

# WORLD WATCH LIST 2026

SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

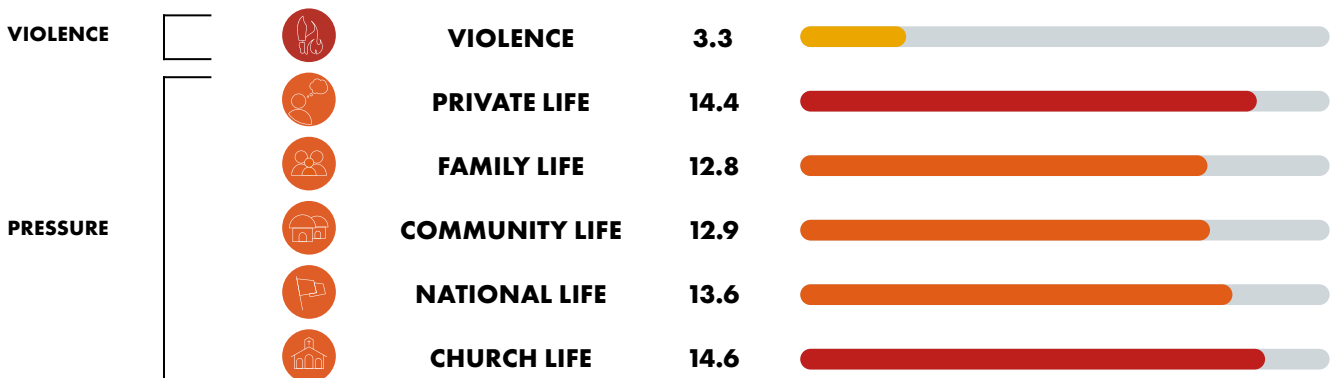
## TAJIKISTAN

WORLD WATCH LIST NO.  
**27**



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### LEVELS OF VIOLENCE AND PRESSURE



Each of the six categories is scored out of a maximum of 16.7 points. The categories added together total 100 points (6 x 16.7 = 100).

### Key findings

The government puts pressure on all “deviating” groups by tightening existing laws and enforcing them strictly. Indigenous Christians with a Muslim background bear the brunt of rights violations, both at the hands of the State and from family and the community. Russian Orthodox churches experience fewer problems from the government, as they do not usually attempt to make contact with the Tajik population. The youth law has left Christians (and other religious minorities) in legal limbo, as it is not clear what kind of youth work is still allowed.

## Quick facts

### LEADER

President Emomali Rahmon

### POPULATION

10,332,000

### NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

55,000<sup>1</sup>

### MAIN RELIGION

Islam

### GOVERNMENT

Presidential Republic



## Context

Religious context	Number of adherents	% of adherents in country
Christians	55,000	0.5
Muslims	10,302,000	98.0
Agnostics/Atheists	140,100	1.3
Others	19,900	0.2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source<sup>2</sup>

Tajikistan has the highest percentage of Muslims in Central Asia, but it would be wrong to call Tajikistan a Muslim country. Seventy years of atheism during the Soviet era have left their mark, and the secular government keeps Islam firmly under control. Most citizens follow Islamic culture rather than strict teachings. Most Christians are Russian Orthodox (ethnic Russians); around 3,000 are Tajik converts to Christianity. No religious activities beyond state-run and controlled institutions are allowed and Protestants in particular (who are seen as extremists, unlike Orthodox Christians) experience significant violations.

A new law regulating religious affairs was implemented in August 2011. It prohibits all religious youth work with citizens under 18 years of age. This has had a huge impact on church activities since it is estimated that about 50% of all Christians are in this age category. In January 2018, amendments to the [law on religion](#) came into force, which included allowing the state to increase religious organizations'

requirements to report all their activities and seek state approval for the appointment of all Imams. On 6 October 2021, Tajikistan introduced new punitive measures against the “underground” religious education of children. Amendments were made to the penal code, so that giving religious lessons illegally, including teaching online, can lead to up to three years in prison.

The [USCIRF 2025 Tajikistan Chapter](#) classified Tajikistan as a recommended Country of Particular Concern (CPC) and stated: “In 2024, religious freedom conditions in Tajikistan remained extremely poor. Throughout the year, the government enforced draconian laws and tightened its already repressive Soviet-era control over the religious practices of all groups. In particular, authorities targeted Ismaili Shi’a Muslims and others who deviated from the state’s preferred interpretation of Hanafi Sunni Islam through harassment, detainment, prison sentences, and transnational repression.”

Most Christians belong to ethnic minorities – Russian and Ukrainian. The number of Christians in Tajikistan dropped sharply in the 1990s because many Russians and Ukrainians left the country after it became independent.

<sup>1</sup> Gina A. Zurlo, ed., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2025

<sup>2</sup> Other refers to all the rest to make up 100%: Gina A. Zurlo, ed., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2025

## Main sources of persecution and discrimination

### DICTATORIAL PARANOIA

Only state-controlled institutions are allowed. Pressure from the authorities has increased since 2015, causing a rise in the number of raids on meetings, Christian materials confiscated and an increase in Christians being fined and interrogated. Protestants are regarded as dangerous followers of an alien sect with the aim of destroying the current political system.

### ISLAMIC OPPRESSION BLENDED WITH CLAN OPPRESSION

If indigenous citizens (who are Muslim) convert to Christianity, they experience pressure and occasionally physical violence from their families and communities to force them to return to their former faith, especially in rural areas. Some converts are put in domestic incarceration or expelled from their homes. Many choose to keep their faith secret.



## How the situation varies by region

Rights violations targeting all Christian communities, which is also carried out by government officials, can occur all over the country. Pressure from family, friends and the community on converts is stronger outside urban areas.

## Who is affected?

### COMMUNITIES OF EXPATRIATE CHRISTIANS

This category is not included in the WWL scoring and analysis

### HISTORICAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

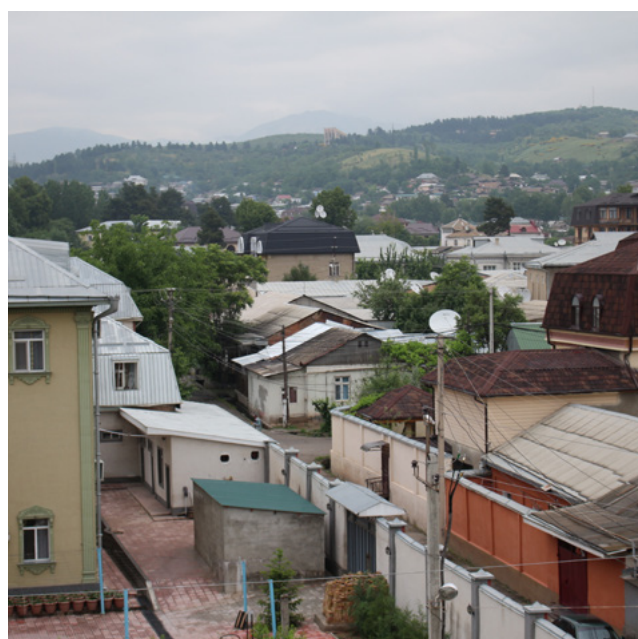
Historical Christians include the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). They are not involved in evangelism among Tajiks so they can function without much interference since the Tajik regime does not consider them a threat.

### CONVERTS TO CHRISTIANITY

Christian converts with a Muslim background are under strong pressure from family and community as conversion is seen as an ethnic, national and religious betrayal, which brings shame to the family.

### NON-TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

After converts, this category experiences the most violations due to active evangelism. Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal groups suffer from many raids, threats, arrests and fines by the authorities.





## How are men and women differently affected?

### WOMEN

Men and women are equal under law, but traditional culture puts women in a subservient position to men and domestic violence is widespread. Female converts from Islam are particularly vulnerable to intolerance, discrimination and violence, as women do not have the independence or freedom to choose their own religion. Women risk house arrest, beatings, rejection, harassment and forced marriage. If already married, domestic violence and forced divorce is likely. The state also prohibits religious clothes or symbols, including those worn by female Christians.

#### **Female typical pressure points:**

- Abduction
- Forced divorce
- Forced marriage
- Forced out of home – expulsion
- Incarceration by family (house arrest)
- Violence – physical
- Violence – sexual

### MEN

Men in Tajikistan normally hold leadership roles within families and churches and are therefore targeted in this capacity. They are pressured by the police via interrogation, fines and the disruption of meetings. State violations also include searches, detention, interrogation, confiscation, fines and imprisonment. When detained, men suffer verbal and physical abuse, threats, beatings and pressure to inform. Known converts can lose jobs and suffer beatings, discrimination and ostracization at the hands of their communities and families. Mandatory military service also exposes Christians to persecution; refusing military service on religious grounds is not possible, and all men between the age of 18-27 must complete up to 2 years of military service.

#### **Male typical pressure points:**

- Economic harassment via work/job/business
- Economic harassment via fines
- Imprisonment by government
- Military/militia conscription/service against conscience
- Travel bans/restrictions on movement
- Violence – psychological
- Violence – verbal



## WWL 5 year trend

WWL Year	Position on Open Doors World Watch List	Persecution rounded score out of 100
2026	27	72
2025	39	68
2024	46	66
2023	44	66
2022	45	65

The score of 72 points in WWL 2026 is 4 points higher than in WWL 2025. This resulted in a rise of 12 ranks for Tajikistan. The score for average pressure increased from 13.3 points in WWL 2025 to 13.7 points in WWL 2026. The scores slightly increased Private, Family, Community and National life, and rose by almost 1 point in Church life. The score of violent incidents increased by 1.5 points as more incidents were reported.

## Examples of violence in the reporting period

For security reasons, no details can be published here.

WWL Year	Churches or Christian buildings attacked or closed	Christians detained	Christians physically or mentally abused	Christians forced to flee their countries
2026	3	5	36	7
2025	1	5	20	2

*This table includes only a few categories of faith-based violence during the reporting period – for full results see the violence section of the country’s corresponding WWL Persecution Dynamics. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as minimum figures. In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10\*, 100\* or 1000\*) is given which in reality could be significantly higher. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000\*, 100,000\* and 1,000,000\*.*





### PRIVATE LIFE

Conversion is officially allowed, but it is viewed as a betrayal of family and culture. It can lead to violence and pressure, as community members try to make converts recant. Many converts choose to keep their faith secret.

### FAMILY LIFE

When a parent converts to Christianity, family members will try to take custody of the children to raise them according to Islamic principles. The law does not permit under-18s to take part in activities linked to a church or a mosque. Christian children experience slander from community members, and Muslim children are often kept from having contact with them. All children are required to study the “History of Religions” at high school, which is taught from a Sunni Muslim perspective.

### COMMUNITY LIFE

Non-Orthodox Christians are monitored by members of their community and local state officials by methods including phone-tapping. They can be

harassed, interrogated and threatened. This is particularly true for known converts.

### NATIONAL LIFE

The Constitution protects religious freedom. However, the Religion Law of 2009/2011 (with its amendments in January 2018) requires compulsory registration of all religious organizations. Any church activities by non-registered groups are illegal. There is a ban on unlicensed religious education and censorship of any religious materials. The law on parents’ responsibilities prohibits young people under 18 from participating in the activities of religious organizations.

### CHURCH LIFE

The August 2011 law on religion prohibits any church youth work. The government must approve the production, importation, sale and distribution of religious materials by registered religious groups, which in effect is a ban on all religious materials used by unregistered religious groups. There are restrictions on foreign Christians visiting Tajikistan. They need a special visa, which is very difficult to obtain.



## International obligations & rights violated

**Tajikistan has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights under the following international treaties:**

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

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

- Christian converts are ostracized and faced with opposition and violence by their families and communities (ICCPR Art.18)
- Christian children are not allowed to participate in church activities (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Ownership of religious literature is severely restricted beyond international permitted limitations (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)
- Christian female converts are forced to marry non-Christian men and pressured to renounce their faith (ICCPR Art. 23; CEDAW Art. 16 and ICESCR Art.10)

## Situation of other religious minorities

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





## Open Doors in Tajikistan

Open Doors provides immediate aid to Central Asian believers when they are imprisoned, excluded from families and communities, and deprived of livelihood and employment because of their faith in Christ. Open Doors also strengthens the persecuted church in Central Asia primarily through:

- Literature distribution
- Prayer support
- Biblical training
- Children/youth training
- Women's ministry
- Presence ministry
- Social and medical ministry
- Vocational training and micro credit
- Socio-economic development projects, such as rehabilitation centers





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## ABOUT THIS DOSSIER

- The content of this Country Dossier is based on detailed analysis carried out by World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. This dossier may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © 2026 Open Doors International.
- All 50 Country Dossiers – along with the latest update of WWL Methodology – can be accessed [here](#).
- The WWL 2026 reporting period was 01 October 2024 - 30 September 2025.

*All photos in this dossier are for illustrative purposes.*