

WORLD WATCH LIST 2022

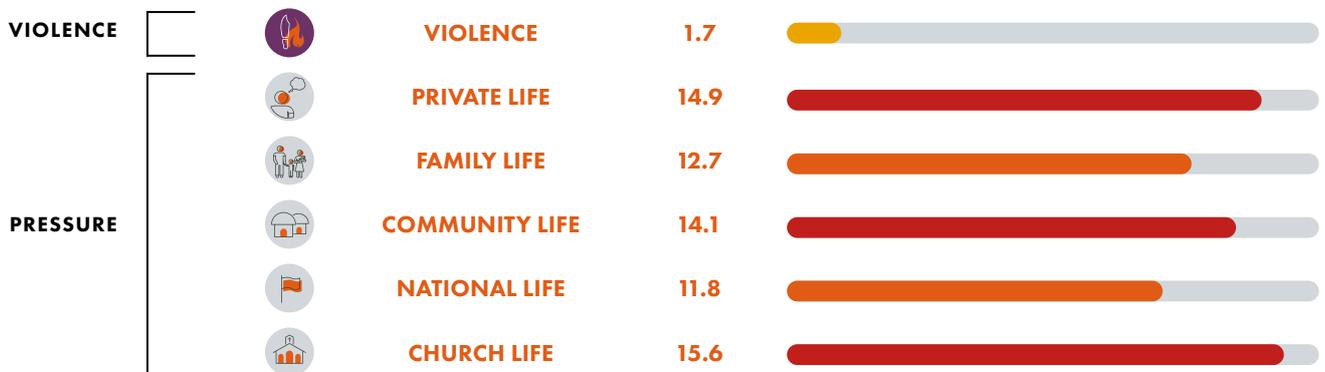
SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

WORLD WATCH LIST NO.
21

Uzbekistan



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).¹ Red = extreme level, orange = very high, yellow = high

Key findings

All Christians experience some form of pressure and violence on the grounds of their faith. Russian Orthodox churches experience the fewest problems from the government as they do not usually attempt to make contact with the Uzbek population. It is the indigenous Christian converts with a Muslim background who most often experience violations from the state, family and community. Where churches have not been registered, Christians suffer from police raids, threats, arrests and fines.

¹World Watch Research measures pressure across all spheres of life as well as violence (full methodology [here](#) – password: freedom).

Quick facts

LEADER

President Shavkat Mirziyoyev

POPULATION

33,649,000

NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

347,000 (1.0%)²

MAIN RELIGION

Islam

GOVERNMENT

Presidential Republic (highly authoritarian)

Context

Main Religions	Number of adherents	Percentage
Christians	347,000	1.0
Muslims	32,356,000	96.2
Atheists	189,000	0.6
Agnostics	640,000	1.9

Source³

Uzbekistan gained independence in 1991. All power lies in the hands of President Mirziyoyev (who has ruled since 2016) and opposition movements and independent media are banned.

The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCRIF) designated Uzbekistan a 'Country of Particular Concern' during 2006-2017, after which it was moved to the Special Watch List category in the light of progress on religious freedom. Whilst registered churches have seen slight improvements, the situation has not changed for other groups, especially converts with a Muslim background. Christians are targeted for raids, arrests and oppression. Some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) claim the government continues to torture people arrested and jailed on suspicion

of religious extremism or for participating in underground Islamic activity.

Although Uzbekistan's main religion is Islam, predominantly Sunni, it would be incorrect to call Uzbekistan a Muslim country. Seventy years of atheism during the Soviet era have left a deep influence and the secular government keeps Islam under tight control, with citizens following Islamic culture rather than adhering strictly to Islamic teachings. The small Christian minority is weak due to much division between the various denominations.

How the situation varies by region

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

Who is affected?

Communities of expatriate Christians

This category is not included in the WWL scoring and analysis.

Historical Christian communities

The Russian Orthodox Church abides by the limitations set out by the government and is therefore left more or less undisturbed. Church services may be monitored, but they are conducted unhindered, and members can meet without fear of arrest. However, the printing or importing of Christian materials is restricted.

Converts to Christianity

Christian converts from a Muslim background suffer severe violations from the state and pressure from family and community.

Non-traditional Christian communities

After converts, this category of Christians is the second most targeted group, especially when the churches have not been registered. Evangelical and Pentecostal groups suffer from raids, threats, arrests and fines.

²Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

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Main sources of persecution and discrimination

Dictatorial paranoia:

No religious activities beyond state-controlled institutions are allowed. Protestants are frequently branded as 'extremists' and it is thought their aim is to spy on and destroy the current political system. From this perspective, Protestants need not only to be controlled but, if necessary, eradicated.

Islamic oppression blended with clan oppression:

If indigenous (Muslim) citizens convert to Christianity, they are likely to experience pressure and occasionally physical violence from families and local community to force them to return to their former faith. Some converts are locked up by their families, beaten and even expelled from their communities. Local mullahs preach against them, adding pressure. As a result, most converts will do their best to hide their faith.

How are men and women differently affected?

WOMEN

Traditional Islamic culture and patriarchal norms place women lower than men and subservient within the family context. Women are not free to choose their own religion and face severe opposition to conversion. They risk house arrest, denied access to social networks, and verbal, physical, psychological and sexual violence. Abduction and forced marriage are common, with sexual violence within marriage often underacknowledged and normalized. If already married, forced divorce and denial of possessions is a risk. Persecutors target women to inflict harm both on them and on their husbands and families.

- Abduction
- Denied access to social community/networks
- Denied inheritance or possessions
- Economic harassment via fines
- Economic harassment via work/job/business
- Forced divorce
- Forced marriage
- Incarceration by family/house arrest
- Incarceration by government
- Violence - death
- Violence - physical
- Violence - psychological
- Violence - sexual
- Violence - verbal

MEN

Church leaders, who are mostly men, are common targets for rights violations. They can be fined, detained, denied exit visas, or put under house arrest. This is a deliberate tactic, creating a ripple effect of fear through their congregations. Leaders of unregistered

churches in particular are insulted, beaten and humiliated. Christian men face continual inequality; they are denied promotions, lose jobs and endure state monitoring. Local Muslim communities will obstruct Christian businesses and mandatory military service exposes men to harassment. Male converts face verbal, physical, and psychological abuse.

- Discrimination/harassment via education
- Denied inheritance or possessions
- Economic harassment via work/job/business
- Economic harassment via fines
- Incarceration by family/house arrest
- Imprisonment by government
- Travel bans/restrictions on movement
- Violence - physical
- Violence - psychological



WWL 5 year trend

WWL Year	Position on Open Doors World Watch List	Persecution score out of 100
2022	21	70.82
2021	21	71.30
2020	18	72.97
2019	17	73.57
2018	16	73.20

The score is the same as in WWL 2021 with 71 points. The score in all spheres of life went down slightly, except in Community life. The level of violence in this sphere (very high) compensated for the slight decrease in the other categories. The situation for Christians in Uzbekistan remains serious.

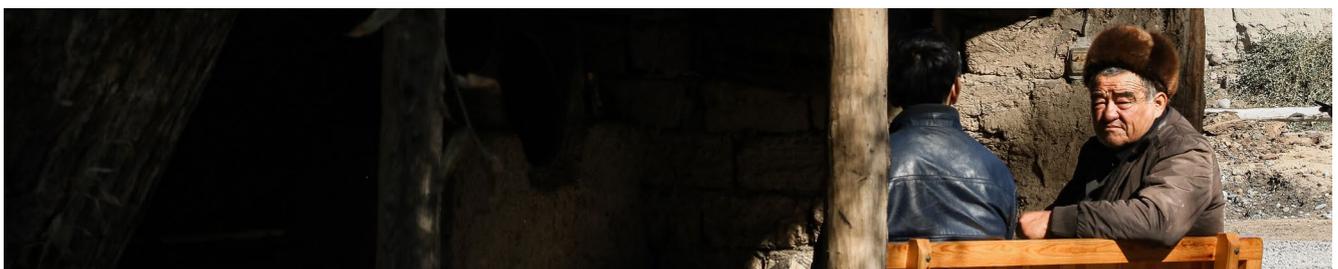
Examples of violence in the reporting period

- **In December 2020**, Tatyana Akhmadiyeva’s home and that of her neighbors were raided and religious materials were confiscated. Tatyana was arrested. She was later fined two weeks of average wages.
- The house of a Christian family in one village was burned by the Muslim community. Fortunately, nobody was in when the fire started, but the house burned completely and almost all the property was destroyed.
- Our partners reported that at least 64 converts faced different kinds of pressure and persecution. This included physical and mental abuse, unfair attitudes, and humiliation in their family, community, work and study. The majority of reported cases are persecution in the family sphere of life, such as beating, threats and isolation.

These incidents were reported by local sources. Further, more specific details cannot be given for security reasons.

WWL Year	Christians detained	Christians physically or mentally abused	Christians’ private property damaged or confiscated	Christians internally displaced
2022	5	64	2	8
2021	6	21	0	4

This table includes only a few categories of faith-based violence during the reporting period - see [here](#) for full results. 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.



Private life

It is already very risky for a convert to discuss their Christian faith in society, including with members of the family. The state views such conversations as evangelism which is punishable by arrest and imprisonment. Discovery of the possession of Christian materials can lead to family exile, community harassment and violence, and government arrest.

Family life

Most Uzbekistanis are Muslims. As a result, wider Muslim society (family, friends, community) will pressurize children of converts to receive Islamic teaching. On the other hand, anti-religious propaganda is foisted on students at schools and universities. Alienated and treated as hostile both by extended family and the state, the only place for converts to provide Christian teaching to their children is at home, since all youth work through churches is illegal.

Community life

Christians are under constant siege by both wider Islamic society and the secular state. Converts are monitored by family, community and police, who regularly stop and search them to ensure intimidation. Protestant groups are actively reported to the government and are often victims of police raids, fines, arrests and violence.

National life

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

The authorities can generally expect to act with impunity. Harm caused to converts and Christians accused of evangelism by the Muslim community will almost certainly happen with impunity.

Church life

Religious work among youth and minors, including Sunday schools, is strictly prohibited.

The criminal code punishes proselytism with up to three years in prison (source: International Religious Freedom Report for 2017 Uzbekistan). It is therefore dangerous for churches to openly accept converts.

International obligations & rights violated

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

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

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

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

Situation of other religious minorities

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



Open Doors in Uzbekistan

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

- Literature distribution
- Prayer support
- Biblical training
- Children/youth training
- Women's ministry
- Advocacy and awareness training (SSTS)
- Presence ministry
- Medical ministry
- Vocational training
- Social-economic development projects

About this brief

- This brief is a summary of the full Country Dossier produced annually by World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. It may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © 2021 Open Doors International.
- The WWL 2022 reporting period was 01 October 2020 - 30 September 2021.
- The full Country Dossier for this country can be accessed [here](#) (password: freedom). The latest update of WWL methodology, as well as the complete WWL 2022 ranking and reports, can be found [here](#) (password: freedom).

All photos in this dossier are for illustrative purposes.
