the Top 50 (at rank 41) with a score of 60 points.

### What type of persecution dominates?

**Islamic oppression:** In the Caucasus region Islamic militants are fighting against the Russian army to establish a Muslim emirate. Islam is also becoming increasingly influential in Tatarstan and threatening church life.

**Dictatorial paranoia:** Legislation in Russia is being adapted and restricted constantly. The government continues to favor the Russian Orthodox Church, at the expense of other religious Christian groups.

**Denominational protectionism:** Outreach activities by non-Orthodox denominations are looked upon with suspicion. These Christian groups are regarded as being alien to Russia.

### Who is driving persecution?

Most of the persecution of Christians in Russia comes from the Muslim environment. Family and friends of converts to Christianity, the local community and Islamic teachers object to evangelism among Muslims in the Muslim majority regions of Russia (i.e. the Northern Caucasus and the area in central Russia around the city of Kazan). Another source of pressure on Christians comes from government officials at various levels – mainly by imposing restrictive legislation.

### What it results in

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

### Violence

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

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

WWL 2018	01 Nov 2016 - 31 Oct 2017	0	10	20	1	0
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*Christians killed refers to the number of Christians killed for faith-related reasons (including state-sanctioned executions). Christians attacked refers to the number of Christians abducted, raped or otherwise sexually harassed, forced into marriage to non-Christians or otherwise physically or mentally abused (including beatings and death-threats) for faith-related reasons. Christians arrested refers to the number of Christians detained without trial or sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment or similar things for faith-related reasons. Churches attacked refers to the number of churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons. Christian-owned houses and shops attacked refers to the number of houses of Christians or other property (including shops and businesses of Christians) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons.*

## Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period

- On 18 February 2018 an Islamic militant attacked a Russian Orthodox group in Kizlyar, Dagestan. Five female Christians were killed while another five were injured. The Islamic State (IS) group claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement issued by the group's Amaq information agency. The statement provided no evidence to support the claim. (Source: [World Watch Monitor](#))
- On 20 May 2018 Islamic militants attacked the Russian Orthodox Archangel Michael Church in Grozny, Chechnya, killing one believer. The church's priest, Father Sergiy, said churchgoers heard shots outside and chants of "Allahu Akbar". (Source: [World Watch Monitor](#))
- Law enforcement agencies are increasing pressure on Protestants in Nizhny Novgorod Region. They are using both the so-called "anti-missionary" amendment and immigration law to punish churches and their members for such activities as inviting students to parties and posting videos of worship on social media. Judges fined and ordered the deportation from Russia of two African Christians at Nizhny Novgorod's medical academy for appearing in or reposting videos on the VK social network. The two deported students were permitted to stay in the country to complete their final exams, but were required to leave by 30 June 2018. (Source: [Forum 18](#))

## External Links - WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: World Watch Monitor  
<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/02/russia-extremist-identified-after-five-women-killed-in-dagestan-church-attack/>
- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: World Watch Monitor  
<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/coe/chechnya-seven-killed-in-orthodox-church-attack/>
- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: Forum 18  
[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2389](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2389)

## WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

### Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

### Position on World Watch List (WWL)

For the first time since WWL 2011 the Russian Federation made it into the Top 50 (at rank 41) with a score of 60 points, 9 more than in WWL 2018 when the country was outside the Top 50 and remained a so-called Persecution Watch Country.

### Persecution engines

Persecution engines: Russian Federation	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	EA	Weak
Denominational protectionism	DPR	Medium
Communist and post - Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Not at all

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

#### Islamic oppression (Strong):

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

#### Dictatorial paranoia (Strong):

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

#### Denominational protectionism (Medium):

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

## Drivers of persecution

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

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

### Drivers of Islamic oppression:

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

### Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia:

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

**Drivers of Denominational protectionism:**

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

**Context**

The Russian Federation is the largest country on earth. It stretches eleven time zones from Europe in the west all the way to the Bering Strait in the east. It is a secular country – after almost eighty years of Communist ideology - with religion playing a comparatively minor role.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 is increasingly regarded as an immense blow to the country's prestige. The Russian Federation is aiming to restore its former position as a world power. It is using a range of tactics to restore its influence in the former "colonies" in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Examples are economic support for the poorest nations in Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) and the Caucasus (Armenia); military assistance to Tajikistan; special tariffs for oil and gas for Belarus and Ukraine; playing the Russian nationalist card in Moldova, Ukraine, Kazakhstan; army campaigns in the Caucasus; closing a range of deals with China to decrease the country's dependency on Europe and the US.

For Christians - especially non-ROC Christians - the situation in the country has been becoming more difficult due to the implementation of a whole range of laws since 2012.

**Christian communities and how they are affected**

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

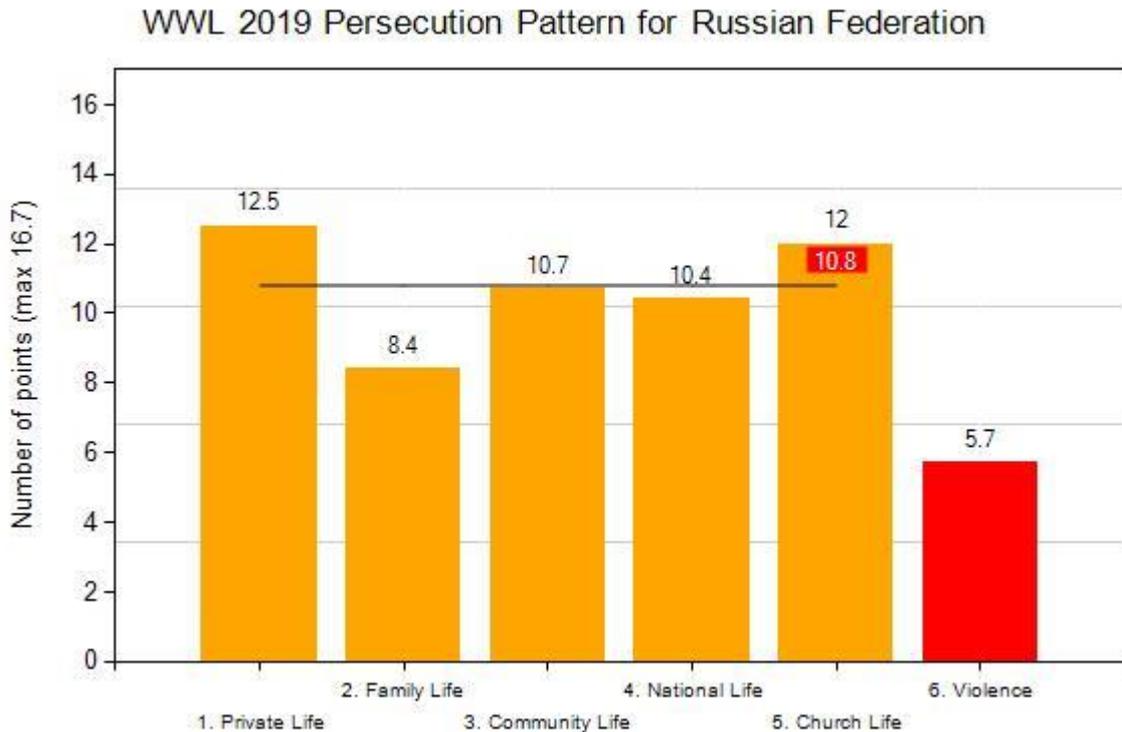
**Historical Christian communities:** After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the state lost its atheistic zeal and stopped persecuting Christians so severely. Religious prisoners were freed, and most churches belonging to Historical Christian communities could function more or less freely. This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

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

**Non-traditional Christian communities:** Non-traditional Christian groups have frequently been targeted by the Russian Orthodox Church for so-called sheep stealing – robbing the Orthodox Church

of its members. The ROC often considers Protestant groups as sects who are teaching heresy. The state regards these groups as un-Russian, Western spies. In Muslim areas, these Christians are often targeted because they are suspected of being active in evangelism.

## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence



The WWL 2019 Persecution pattern for the Russian Federation shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a high level (10.8), increasing from 9.9 in WWL 2018. The increase occurred in all *spheres of life* (except the *Family sphere of life*), an indication that pressure from both the government (*National and Church life*) and the Muslim community (*Private and Community life*) in Russia has risen.
- The *sphere of life* with the highest level of pressure is *Private life*, reflecting the very high pressure on converts exerted by their Muslim environment.
- The score for violence has now reached the category "very high", increasing from 2.0 in WWL 2018 to 5.7 in WWL 2019. The sharp increase is based mainly on two attacks against Christians in the northern Caucasus in which 6 Christians were killed and 2 churches were destroyed.

### Private sphere:

Russia has one region where very conservative Islam is dominant - the North Caucasus. Here pressure is very high for all Christians, but especially for converts with a Muslim background. Conversion is strongly opposed. Many Christian converts have fled this region over the past decades, while those who stayed have to be extremely careful not to draw attention to their Christian faith through openly displaying Christian symbols or materials, or by tuning into Christian media. Speaking about their faith with family or guests or meeting with other believers is very dangerous. The monitoring of Christians is carried out both by the state (FSB) and by the community in the Muslim majority regions. After a

conversion is discovered, the family will put pressure on the convert to give up his/her new faith. The first thing that they will do is to lock up the believer and put huge pressure on him/her to recant the faith – if this does not help, they may be killed.

**Family sphere:**

For converts from Islam in the North Caucasus region, all Christian ceremonies (including baptism) are impossible. So far there have been no problems burying converts, but this is because the local population has not known that the deceased had become Christians. Raising children according to Christian beliefs is difficult for converts in the North Caucasus, since all children are expected to learn about Islam. Children of known converts are put through a process of "retraining" by the wider family to make sure they know the right way to be Chechen (and therefore, Muslim). In the North Caucasus there have been cases where converts were put under house-arrest by their families to pressurize them into recanting their new faith. Spouses of converts are placed under pressure to file for divorce, and the children may be taken away from the convert. Converts can lose their inheritance rights.

**Community sphere:**

In the North Caucasus, Christians (and especially converts with a Muslim background) are often treated with suspicion in businesses, workplaces, schools and universities. Newer Protestant groups are closely monitored by the government, but in the North Caucasus converts from Islam are also monitored by their families. They face the threat of kidnapping and are regarded as traitors; they will not be allowed to participate in communal activities and often face problems at work. When it becomes known that a Muslim has become a Christian, the family, friends and community will use maximum pressure to make the convert recant his/her faith, including death threats. There are reports of Christian students being threatened and beaten by Muslim student groups. Christians have been forced to report to the police to be investigated, sometimes resulting in fines or criminal charges being made specifically due to their faith and the religious activities they are involved in.

**National sphere:**

Officially, Russia is a secular state, but in the Muslim regions, the political leaders are explicitly courting Sunni Islam. In the North Caucasus, Christians cannot hold public office. Since 2012, new legislation has been affecting churches - above all non-ROC churches and it is clear that the regime is openly courting the ROC to the disadvantage of other denominations (which are often regarded as foreign). On Russian TV channels and in printed media there is a permanent campaign against sects and Evangelicals who are criticized along with Satanists and Scientologists.

**Church sphere:**

Christians with a Muslim background in the North Caucasus region have to live their faith essentially in secret and are constantly hindered from meeting each other. In Russia as a whole, registration is currently not particularly problematic. Churches which do not register do this to avoid state influence. All Christians in the North Caucasus are hindered in organizing Christian activities inside and outside their buildings. In Russia as a whole, the FSB (state security successor to KGB) is watching the activities of churches (both registered and unregistered). Religious materials considered "extremist" are not only monitored, they are also confiscated. In the North Caucasus pastors and other Christian leaders have left the region because of being targeted. It is impossible to print Christian materials in the North Caucasus region, nor can materials be imported into the region. Also, it is not possible in this region for Christian groups to establish charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural institutions or associations.

**Violence:**

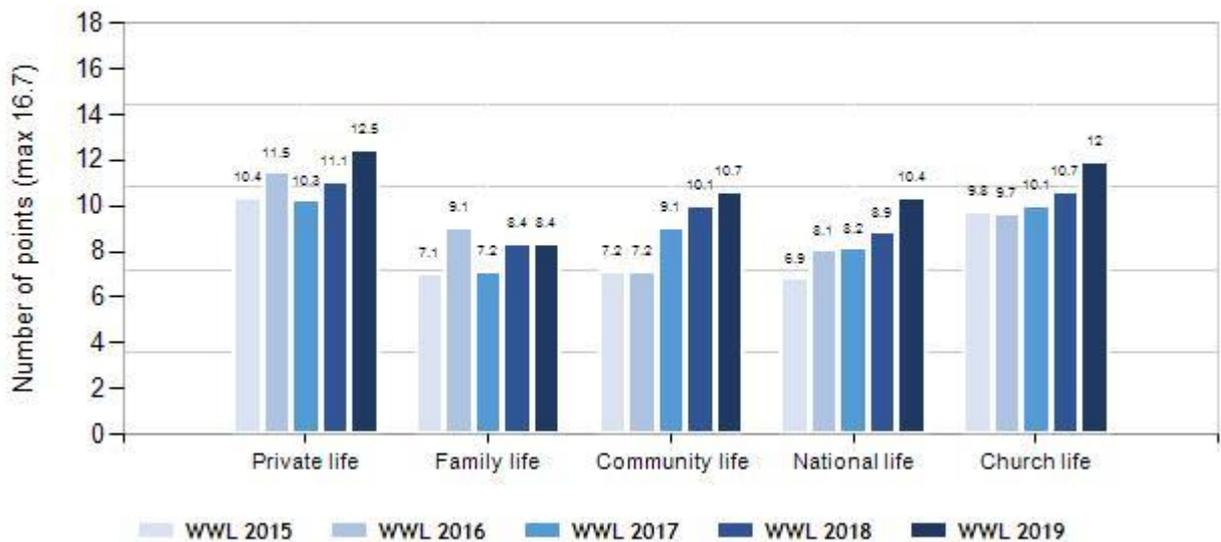
Normally, the number of violent incidents in Russia is relatively low and few (if any) Christians are killed. The WWL 2019 reporting period proved to be different. Among other incidents, 6 Russian Orthodox Christians were killed by Islamic militant attacks on churches in Dagestan and Chechnya and two African Christians were deported from Russia in June 2018.

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

**5 Year trends**

In virtually all *spheres of life*, pressure has gradually increased over the last five reporting periods (chart 1), reaching the highest levels in *Private life* and *Church life*. The continual rise in pressure on Christians can also clearly be seen in chart 2, where the average pressure has increased almost every reporting period from 8.3 in WWL 2015 to the very high level of 10.8 in WWL 2019. Chart 3 shows that the violence score has varied over the years and is currently at the highest level of all 5 reporting periods.

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



WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Pattern history: Russian Federation	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2019	10.8
2018	9.9
2017	9.0
2016	9.1
2015	8.3

## WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Profile for Russian Federation (Violence)



## Gender specific persecution

### Female:

In rural and Asian areas of the Russia, social pressure on Christian girls to get married and have a family force women into marriage with non-Christians. In these cases, women sometimes find themselves isolated in two ways: 1) from the non-Christian partner not sharing faith-based life, and 2) from the local ROC community that usually practices excommunication in the case of marriage to non-Christians. This social pressure can traumatize the further life of Christian women.

In Russia's Muslim regions, daily life is based on Islamic culture which gives women inferior status. Women are expected to show total submission to their parents and if married - to their husbands. This makes them more vulnerable to persecution - both as Christians and as women who challenge the existing order.

### Male:

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

Men are also the heads of their families and usually the main bread winners. When a Christian man becomes a target of persecution – through being fined or imprisoned - his whole family will suffer. Losing employment will affect the whole family. Church leaders are normally male - if he is persecuted in some way, this often has a negative effect on the church and can result in fear spreading among church members.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, equal rights irrespective of religious belief, and the rights to worship and profess one's religion. The law states government officials may prohibit the activity of a religious association for violating public order or engaging in "extremist activity". The law lists Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism as the country's four "traditional" religions and recognizes the special role of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). The law distinguishes between "religious groups", which have the right to conduct worship services but may not engage in many other activities, and two categories of "religious organizations", which obtain legal status through registration with the government to conduct a full range of religious and civil functions. The Supreme Court ruled to criminalize the activity of Jehovah's Witnesses as "extremist", effectively banning their activities and literature, and ordered their headquarters property to be liquidated. The authorities continued to detain and fine members of minority religious groups and minority religious organizations for alleged "extremism".

Examples:

- In February 2018, Asia News reported: The construction of a Mormon church in Novosibirsk was forbidden, despite Supreme Court ruling. (Source: [AsiaNews](#)).
- In April 2018, Forum 18 reported that Jehovah's Witnesses faced a wave of criminal prosecutions, one year after Russia's Supreme Court ruled that their activities should be banned. (Source: [Forum 18](#)).
- In May 2018, officers launched 28 raids on Jehovah's Witness homes, often forcing entry, threatening occupants with weapons and seizing literature and other items. (Source: [Forum 18](#)).
- On October 2018, a Krasnoyarsk court heavily fined a 24-year-old Muslim for meeting with others to study the works of the late Turkish Muslim theologian, Said Nursi. (Source: [Forum 18](#))

## Future outlook

**The political outlook:** The regime of President Vladimir Putin has not experienced any significant opposition in ruling Russia over the past years. Constitutional barriers to limit the number of terms a president could be in power were removed. No political changes are to be expected anytime soon.

**The outlook for Christians - through the lens of:**

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

**Conclusion:** Islamic pressure on converts and Protestants who are actively promoting their faith will remain very high in the Muslim majority regions of Russia. Russia's government may be expected to

impose more restrictions on freedom of religion in the country and the opposition against this will be very limited - and definitely not from the ROC.

### External Links - WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution of other religious minorities: AsiaNews  
<http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Wave-of-persecution-against-Mormons,-Jehovah's-Witnesses-and-Hindus-43073.html>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Forum 18  
[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2372](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2372)
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Forum 18  
[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2381](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2381)
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Forum 18  
[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2426](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2426)

## Additional Reports and Articles

### WWR in-depth reports

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

### Open Doors article(s) from the region

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

### World Watch Monitor news articles

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

### Recent country developments

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