

FINAL WWL 2019 COUNTRY DOSSIER

UZBEKISTAN

LEVEL 3/EMBARGO

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

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Introduction

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Introduction

World Watch List Uzbekistan	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2019	74	17
WWL 2018	73	16
WWL 2017	71	16
WWL 2016	70	15
WWL 2015	69	15

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 Uzbekistan

Link for general background information

See BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16218112>

Recent country history

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

In the presidential elections on 4 December 2016, Uzbekistan's interim president Shavkat Mirziyoyev became the second president of Uzbekistan. While the new government opened up towards its neighbors and Russia, the restrictions on religious freedom did not change.

The religious landscape

Uzbekistan is the most populated country in Central Asia and the main religion in the country is Islam. According to the World Christian Database (WCD 2018) 95.5% of the population is Muslim – predominantly Sunni. However, it would be wrong to call Uzbekistan a Muslim country. 70 years of atheism during the Soviet era have left a deep influence. The government (the heirs of the atheist Soviets) is staunchly secular and keeps Islam under tight control, with citizens following Islamic culture rather than adhering strictly to Islamic teachings.

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

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

The small Christian minority of just 1.1% of the population is weak due to much division and little cooperation between the various denominations. Unfortunately there are but few exceptions to this and it plays into the hands of the government.

The political landscape

Uzbekistan has a constitution and parliament, but in fact all power lies in the hands of the president. All opposition movements and independent media are essentially banned. From 1 September 1991 the country was ruled by the former Communist Party Secretary Islam Karimov until his death on 2 September 2016. In the ensuing presidential elections on 4 December 2016, Mirziyoyev became Uzbekistan's second president.

In the decades of President Karimov's rule, Uzbekistan withdrew from a number of regional bodies, such as the Eurasian Economic Union, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and the Economic

Cooperation Organization. Uzbekistan was wary of too much influence from Russia, but the developments in Ukraine since 2014 have made the regime aware it cannot act as independently as it would like. Russia wrote off a large debt of Uzbekistan in December 2014, but such measures of course have consequences.

The relationships with neighboring republics Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan used to be tense. There have been ethnic clashes between Uzbeks, Tajiks and Kyrgyz in the past few years, but the main reason for political tension is the water supply. Uzbekistan depends highly on water from the Syr-Darya and Amu-Darya rivers for its cotton harvest. These rivers enter Uzbekistan via Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and both countries are considering making use of the rivers for energy by constructing dams. Uzbekistan fears this will severely damage its main crop and has threatened with war should water be diverted away from Uzbekistan. However, since Mirziyoyev took over as president, relations with neighboring states have improved.

Uzbekistan's constitution provides for freedom of religion or belief and separation of government and religion. Constitutional rights may not encroach on lawful interests, rights, and freedoms of other citizens, the state, or society. The law allows for restricting religious activities when necessary to maintain national security, the social order, or morality. The law requires religious groups to register with the government and declares religious activities of unregistered groups to be illegal. It bans a number of religious groups as "extremist." The law restricts public speech or proselytism, censors religious literature, and limits home possession of religious materials of all types and format. Raids on meetings (of unregistered groups), legal and illegal searches, and the seizure from private residences of outlawed religious material (including cell phones and laptops claimed to contain religious material) resulted in a combination of fines, corrective labor, and prison sentences. (Source: [IRF 2017](#)) President Mirziyoyev has simply continued the harsh oppression of religious freedom that Christians experienced under Karimov.

The socio-economic landscape

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

Corruption is endemic at all levels of administration and government. The power groups within the regime have no interest in losing their opportunity of making money. The changes in government since December 2016 do not seem to have brought any action against this. Another social phenomenon is that more than one quarter of the Uzbek population is younger than fourteen. This so-called youth-bulge puts massive pressure on the government to create new job opportunities every year. It also means that Uzbekistan will be facing huge changes in the not too distant future as the majority of the population will no longer have any affinities with the Soviet past. Instead, many young Uzbeks are inspired by the activities of radical Islamic groups like the Islamic State group (IS). It is estimated that hundreds are currently fighting with IS. In September 2014 an IS flag was displayed from a bridge in Tashkent. Thousands of suspected members of these groups have been imprisoned and the Uzbek government has sought Russian assistance in the fight against Islamic militants.

Thanks to the former Soviet educational system practically every citizen in Uzbekistan is literate. This means that people who are interested in the Christian message can receive materials in their own

language. The restrictions imposed by the government (all materials must be approved and only registered groups may be active) mean that most work must be done unofficially.

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

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

Concluding remarks

Despite the change in leadership since the death of President Islam Karimov on 2 September 2016, very little has changed for Christians in Uzbekistan. All existing restrictions in the country's legislation have remained intact - and so has the surveillance and interference of various state agents (secret services, police etc.). Meetings of Christians continued to be raided, religious materials continued to be confiscated and Christians continued to be detained for periods of up to 10-15 days.

The policy of the previous president to follow an independent course seems to have been abandoned. Uzbekistan is trying to improve its relationships with its neighbors and President Mirziyoyev has paid visits to practically all other Central Asian countries and Russia. Despite this, Uzbekistan will most likely remain a very tightly governed country with many freedoms (political, religious, media etc.) continuing to be restricted.

External Links - WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Uzbekistan

- The political landscape: IRF 2017
<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2017&dliid=281040>

WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

How many Christians?

Pop 2018	Christians	Chr%
32,365,000	349,000	1.1

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

How did Christians get there?

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

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

What church networks exist today?

Church networks: Uzbekistan	Christians	%
Orthodox	208,000	59.6
Catholic	3,500	1.0
Protestant	43,800	12.6
Independent	87,200	25.0
Unaffiliated	5,800	1.7
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
Total	348,300	99.8
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	9,000	2.6
Renewalist movement	77,800	22.3

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)

Most Christians belong to ethnic minorities - mainly Russian and Korean. Large-scale Russian emigration explains the negative overall growth rate of Christianity in Uzbekistan (-1.6%). One of the major problems for Christians in Uzbekistan (and the other countries in Central Asia) is the fact that there is much division and little cooperation and between the various denominations. This makes the Church weak and plays into the hands of the government.

Communities of expatriate Christians do not exist in Uzbekistan for inclusion in WWL analysis.

The historical Christian communities are by far the largest category of Christians in Uzbekistan with the biggest denomination being the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). The ROC makes up about 0.35% of the population, but is suffering from the emigration of Russian Christians. Today, the Orthodox population is only 10% of what it was in the 1980s. The Roman Catholic Church is much smaller, only 0.01%. Traditional Protestant churches in Uzbekistan are represented by the Lutheran church (mostly German). Altogether, these churches account for less than 0.4% of the Uzbek population.

Converts to Christianity number approximately 30,000 (i.e. about 0.1% of the Uzbek population). The growth of the indigenous church continues. Some of the Uzbek Christians have developed a vision to reach out to the Uzbek people in Afghanistan and Turkmenistan and are active in those areas too. Many of the Uzbek Christians have faced opposition from the moment they left Islam, but persevere in their faith in spite of their hardships.

The non-traditional Christian communities make up about 0.3% of the Uzbek population. Churches belonging to this group are the Baptists, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Charismatics, Full Gospel and others. This group is the most active in outreach activities, and as a result it is this group that is facing most of the persecution in Uzbekistan.

Religious context

Religious Context: Uzbekistan	Numbers	%
Christians	349,000	1.1
Muslim	30,893,000	95.5
Hindu	810	0.0
Buddhist	45,000	0.1
Ethnoreligionist	62,500	0.2
Jewish	2,900	0.0
Bahai	890	0.0
Atheist	228,000	0.7
Agnostic	781,000	2.4
Other	1,730	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)

Uzbeks make up the majority (80%) of the total population. Other ethnic groups include Russians 2%, Tajiks 5% (official estimate and disputed), Kazakhs 3%, Karakalpaks 2.5% and Tatars 1.5% (1996 estimates from the [CIA World Factbook](#)). There is some controversy about the percentage of the Tajik population. While official figures from the government put the number at 5%, some Western experts estimate the number to be more in the region of 20%–30%.

Notes on the current situation

The persecution of Christians in Uzbekistan tends to be heavy-handed. There were reports of raids on religious meetings, torture, beatings, denial of religious practice, and other forms of harsh treatment for prisoners whom the government regards as "religious extremists".

Uzbekistan is the only country in Central Asia that has an official Bible Society. Officially, the government has given permission to publish, import and distribute religious literature, but state control on each and every move of this organization is so huge that the Bible Society only appears to exist on paper.

External Links - WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

- How did Christians get there?: Nestorian Christianity
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_the_East
- Religious context: CIA World Factbook
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/uz.html>

WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

What type of persecution dominates?

Dictatorial paranoia: No religious activities beyond state-run and state-controlled institutions are allowed. It is very common that members of Protestant churches are regarded as followers of an alien sect aiming to depose the government. Hence the need for them to be controlled and eradicated.

Islamic oppression: Indigenous Muslims converting to Christianity experience pressure and occasionally physical violence from 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 also preach against them.

Who is driving persecution?

There are two main drivers of persecution in Uzbekistan - the State and the Muslim environment. State persecution comes in the form of police, secret services and local authorities monitoring religious activities by various means (bugging homes, tapping phones, infiltrating groups etc.) and attending church services. State authorities regularly raid non-registered churches. The general Islamic culture makes life for converts to Christianity particularly difficult.

What it results in

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

Violence

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

Uzbekistan	Reporting period	Christians killed	Christians attacked	Christians arrested	Churches attacked	Christian-owned houses and shops attacked
WWL 2019	01 Nov 2017 - 31 Oct 2018	0	40	40	0	13
WWL 2018	01 Nov 2016 - 31 Oct 2017	0	21	25	0	10

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 19 November 2017 14 officials from various state agencies raided the private home of Stanislav Kim in Urgench in Khorezm Region (north-western Uzbekistan). Nine of the 10 adults at the meeting, including Kim, were arrested and taken to Urgench police station. Baptists complained that those arrested were interrogated for two hours, forced to write statements, threatened and physically harassed. (Source: [Forum 18](#))
- On 24 May 2018 Nabijon Bolikulov was jailed in Karshi for five days and three fellow Baptists were fined for meeting for worship without state permission. The Judge told Bolikulov: "Do your prayers at home. It is against the law of our state to meet for worship without state registration." (Source: [Forum 18](#))
- The Uzbek government has a special department for monitoring religious activity and censoring religious literature.
- It is difficult to register new churches and the registration rules for already existing religious communities have become more difficult.

External Links - WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: Forum 18
http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2341
- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: Forum 18
http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2388

WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 74 points, Uzbekistan ranked 17th in WWL 2019, a 1 point rise in comparison to WWL 2018. Despite the change in government leadership since the death of President Islam Karimov in September 2016, little has changed for Christians in Uzbekistan. Pressure is at an extreme level particularly in the *Private* and *Church spheres of life*. Christians continue to suffer from the authoritarian government's tight control.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines: Uzbekistan	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	EA	Not at all
Denominational protectionism	DPR	Very weak
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 (long version).

Dictatorial paranoia (Very strong):

No religious activities beyond state-run and state-controlled institutions are allowed. Protestants are frequently branded as "extremists" for their practice of religion outside state-sanctioned structures. It is very common that members of Protestant churches are regarded as followers of an alien sect that has only one goal, namely to spy on and destroy the current political system. From this perspective they need to be not only controlled, but if necessary, even eradicated. Security forces have stepped up monitoring measures in order to find "extremists". This has also affected Christians and churches.

Islamic oppression (Strong):

If indigenous citizens (who are Muslim) convert to Christianity, they are likely to experience pressure and occasionally physical violence from their families, friends and local community to force them to return to their former faith. Some converts are locked up by their families for long periods, beaten and may eventually be expelled from their communities. Local mullahs preach against them, so adding pressure. As a result, most converts will do their best to hide their faith – they become so-called secret believers.

Drivers of persecution

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

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

Drivers of Islamic oppression:

- At the community level there is a link between *government officials* and Muslim pressure. Often, active Muslims and local officials know each other. Therefore, the pressure on converts is stronger at the community level than at the state level, where officials claim that they are secular.
- *Uzbek ethnic leaders*, with the support of the authorities, encourage all the forms of persecution mentioned above. Mahalla community groupings have been provided government sanction in many cases to carry out the state's persecution of Christians, particularly to prohibit missionary activity.
- *Muslim clerics* are open in their hostility to especially non-Orthodox Christians and particularly against converts from Islam.
- *Normal citizens*: In the case of conversion, converts are persecuted severely by the local community and religious leaders.
- *Extended family*: Pressure from family, friends and community are extremely high on converts, especially in the countryside. This will lead to threats, beatings, house arrest, ostracism.

Context

Uzbekistan is ruled by one of the harshest dictatorships in Central Asia. The regime will do everything possible to stay in power – all forms of opposition and deviations from the norm will be ruthlessly attacked. This has not changed since the death of President Islam Karimov on 2 September 2016. Christianity is regarded as an alien and destabilizing factor. On top of this, Christians with a Muslim background experience additional pressure from their social and cultural environment.

The government uses the existence of radical Islamic groups to justify its total control over society by claiming that these are a constant threat to the country – a claim that is grossly exaggerated. So far, few, if any, jihadists have returned to Uzbekistan from the battlefields in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan.

The secret police closely monitors all religious activities in the country and informers have infiltrated all religious groups. House church meetings are often targeted for raids, and those present are then harassed, detained, interrogated and fined; religious materials found on the premises will be confiscated and destroyed. Short sentences of up to 15 days imprisonment are common for Christians detained by police. Christians are rarely given long-term prison sentences.

Christian communities and how they are affected

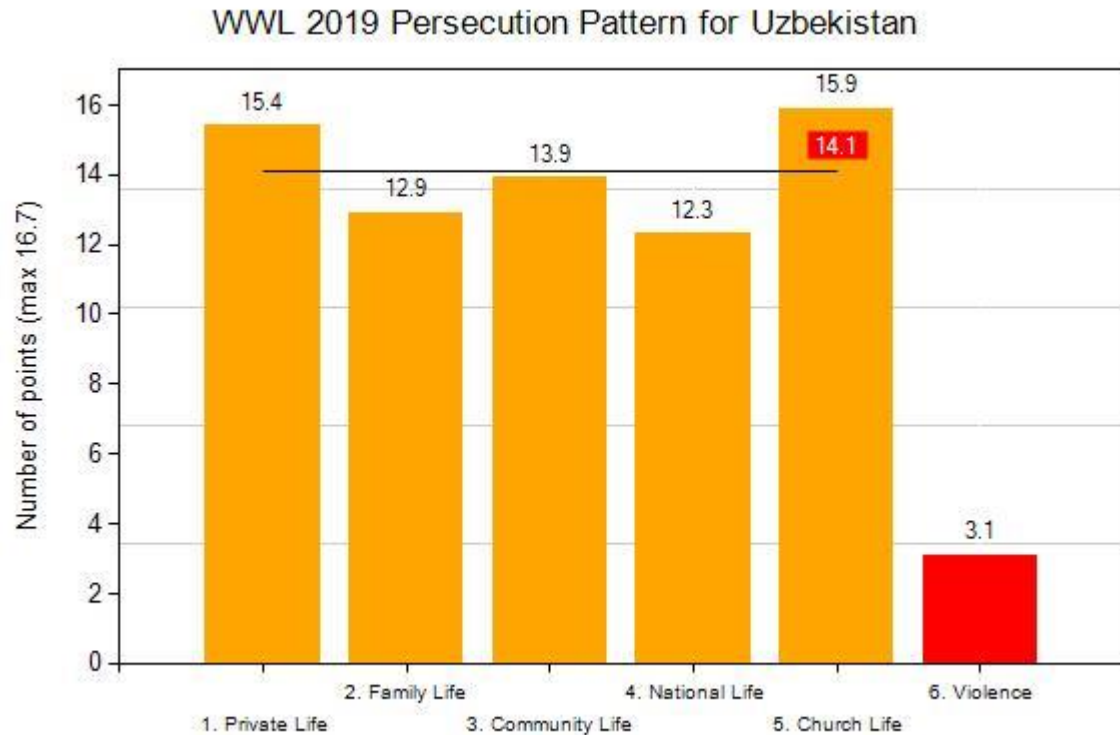
Communities of expatriate Christians: Expatriate Christians in Uzbekistan are not forced into isolation. This category is therefore not included in the WWL analysis.

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

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

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

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence



The WWL 2019 Persecution pattern for Uzbekistan shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at an extremely high level (14.1), rising from 13.9 in WWL 2018. Pressure increased in the *Family* and *Community* spheres of life, while it decreased slightly in the *Private*, *National* and *Church spheres of life*. This reflects the increased impact of the Persecution engine *Islamic oppression*.
- Two *spheres of life* show very high levels of pressure (*Family* and *National life*), and three have extreme scores (*Community*, *Private* and *Church spheres* - in ascending order). The fact that the highest score is in the *Church sphere* reflects the extreme pressure the state is imposing through many restrictions.
- The score for violence decreased from 3.5 in WWL 2018 to 3.2 in WWL 2019.

Private sphere:

Conversion is the issue that triggers the fiercest reaction from the social and cultural environment. It is regarded as a shameful affront to the honor of the family. As it creates social unrest, it is also high on the radar of the state and its agents. Neighbors will go to the police if they see a Christian convert worshipping at home. In some areas it is illegal to own a Bible, elsewhere one Bible is allowed. Revealing one's adherence to the Christian faith (e.g. by displaying Christian symbols) is also risky. Not only is it

risky for a convert from Islam to talk about his new faith with members of the family, the same goes for members of Historical churches who have joined non-traditional churches ("cross-denominational converts"), although this pressure is far less acute. House arrests are quite common for Christians from a Muslim background – the family will use this to put pressure on them to give up their new faith.

Family sphere:

Christians with a Muslim background may experience problems when trying to register births, deaths and marriages at the local authorities, as the officials are often Muslims from the local community. There are examples of Christian burials being denied by local officials. The pressure on converts not to go through with baptism is immense as it is often regarded as the ultimate sign that one has left Islam. In Uzbek families, relatives (e.g. grandparents) may force a child to go to the mosque, despite the fact that his parents are Christians. Because of the frequent propaganda against "sects" in the media, schools and colleges, young people are often hostile towards the children of evangelical Christians. There are cases where spouses have been forced to seek refuge in another country when the husband/wife was detained. In such cases, the family is separated for a long time. There have been cases where spouses are put under pressure to divorce.

Community sphere:

Threats and obstructions may come to Christians from more than one source. First of all, converts face pressure from their relatives and community, but other Christians (especially those active in evangelism) may also face threats from the local community and from the authorities. The two groups responsible for the surveillance of Christians are i) relatives/community (as a form of social control) and ii) the authorities at various levels. If an employer realizes that an employee is an active Christian, the latter can be fired on the spot. The NSS (Uzbek Intelligence Service) is known to blackmail Christian owners of shops. There is a long list of offences for which Christians can – and frequently do – receive fines: e.g. for meeting illegally, for possessing religious literature or for having Christian songs on their smartphones. Known believers will be required to go to the local police station from time to time just to intimidate them.

National sphere:

The constitution and some laws provide for religious freedom but not without serious restrictions. The state is monitoring active pastors. When meetings or houses are raided, all those present will be interrogated - often very harshly. Citizens need an exit visa to leave the country, and known Christians are sometimes refused such visas. They also cannot currently get a position in state employment. For all Christians not belonging to the Russian Orthodox Church, expressing Christian views in public can lead to threats of reprisals from both the government and the local Uzbek community. State-controlled media regularly produce reports attacking evangelical Christians. Billboards, leaflets and other public information about the danger of sects and missionaries appeared in the north of the country in the WWL 2019 reporting period. Fair trials do not occur in Uzbekistan. The judiciary is not independent and the international monitoring of court cases involving Christians faces many political hurdles.

Church sphere:

Christian gatherings are frequently hindered and raided. It is almost impossible to register as a new church – for the past 16 years not a single new church has been registered. All religious activities are closely watched. It is almost impossible to get permission to build new church premises and the maintenance of existing buildings is made very difficult (except for the Russian Orthodox Church). The few churches that are registered may organize activities inside their premises only; activities outside

these premises are forbidden. Many churches avoid using visible Christian symbols in order to prevent conflicts. Under the Religion Law all religious materials need to be subjected to the government for approval. In practice this means that all importing, printing and distribution is blocked. Charitable work is highly restricted, only the Russian Orthodox Church may organize this. A 2003 decree of the Cabinet of Ministers outlining a change in registration requirements for NGOs restricted the activities of faith-based entities, and the 1998 Religion Law prohibits "actions aimed at converting believers of one religion into another (proselytizing) as well as any other missionary activity".

Violence:

The score for violent incidents targeting Christians is at a fairly high level (3.1 points). In the WWL 2019 reporting period, 39 Christians were detained and 1 of them was sentenced to a short term of imprisonment. 25 Christians suffered from physical violence more than 10 properties of Christians (houses, shops etc.) were damaged. 7 Christians had to stay in safe houses – most of these were Christians with a Muslim background.

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

5 Year trends

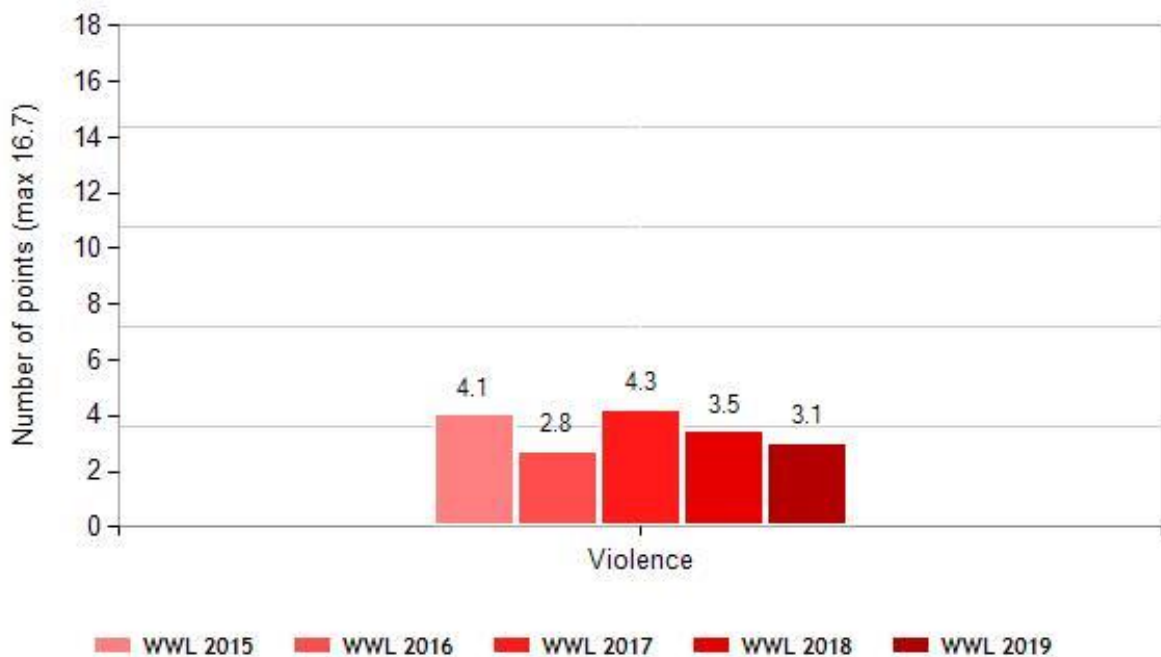
The three graphics below illustrate how the situation for Christians in Uzbekistan has deteriorated gradually since WWL 2015. While the levels of pressure in the *private* and *church spheres of life* have been more or less stable over the last five years (first chart), there have been notable increases in the pressure in the *family* and *community spheres of life*. The second chart, showing average pressure, shows that the overall level of pressure on Christians has gradually crept up from a very high level to an extreme level. This reflects the fact that the situation for converts in Uzbekistan has become worse. The number of violent incidents recorded in Uzbekistan has not changed dramatically per year. The scores for violence (third chart) have thus remained more or less stable at a fairly high level over the last five years.

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



WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Pattern history: Uzbekistan	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2019	14.1
2018	13.9
2017	13.3
2016	13.4
2015	13.0

WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Profile for Uzbekistan (Violence)



Gender specific persecution

Female:

In Uzbekistan the daily life of indigenous people is based on Islamic culture which puts women in an inferior position compared to men. Total submission is expected from women 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. Christian women and girls are suffering from verbal and physical abuse, threats, beatings, detention, interrogation, confiscation, fines, imprisonment, job loss, discrimination, home detention, forced marriage, family violence and rape, shaming, divorce, loss of possessions.

Male:

Church leaders are normally men; they are also normally the heads of their family and the main bread winners. When a Christian man becomes a target of persecution - fined or imprisoned - his whole family will suffer. Losing jobs will affect the whole family. If a man is a church leader his persecution will affect his church and cause fear. Christian men and boys suffer from verbal and physical abuse,

threats, beatings, detention, interrogation, confiscation, fines, imprisonment, job loss, discrimination, home detention, shaming, divorce, loss of possessions.

Persecution of other religious minorities

All exercise of freedom of religion and belief with others without state permission is illegal, including sharing any beliefs with anyone, and meeting with others for worship or the study of sacred texts in homes. "Law enforcement" officials raid with impunity people of all faiths meeting together to exercise freedom of religion and belief. Those taking part in such meetings are very often threatened, detained, subjected to violent physical assault and torture, given large fines, and have religious literature - including Islamic texts and the Bible - confiscated and destroyed. Officials impose severe censorship on all religious literature. Muslims meeting to study the Koran and learn how to pray at home are likely, if found, to be jailed for long periods. Strict restrictions are imposed both on observing Ramadan and on going on the haj pilgrimage to Mecca. (Source: [Forum 18, Religious freedom survey, September 2017](#)). There is no focus on any specific religious group - all (Muslims, Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, Bahai etc.) suffer under a very high level of state surveillance and oppression.

Examples of persecution of other religious groups:

- The trial took place on 13 April 2018 of a Muslim accused of giving his hairdresser a legally-published Muslim book. The Fergana Region court gave the Muslim scholar a three-year suspended prison term. (Source: [Forum 18](#)).
- The Jehovah's Witnesses, Yevgeni Kupayev and Natalya Kupayeva, faced criminal proceedings on 23 July 2018 for sharing their beliefs. (Source: [Forum 18](#)).

Future outlook

The political outlook:

After the change in presidency in 2016, it is highly unlikely that the government of President Mirziyoyev will be challenged in the (near) future – stability will be the keyword.

The outlook for Christians - 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 Uzbekistan. They have imposed all kinds of legal restrictions, monitor all religious activities, raid meetings and block religious materials. The chances that this situation will change are very slim indeed.
- **Islamic oppression:** Islam is not the state religion. It is the traditional religion of most of the population. Muslim pressure on Christians in Uzbekistan does not come from radical Islamic movements but from the far-reaching influence of family, friends and community on converts. The chances that this will change are as good as non-existent.

Conclusion:

Due to the very high level of stability of the two most important Persecution engines in Uzbekistan, the Church in this country will have to brace itself for living under a continued and considerable level of surveillance and pressure.

External Links - WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution of other religious minorities: Forum 18, Religious freedom survey, September 2017
http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2314
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Forum 18
http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2367
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Forum 18
http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2397

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).