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# Uzbekistan: Full Country Dossier

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**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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## Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
World Watch List 2024 .....	3
Copyright note .....	4
Sources and definitions .....	4
<b>WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Uzbekistan .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Brief country details .....	5
Map of country .....	5
Dominant persecution engines and drivers .....	6
Brief description of the persecution situation .....	6
Summary of international obligations and rights violations .....	6
Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period .....	7
Specific examples of positive developments .....	7
External Links - Situation in brief .....	7
<b>WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Uzbekistan .....</b>	<b>8</b>
Links for general background information .....	8
Recent history .....	8
Political and legal landscape .....	9
Religious landscape .....	12
Economic landscape .....	14
Social and cultural landscape .....	15
Technological landscape .....	16

Security situation .....	18
Trends analysis .....	20
External Links - Keys to understanding .....	20
<b>WWL 2024: Church information / Uzbekistan .....</b>	<b>22</b>
Christian origins.....	22
Church spectrum today.....	22
Areas where Christians face most difficulties .....	23
Christian communities and how they are affected .....	23
External Links - Church information.....	23
<b>WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Uzbekistan .....</b>	<b>24</b>
Reporting period .....	24
Position on the World Watch List .....	24
Persecution engines .....	24
Drivers of persecution.....	25
The Persecution pattern.....	27
Pressure in the 5 spheres of life.....	28
Violence.....	32
5 Year trends .....	34
Gender-specific religious persecution / Female .....	36
Gender-specific religious persecution / Male .....	37
Persecution of other religious minorities.....	38
Future outlook.....	39
External Links - Persecution Dynamics.....	40
<b>Further useful reports.....</b>	<b>40</b>

# Introduction

## World Watch List 2024

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	12.8	96	98	96	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	10.6	93	92	91	92	92
3	Libya	15.9	16.0	15.9	16.1	16.4	10.2	91	88	91	92	90
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.8	89	89	88	88	87
5	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	89	88	87	85
6	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.5	14.9	14.4	16.7	88	88	87	85	80
7	Pakistan	13.2	13.9	15.0	15.1	13.1	16.7	87	86	87	88	88
8	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	13.3	87	83	79	79	85
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.8	16.5	10.9	86	86	85	86	85
10	Afghanistan	15.7	15.9	15.2	16.3	16.6	4.6	84	84	98	94	93
11	India	12.2	12.6	13.3	14.8	13.2	16.5	83	82	82	83	83
12	Syria	13.4	14.3	13.9	14.3	14.2	11.1	81	80	78	81	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.7	16.6	3.3	81	80	81	78	79
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	12.8	15.1	15.6	79	76	70	67	66
15	Algeria	14.4	14.1	11.5	14.0	15.6	9.8	79	73	71	70	73
16	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.0	14.8	13.9	7.8	79	76	78	82	76
17	Myanmar	12.2	10.6	13.4	13.7	13.0	16.1	79	80	79	74	73
18	Maldives	15.6	15.5	13.6	16.0	16.4	0.9	78	77	77	77	78
19	China	13.0	10.0	12.8	14.6	16.0	11.1	78	77	76	74	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	13.8	15.6	75	71	68	67	66
21	Laos	11.6	10.6	13.2	14.3	14.0	11.3	75	68	69	71	72
22	Cuba	13.2	8.7	13.8	13.3	15.1	8.7	73	70	66	62	52
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	1.3	72	72	70	71	68
24	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.7	12.8	14.4	5.4	71	69	69	67	66
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.9	12.6	15.5	1.7	71	71	71	71	73
26	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.5	10.8	10.4	14.1	71	69	68	67	63
27	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.9	70	70	68	62	60
28	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	70	68	66	68
29	Turkmenistan	14.2	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.5	0.6	70	70	69	70	70
30	Nicaragua	12.1	7.6	13.2	13.2	14.1	9.6	70	65	56	51	41
31	Oman	14.3	14.0	10.6	13.3	14.0	3.1	69	65	66	63	62
32	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	14.4	69	66	66	65	63
33	Tunisia	12.3	13.2	10.2	12.4	13.8	6.9	69	67	66	67	64
34	Colombia	11.1	8.6	12.9	11.3	10.4	14.1	68	71	68	67	62
35	Vietnam	11.3	9.4	12.4	13.8	14.2	7.2	68	70	71	72	72
36	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	12.4	14.1	14.3	2.2	68	66	67	64	61
37	Mexico	11.5	8.5	12.5	11.1	10.6	14.1	68	67	65	64	60
38	Egypt	12.5	13.7	11.4	11.9	10.9	7.8	68	68	71	75	76
39	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.0	68	68	65	63	43
40	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.6	67	68	74	67	66
41	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.9	67	67	66	64	56
42	Indonesia	10.9	12.3	11.5	10.2	9.7	11.5	66	68	68	63	60
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.0	13.1	15.9	66	65	65	64	60
44	Brunei	15.0	14.7	10.0	10.8	14.1	1.3	66	65	64	64	63
45	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.1	66	66	63	62	57
46	Tajikistan	13.8	12.6	12.3	12.9	13.4	0.6	66	66	65	66	65
47	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.8	12.1	12.8	14.3	1.1	65	65	64	64	64
48	Jordan	12.9	14.2	10.5	12.4	12.8	2.2	65	65	66	64	64
49	Malaysia	13.0	14.1	11.5	12.2	11.1	2.4	64	66	63	63	62
50	Turkey	13.0	11.5	11.6	13.2	11.4	3.1	64	66	65	69	63

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	12.4	63	64	63	62	61
52	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	14.4	62	63	61	58	55
53	Nepal	12.1	10.4	9.5	13.2	12.3	4.4	62	61	64	66	64
54	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	64	64	63	62
55	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	1.1	61	60	59	56	56
56	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	10.6	61	58	55	53	56
57	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.7	61	62	62	62	60
58	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.2	10.8	11.5	9.7	5.9	60	57	63	62	65
59	Azerbaijan	13.2	9.9	9.6	11.9	13.6	1.7	60	59	60	56	57
60	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	9.7	10.7	12.1	0.9	60	60	59	58	60
61	Kyrgyzstan	13.2	10.3	11.3	10.5	12.2	1.3	59	59	58	58	57
62	Russian Federation	12.7	7.7	10.6	12.8	12.9	1.7	58	57	56	57	60
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	9.4	58	57	50	42	42
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	12.8	57	55	52	48	48
65	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	1.1	55	55	57	56	55
66	Honduras	7.9	4.7	12.2	7.3	9.9	12.6	55	53	48	46	39
67	Venezuela	6.0	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	10.7	53	56	51	39	42
68	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	8.9	52	49	44	43	41
69	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	7.2	52	48	43	47	45
70	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	15.9	52	51	48	47	48
71	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	52	51	46	43
72	Lebanon	11.0	10.2	7.0	6.1	6.6	7.2	48	40	11	-	35
73	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	3.7	47	44	44	43	43
74	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.6	46	46	43	43	44
75	Belarus	9.6	3.8	5.8	9.7	13.3	3.3	46	43	33	30	28
76	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	44	42	42	42
77	Ukraine	5.5	4.8	8.0	11.6	11.6	2.8	44	37	37	34	33
78	Israel	9.8	8.6	5.8	6.3	6.9	6.7	44	38	41	40	38

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## Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2024 reporting period was 01 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/> and on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom): <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>.

# WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Uzbekistan

## Brief country details

Uzbekistan: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
34,809,000	352,000	1.0

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

## Map of country



Uzbekistan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	71	25
WWL 2023	71	21
WWL 2022	71	21
WWL 2021	71	21
WWL 2020	73	18

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Uzbekistan: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials, Political parties, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs
Islamic oppression	Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Non-Christian religious leaders, One's own (extended) family, Government officials, Ethnic group leaders
Clan oppression	Non-Christian religious leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family, Government officials, Ethnic group leaders

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

### Brief description of the persecution situation

All categories of Christian communities (except expatriate Christians) are experiencing some form of pressure and violence on grounds of their faith. Russian Orthodox churches face 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.

### Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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 attendees 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)

## Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

**9 April 2023:** As reported by Forum 18: "On Easter Sunday, police raided the Council of Churches Baptist congregation in Karshi in the southern Kashkadarya Region during their morning worship meeting. 'Police officers and officials damaged the door of the prayer house, behaved crudely, and arrested three church members', Baptists told Forum 18 the same day." (Source: [Forum 18, 11 April 2023](#))

## Specific examples of positive developments

None.

## External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Forum 18, 11 April 2023 - [https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2824](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2824)



# WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Uzbekistan

## Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/23 Uzbekistan report	AI Uzbekistan 2022	<a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/uzbekistan/report-uzbekistan/">https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/uzbekistan/report-uzbekistan/</a>	29 June 2023
BBC News Uzbekistan profile - updated 24 March 2023	BBC Uzbekistan profile	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16218112">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16218112</a>	29 June 2023
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI Uzbekistan report 2022	<a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/UZB">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/UZB</a>	29 June 2023
CIA World Factbook Uzbekistan - updated 21 June 2023	World Factbook Uzbekistan	<a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/uzbekistan/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/uzbekistan/</a>	29 June 2023
Crisis24 Uzbekistan report (Garda World)	Crisis24 Uzbekistan report	<a href="https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/uzbekistan">https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/uzbekistan</a>	29 June 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit Uzbekistan profile 2023	EIU Uzbekistan profile 2023	<a href="https://country.eiu.com/uzbekistan">https://country.eiu.com/uzbekistan</a>	29 June 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2023 Uzbekistan	<a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>	29 June 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index – covering 29 countries	Democracy Index 2023 Uzbekistan	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/uzbekistan/nations-transit/2023">https://freedomhouse.org/country/uzbekistan/nations-transit/2023</a>	29 June 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2023 Uzbekistan	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/uzbekistan/freedom-world/2023">https://freedomhouse.org/country/uzbekistan/freedom-world/2023</a>	29 June 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report – covering 70 countries	Freedom on the Net 2023 Uzbekistan	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/uzbekistan/freedom-net/2023">https://freedomhouse.org/country/uzbekistan/freedom-net/2023</a>	27 November 2023
Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 – covering 170 countries	GIWPS 2021 Uzbekistan	<a href="https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/uzbekistan/">https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/uzbekistan/</a>	29 June 2023
Girls Not Brides Uzbekistan report	Girls Not Brides Uzbekistan	<a href="https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/uzbekistan/">https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/uzbekistan/</a>	29 June 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 - Uzbekistan country chapter	HRW 2023 Uzbekistan country chapter	<a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/uzbekistan">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/uzbekistan</a>	29 June 2023
Internet World Stats available in 2023	IWS 2023 Uzbekistan	<a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#uz">https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#uz</a>	29 June 2023
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2023 Uzbekistan	<a href="https://rsf.org/en/uzbekistan">https://rsf.org/en/uzbekistan</a>	29 June 2023
Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2022 Uzbekistan	<a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/uzbekistan">https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/uzbekistan</a>	29 June 2023
UNDP: Human Development Report Uzbekistan	UNDP HDR Uzbekistan	<a href="https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#countries/UZB">https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#countries/UZB</a>	29 June 2023
US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report Uzbekistan	IRFR 2022 Uzbekistan	<a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/uzbekistan/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/uzbekistan/</a>	29 June 2023
USCIRF 2022 country reports – covering 17 CPC / 11 SWL	USCIRF 2023 Uzbekistan SWL	<a href="https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/Uzbekistan.pdf">https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/Uzbekistan.pdf</a>	29 June 2023
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook Uzbekistan - April 2023	Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Uzbekistan	<a href="https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/d5f32ef28464d01f195827b7e020a3e8-0500022021/related/mpo-uzb.pdf">https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/d5f32ef28464d01f195827b7e020a3e8-0500022021/related/mpo-uzb.pdf</a>	29 June 2023
World Bank Uzbekistan data 2021	World Bank Uzbekistan data	<a href="https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar-ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=UZB">https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar-ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=UZB</a>	29 June 2023
World Bank Uzbekistan overview	World Bank overview Uzbekistan	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/uzbekistan/overview#economy">https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/uzbekistan/overview#economy</a>	29 June 2023

## Recent history

On 20 June 1990, Uzbekistan declared its state sovereignty and on 31 August 1991 its independence. 1 September was proclaimed 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 hardly changed.

Uzbekistan had been designated as a Country of Particular Concern by the US Secretary of State from 2006-2017 and was moved in November 2018 to the Special Watch List category after the Secretary determined that the government had made substantial progress in improving respect

for religious freedom. That progress was achieved is only partially true. Officially registered churches like the Russian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the registered Baptists have indeed noted slight improvements. But for other Christians, especially for Christians with a Muslim background, the situation has not changed significantly; they have continued to be targets for raids, arrests and oppression.

Since President Mirziyoyev became president in December 2016, Uzbekistan's foreign policy has changed in many respects. It contacted China in 2019 for [economic cooperation](#) (Jamestown Foundation, 4 September 2019). On 6 March 2020, the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan approved the decision to apply for [observer status](#) with the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) (Jamestown Foundation, 23 March 2020). The move brought to a close months of speculation about whether Tashkent would end the previous president's policy of eschewing all Moscow-led integration processes.

On 17 March 2022, Uzbek Foreign Minister [Abdulaziz Komilov](#) said in public that his country did not recognize the pro-Russian separatist-controlled districts in Ukraine's Donbas, known as the Donetsk and Luhansk "people's republics," and called for a "peaceful solution" to end Russia's unprovoked attack against Ukraine (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty - RFE/FL, 17 March 2022). However, on 27 April 2022, Uzbek presidential spokesman Sherzod Asadov reported that Komilov had [left the post of foreign minister](#). There is no doubt that this was caused by his lack of 'pro-Russia' wording on 17 March (RFE/RL, 28 April 2022): "On March 29, the Uzbek Foreign Ministry said Komilov had not been seen in public for more than a week because he was being treated for an unspecified 'chronic illness' in Tashkent before being taken to an unspecified foreign country for further treatment."

## Political and legal 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.

In the decades of President Karimov's leadership (1991-2016), 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 realize that it cannot act as independently as it would like to. Russia wrote off a large amount of Uzbekistan's debt in December 2014, but such actions are, of course, always tied to Russian expectations.

Parliamentary elections were held on 22 December 2019 under the slogan "New Uzbekistan, New Elections" (RFE/RL - 23 December 2019). The Liberal Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (LDPU) emerged as winner but observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) noted "serious irregularities" amid changes allowing "greater tolerance of independent voices". The elections were the first since Shavkat Mirziyoyev was elected president in December 2016.

After the death of Islam Karimov and the end of his nearly three decades of authoritarian leadership, President Mirziyoyev announced reforms. According to BTI report 2022, from 2017 to 2020, a large number of laws and presidential decrees were adopted and implemented to a

varying degree of success, indicating a breakthrough in domestic and foreign policy. One of the main strategic documents that shed light on the government's future direction was the "[Action strategy on five priority areas of development](#)" of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2017 to 2021", which was adopted in February 2017 (Tashkent Times, 8 February 2017). It prioritized the following five areas:

- 1) Improving the system of state and public construction;
- 2) Ensuring the rule of law and further reforms of the legal system;
- 3) Economic development and liberalization;
- 4) Social development; ensuring security, interethnic cohesion and religious tolerance;
- 5) Implementing a balanced, mutually beneficial and constructive foreign policy.

President Mirziyoyev's unprecedented reforms have created a new political, social and economic climate both in the country and in the region.

### **Referendum and early elections**

On 30 April 2023, a [referendum](#) was held about a new constitution that would allow President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to run for a third term in office. On 1 May 2023 [Uzbek officials](#) said voters approved a series of constitutional amendments that, among other things, pave the way for President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to stay in office until 2040. The referendum did not bring any [major political reforms](#). On 8 May 2023 President Mirziyoyev [announced](#) that an early presidential election would be held. No date was announced for the snap election, but the vote should come within two months of Mirziyoyev's announcement, according to Uzbek law.

### **The 1992 Constitution**

The 1992 Constitution provides for freedom of religion or belief and separation of government and religion. A religious freedom "roadmap" approved by parliament in 2018 to implement all 12 of the recommendations of UN Special Rapporteur on Religion or Belief Ahmed Shaheed, simplified rules for registering religious organizations and their reporting requirements, but the underlying law on religion continued to make it difficult for religious groups to register.

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Uzbekistan):

- “The constitution provides for freedom of religion or belief and separation of government and religion. The law allows for restricting religious activities when necessary to maintain national security, the social order, or morality. The freedom of conscience and religion law further details the scope of, and limitations on, the exercise of the freedom of religion or belief. The law criminalizes unregistered religious activity; requires official approval of the content, production, and distribution and storage of religious publications; and prohibits proselytism and other missionary activities. The religion law also provides for a registration process for religious organizations but prohibits private religious education.”

On [22 September 2023 USCIRF](#) reported:

- “The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) is deeply troubled by reports indicating that the government of Uzbekistan is backsliding on steps it

had taken in recent years to improve religious freedom conditions in the country. Within the last week, Uzbek officials have allegedly conducted raids against religious individuals, fined them, and subjected many to brief sentences of administrative arrest. Authorities have also reportedly forced Muslim men to shave their beards while school administrators have pressured schoolgirls to either remove their hijabs or wear them differently.”

HRW (Uzbekistan: [Backsliding on Religious Freedom Promises – 24 May 2023](#)) states:

- “The Uzbek government is restricting religious freedom despite promises to eliminate restrictions.”
- “The Uzbekistan authorities still consider legitimate expression of religious sentiment or belief “extremism,” and peaceful religious communities and individuals are paying the price.”
- “Uzbek authorities should ensure that rights-violating provisions related to freedom of religion in the Criminal Code and in the 2021 religion law are amended in line with international human rights law.”

Freedom of religion and belief, with interlinked freedoms of expression, association, and assembly, thus remain severely restricted in Uzbekistan. Forum 18's survey analysis of [freedom of religion and belief](#) (released on 26 November 2021) documents among other issues:

- “a harsh 2021 Religion Law, adopted in secrecy and against recommendations to bring the Law into line with the regime's legally binding international human rights obligations from the UN, the Council of Europe's Venice Commission, and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). The Law also ignores multiple recommendations from the people the unelected regime rules to stop making the exercise of freedom of religion and belief illegal;”
- “proposals to adopt a new Criminal Code from 2022, which in the only draft so far released also continues to make the exercise of human rights a crime;”
- “attempts to impose complete state control of all expressions of Islam, including banning all public manifestations of Islam outside the state-controlled Spiritual Administration of Muslims (the Muftiate), the targeting for surveillance of devout Muslims, barring Shias from opening more mosques, barring under-18-year-olds from attending mosques, especially during Ramadan, with the use of police agent provocateurs jailing and torturing Muslim men who meet informally to discuss Islam and learn to pray, and corruption and restrictions on the haj pilgrimage;”
- “banning religious teaching without state permission, and severe restrictions on the teaching which the state might permit;”
- “the imposition of state censorship of all religious texts, with wide-ranging literature bans and bans on public discussion of religious topics;”
- “a complex and arbitrary process of applying for state registration or permission for religious communities to exist, which provides multiple opportunities for officials to seek bribes and appears designed to discourage applications;”
- “jailing and torturing prisoners of conscience whose only crime is to exercise their freedom of religion and belief.”

## Gender perspective

Additionally, there remain significant legal gaps that serve to disadvantage women and girls. In particular, marriage is a place where violent repression of women takes place, especially of female converts. Whilst rape is outlawed in the Criminal code (Art 118), there is no provision to protect victims from marital rape. While the Law on Protection of Women from Harassment and Violence was introduced in 2019, it failed to fully criminalize domestic violence ([Human Rights Watch 2022 Uzbekistan country chapter; CEDAW, 2022](#)). While more shelters have reportedly been built in recent years for victims of domestic violence, a media report found that many such centers ‘did not exist’ or ‘did not function’ as intended (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Access to justice for women and girls was highlighted as a particular concern in a recent [2022 CEDAW Periodic Report](#).

There remains a significant divergence between the law and customary practice, with women often disadvantaged in divorce, custody and inheritance proceedings. Child marriage also remains an ongoing practice, despite being illegal, with 7% of girls marrying before the age of 18 (Girls Not Brides Uzbekistan).

Military service is officially mandatory in Uzbekistan, but the army is of a sufficient size that not all young men need to be enlisted. Military service is understood to be less severe than in neighboring countries, although Christian men have faced hostile treatment and harassment within this context ([World Population Review, 2022](#)).

## Religious landscape

Uzbekistan: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	352,000	1.0
Muslim	33,408,000	96.0
Hindu	870	0.0
Buddhist	44,200	0.1
Ethno-religionist	60,100	0.2
Jewish	3,700	0.0
Bahai	990	0.0
Atheist	192,000	0.6
Agnostic	746,000	2.1
Other	1,770	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

According to the World Christian Database (WCD March 2023), 96.0% of the population of Uzbekistan is (predominantly Sunni) Muslim. 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).

The 2.3% agnostic and atheist part of the population is the result of 70 years of atheist propaganda by the Soviet authorities.

According to WCD 2023, Christians form 1% of the Uzbek population. Evangelistic activities by Protestant Christians in Uzbekistan are not appreciated and immediately draw the attention of the authorities. Muslims oppose such activities as well. Converts from Islam face opposition from their families, friends and communities. The pressure is highest in the region of Uzbekistan that is known for its most conservative Muslim population - the Fergana Valley.

The small Christian minority is weak due to much division and little cooperation between the various denominations. There are few exceptions to this and it plays into the hands of the government.

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Uzbekistan):

- “According to some Christian groups, many churches continued their efforts to register but were not successful, some because the government rejected their applications for technical reasons, including typographical errors. Many religious groups reported that various local government bodies prevented their application from advancing. Some religious groups said that local authorities blocked registration efforts by constantly finding "mistakes" in applications and asking applicants to resubmit, while others maintained that the mahalla retained its ability to block registration applications despite the government's formally removing the mahalla from the registration process in 2021. In Tashkent, affected religious groups included Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostal Life Water Church, and Pentecostal Source of Life Church. Jehovah's Witness kingdom halls also remained unregistered in Urgench, Fergana, Bukhara, Samarkand, Nukus, and Karshi. The Pentecostal Full Gospel churches in the cities of Khanabad, Kungrad, Chimbay, and Jizzakh remained unregistered, along with two in the city of Nukus.”
- “Activists and human rights groups continued to report social pressure among the majority Muslim population against conversion from Islam. Religious community members said ethnic Uzbeks who converted to Christianity risked harassment and discrimination. Some said social stigma because of conversion from Islam resulted in difficulties in carrying out burials and that Muslims in the community forced them to bury individuals in distant cemeteries or allowed burials only with Islamic religious rites. Individuals who reported these incidents declined to share their names or even the details of their cases for fear of retaliation.”

- “According to government spokespersons, the government continued to strictly control religious education for youth, including by shutting down private religious schools operating without government permission and fining individuals who provided unauthorized religious education.”

## Economic landscape

According to World Bank Uzbekistan overview/economy:

- **GDP (current US\$):** 80.4 (in 2022)
- **GDP growth:** "Real GDP grew by 5.6% in H1 2023, led by exports, remittances and consumption. ... In 2023, growth is expected to remain close to 5.5% and accelerate gradually in the medium term."

The Uzbek economy is characterized by high levels of unemployment, poverty and inflation. As it is impossible to provide jobs for all people within Uzbekistan itself, there is massive labor migration - around seven or eight 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.

The Uzbek economy is dependent on the growth of cotton. Virtually 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 are regular water shortages 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.

The 2020 COVID-19 crisis had a huge impact on the Uzbek economy. Many migrant workers abroad lost their jobs. More than a [thousand](#) Uzbeks were stranded in Kazakhstan's southern region of Turkistan because they were unable to travel back home due to travel restrictions (RFE/RL, 3 July 2020).

In November 2022 Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed creating a "gas union" with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to establish a mechanism to ship natural gas between the three countries and to other nations, including China ([RFE/RL, 29 November 2022](#)). Uzbekistan politely rejected the proposal days later ([RFE/RL, 8 December 2022](#)).

In April 2023, [AsiaNews](#) reported that hundreds of entrepreneurs in Uzbekistan who had received generous credits from the state after the liberalization of the currency market in 2017 now find themselves on the brink of bankruptcy. After receiving hundreds of thousands and even millions of dollars to build greenhouses, thermal plants and develop intensive crops according to government plans, the liabilities suddenly doubled and tripled. Many companies

are declaring bankruptcy, and lawsuits for financial malfeasance are being filed against them. Some owners are already in jail, and many are busy defending themselves in court. According to many entrepreneurs, the state is trying to 'break the bones' of those who would like to try to fall in line, and is using the weapon of the judiciary to defend the interests of central power.

### Gender perspective

Christians in Uzbekistan suffer from the same economic problems as the rest of the population, for instance, high unemployment and poverty. Women are on balance more economically vulnerable in Uzbekistan due to lower education and employment rates; according to [Trading Economics](#), 39.4% of the total labor force was female in 2021. Making it additionally challenging for women and girls to be economically dependent, patrilineal inheritance practices continue despite the right to equal inheritance being guaranteed in law ([Article 36 of the Constitution of Uzbekistan](#)). As noted in a [World Bank](#) news feature on 8 March 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic added additional challenges for the economic security of women in Uzbekistan.

### Social and cultural landscape

According to the World Factbook Uzbekistan:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Uzbek 83.8%, Tajik 4.8%, Kazakh 2.5%, Russian 2.3%, Karakalpak 2.2%, Tatar 1.5%, other 4.4% (2017 est.).
- **Main languages:** Uzbek (official) 74.3%, Russian 14.2%, Tajik 4.4%, other 7.1%.
- **Urban population:** 50.5 % of total population (2023)
- **Literacy rate:** 100% (male: 100%, female: 100%) (2019)

According to UNDP Human Development Report Uzbekistan:

- **HDI score and ranking:** 0.727 (0.702 for females, 0.744 for males), ranking 101.
- **Total population:** 34.1 million (2021).
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 70.9 years (73.4 for females, 68.3 for males) (2021).
- **Expected years of schooling:** 12.5 (12.4 for girls, 12.6 for boys) (The gender gap in relation to school enrolment rates has closed over the past decade, although girls remain less likely to attend secondary school or tertiary education due to socio-cultural and socio-economic barriers (The Borgen Project, 2019).
- **Gender inequality index:** 0.227 (2021).
- **Labor Force Participation Rate:** Female: 44.9, Male: 70.9 (2021).

Corruption is endemic at all levels of administration and government. The power groups within the regime have no interest in losing the opportunity of making money. The changes in government since December 2016 do not seem to have brought any action against this.

Transparency International (CPI 2022 Uzbekistan) reported on 31 January 2023 that Uzbekistan was one of the most consistently improving nations. From a score of just 17 points in the 2012 Corruption Perception Index it has now risen to 31 points. Reforms adopted since 2016 contributed to modest increases in civil liberties, particularly freedom of expression. However, Uzbekistan remains an autocracy and much more is needed to achieve lasting wins against corruption.



A serious energy crisis broke out in Uzbekistan in December. Throughout the country, electricity is rationed for a few hours a day and long queues of motorists are thronging at service stations. Faced with the growing tension among the population, the chief imam of the capital Tashkent, Rakhmatulla Sayfiddinov, delivered a solemn speech in which he called on all believers to show gratitude and forbearance. Sayfiddinov emphasized that 'our ancestors lived without gas and electricity, one must accept the will of Allah'. According to him, local Muslims must not become 'the shame of the world', animatedly raising the issue on all social media. The preacher warned that 'panic, riots and protests will not solve the problems', but these words only caused further upset among the socially active citizens. ([AsiaNews, 4 January 2023](#))

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 significant changes in the not too distant future as the majority of the population will no longer have any affinities with the Soviet past.

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 read 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 distribution must be done unofficially.

### Gender perspective

Uzbekistan operates according to Islamic and patriarchal norms, whereby men and women are expected to assume traditional gender roles; men are expected to assume the role of decision makers and financial providers, whilst women are expected to prioritize household duties. Despite gender equality being enshrined in [Articles 18 and 46](#) in the Constitution of Uzbekistan, discriminatory household practices and socio-cultural barriers prevent women from realizing these rights ([CEDAW, 2022](#)). Domestic violence victims – primarily women – are viewed negatively if they choose to leave the marriage and risk being vilified. Public pressure to tackle domestic violence has increased, however, particularly following a recent media report where a groom was caught on camera hitting his bride during the wedding reception ([The Diplomat, 22 June 2022](#)).

## Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2023 Uzbekistan):

- **Internet usage:** 50.1% penetration - survey date: July 2022
- **Facebook usage:** 20.4% penetration - survey date: July 2022 According to [NapoleonCat](#) (June 2023), there are significantly more male than female users of Facebook (64.4% male, compared to 35.6% female users).

According to World Bank Uzbekistan data:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 102.9 per 100 people (2021)

Key technological developments according to [BuddeComm Research](#) (updated June 2023):

- “Uzbekistan’s telecom markets – both wireline and wireless – have long been playing “come from behind” in terms of their development following the country’s independence from the former Soviet Union. While the government has formally adopted the principles of operating as a market economy, many elements of the old centrally planned economic model remain. This has had the effect of reducing the level of interest from foreign companies and investors in building out the necessary underlying infrastructure, which in turn has constrained the rate of growth in the country’s telecoms sector. Nevertheless, the last five years has seen the beginning of an upswing in prospects for the sector as fibre network rollouts continue out beyond the main urban centres, while the mobile market experiences some consolidation amongst the main operations to become stronger, more efficient competitors.”
- “The fixed-line market is dominated by the incumbent state-owned provider Uztelecom, which has a much as 98% market share. With teledensity sitting at around 11%, the fixed-line segment remains relatively underdeveloped. But Uztelecom has been diligently expanding its fibre footprint across the country, and so utilisation is slowing increasing as consumers are able to take on VoIP services as part of their fibre packages. Strong growth is also present in the fixed broadband segment thanks to that same network expansion (albeit coming off a very low base), with penetration projected to reach 24% by 2027 (a 5-year CAGR of 6.2%).”
- “Despite the promising signs in the fixed markets, it is the mobile segment that continues to dominate Uzbekistan’s telecoms sector in terms of penetration, revenue, and growth. There are four major operators providing a modicum of competition; three of the four are government-owned entities although private operator Beeline Uzbekistan has been able to capture up to a third of the market. The last two Covid-affected years have proved challenging for Beeline, in particular, but its most recent operating results suggest a turnaround in the company’s fortunes is under way. Overall, the mobile market is expected to reach 100% penetration in 2023 – a 50% increase in the last five years.”

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Uzbekistan):

- "According to regulations, a website or blog may be blocked for calling for the violent overthrow of the constitutional order and territorial integrity of the country; spreading ideas of war, violence, and terrorism, as well as religious extremism, separatism, and fundamentalism; disclosing information that is a state secret or protected by law; or disseminating information that could lead to national, ethnic, or religious enmity, involves pornography, or promotes narcotic usage. According to the Ministry of Justice, the government may permanently block websites or blogs without a court order. "
- "During the year, the Supreme Court ruled in 13 instances that 80 online profiles, channels, and pages on Facebook, Odnoklassniki, Instagram, and Telegram were promoting extremism. The court ruled the materials and content of these sources were prohibited from entering or being manufactured, distributed, or possessed in the country."

According to Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 Uzbekistan:

- “Internet freedom in Uzbekistan worsened during the coverage period, largely due to measures the government took in response to summer 2022 protests in the autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan against proposed constitutional amendments that would infringe on the region’s sovereignty. Ahead of and during the protests, the government restricted access to the internet, arrested journalists and activists for sharing information about the protests, and reportedly tortured bloggers in Karakalpakstan. In the wake of the protests, the government convicted at least 61 people for their involvement in the protests, some of which related to online activities. More positively, the government unblocked social media platforms, which were initially blocked for violating data localization requirements introduced in April 2021.”
- “While reforms adopted since President Shavkat Mirziyoyev took office in 2016 have led to improvements on some issues, Uzbekistan remains an authoritarian state with few signs of democratization. No opposition parties operate legally. The legislature and judiciary effectively serve as instruments of the executive branch, which initiates reforms by decree, and the media are still tightly controlled by the authorities. Reports of torture and other ill-treatment persist, although highly publicized cases of abuse have resulted in dismissals and prosecutions for some officials, and small-scale corruption has been meaningfully reduced.”

All media, including the Internet, are under strict state control and are censored. As a result, Christians in Uzbekistan do not have their own media platform, and have difficulty in accessing foreign Christian media. As all digital communication is monitored, Christians have to be careful how they use social media and email.

### **Gender perspective**

Georgetown highlights a gender gap in regards to technology, noting that Uzbekistan performs worst in the Central Asian region (GIWPS 2021 Uzbekistan profile, p.21). It is therefore harder for women to access digital Christian resources or online Christian communities.

### **Security situation**

Since gaining independence from the Soviet Union, the relationship with neighboring republics Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan has at times been tense and there have been ethnic clashes between Uzbeks, Tajiks and Kyrgyz in the past few years. The main reason for political tension is the water supply. Uzbekistan depends greatly 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. Nevertheless, in May-June 2020, there were several [border incidents](#) between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan and between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan (The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst, 16 July 2020). In April and May 2022 more conflicts erupted along the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border (Source: [RFE/RL, 6 April 2022](#), [RFE/RL, 6 May 2022](#)).

These incidents - none of which escalated into wider conflicts - reveal once again the transboundary lifestyle of Central Asian people and the artificial character of the borders that separate independent states from each other. In January 2023 the presidents of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan signed an agreement to end the dispute between their two countries (Source: [AsiaNews, 31 January 2023](#))

In early July 2022, protestors took to the streets railing against Tashkent's plan to remove provisions from the Constitution of Uzbekistan that allow Karakalpaks to declare independence unilaterally through a popular referendum. This comes following a massive crackdown on the tens of thousands of Karakalpak protestors and the imposition of martial law in Karakalpakstan. Protest began to die down after President Mirziyoyev decided to reverse course and retain the provision that the Karakalpaks insisted be kept in the Constitution. Nevertheless, observers suggest the crisis is far from over in Karakalpakstan. (Source: [Jamestown Foundation, 21 July 2022](#)) The government of Uzbekistan continued its crackdown against Karakalpak activists in January 2023 by demanding lengthy prison sentences (Source: [RFE/RL, 12 January 2023](#))

Although Islam in Uzbekistan is generally of a traditional and moderate character, the country has experienced attacks in the past from radical Islamic groups such as 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 drive them out of the country. The Fergana Valley in Uzbekistan's south-east is known for the presence of other radical Islamic groups.

Many young Uzbeks have been inspired by the activities of radical Islamic groups like the Islamic State group (IS). It is estimated that hundreds of Uzbeks were fighting with the Islamic State group in Syria and Iraq. In September 2014 an IS flag was displayed from a bridge in Tashkent. According to a warning by the [UK Government travel advice](#) (accessed on 27 November 2023), on 6 November 2019, 17 people were killed in an armed attack on a Tajik security check-point on the Uzbek/Tajik border, with IS claiming responsibility. Thousands of suspected members of Islamist groups have been imprisoned and the Uzbek government has sought Russian assistance to combat the threat of any increasing militancy.

### **Gender perspective**

Over the past years Uzbekistan has dropped down the rankings of Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security index, primarily reflecting a worsening security situation and lack of community safety for women (GIWPS 2021 Uzbekistan profile). However, the lack of official data makes it challenging to identify the scale of violence against women, but it is understood to be [significant](#) (RFE/RL, 7 March 2021). Media reports highlighted a rise in domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown ([HRW 2021 Uzbekistan country chapter](#)). Bride kidnapping, despite being illegal, is also reportedly an ongoing issue in Uzbekistan.

## Trends analysis

### 1) Uzbekistan remains an authoritarian regime but there are improvements

Despite the change in leadership since the death of President Islam Karimov on 2 September 2016, very little has changed for Christians in Uzbekistan. It is still difficult to obtain official registration and those churches that are without registration remained unable to practice their religious beliefs without risking criminal prosecution. On the other hand, since 2018, there have been considerably fewer raids on churches.

### 2) Uzbekistan's foreign policy is changing

After the death of President Karimov, Uzbekistan has done its best to improve its relationship with its neighbors and President Mirziyoyev has paid visits to practically all other Central Asian countries and Russia. However, the results of this were limited as border conflicts with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have continued to erupt from time to time. Uzbekistan has also done its best to improve relationships with Western countries such as the USA. To achieve better relations, the pressure on registered churches was reduced, which in turn led to positive reactions from both the US State Department and USCIRF (see above: *Political and legal landscape*).

## External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: economic cooperation - <https://jamestown.org/program/uzbekistan-increasingly-turns-to-china-for-development-loans/>
- Recent history: observer status - <https://jamestown.org/program/uzbekistan-temporarily-chooses-observer-status-instead-of-full-membership-in-eurasian-union/>
- Recent history: Abdulaziz Komilov - <https://www.rferl.org/a/uzbekistan-ukraine-separatists-not-recognized/31757881.html>
- Recent history: left the post of foreign minister - <https://www.rferl.org/a/uzbekistan-komilov-ukraine-steps-down/31825263.html>
- Political and legal landscape: Action strategy on five priority areas of development - <http://tashkenttimes.uz/national/541-uzbekistan-s-development-strategy-for-2017-2021-has-been-adopted-following-discussion>
- Political and legal landscape: referendum - <https://www.rferl.org/a/uzbekistan-referendum-mirziyoyev-constitution-terms/32311624.html>
- Political and legal landscape: Uzbek officials - <https://www.rferl.org/a/uzbekistan-referendum-constitutional-changes-mirziyoyev/32386702.html>
- Political and legal landscape: major political reforms - <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13757-uzbekistan%E2%80%99s-constitutional-referendum.html>
- Political and legal landscape: announced - <https://www.rferl.org/a/uzbekistan-announces-early-presidential-election/32401647.html>
- Political and legal landscape: 22 September 2023 USCIRF - <https://www.uscifr.gov/news-room/releases-statements/uscifr-deeply-troubled-uzbekistans-backsliding-religious-freedom>
- Political and legal landscape: Backsliding on Religious Freedom Promises – 24 May 2023 - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/24/uzbekistan-backsliding-religious-freedom-promises>
- Political and legal landscape: freedom of religion and belief - [https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2699](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2699)
- Political and legal landscape: Human Rights Watch 2022 Uzbekistan country chapter - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/uzbekistan#d91ede>
- Political and legal landscape: CEDAW, 2022 - [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fUZB%2fCO%2f6](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fUZB%2fCO%2f6)

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- Political and legal landscape: World Population Review, 2022 - <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/countries-with-mandatory-military-service>
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## WWL 2024: Church information / Uzbekistan

### Christian origins

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 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, last accessed December 2022).

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 evangelistically active among the Uzbek population.

### Church spectrum today

Uzbekistan: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	196,000	55.7
Catholic	3,500	1.0
Protestant	45,700	13.0
Independent	93,900	26.7
Unaffiliated	13,100	3.7
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>352,200</b>	<b>100.1</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	15,200	4.3
Renewalist movement	88,000	25.0

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

**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:** Christians 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.

According to the World Christian Database (March 2023) some of the largest Christian denominations in Uzbekistan are:

- Russian Orthodox Church
- Armenian Apostolic Church
- Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- Independent groups

## Areas where Christians face most difficulties

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

## 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 scoring.

**Historical Christian communities:** The Russian Orthodox Church has accustomed itself to the limitations provided 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 bear the brunt of 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, hostility from the latter is by far the most serious challenge.

**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.

## External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: Nestorian Christianity - <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Nestorianism>



# WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Uzbekistan

## Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

## Position on the World Watch List

Uzbekistan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	71	25
WWL 2023	71	21
WWL 2022	71	21
WWL 2021	71	21
WWL 2020	73	18

*Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods*

The score of 71 points has not changed for the last four WWL reporting periods. In WWL 2024, the score for pressure went down very slightly in Private, National and Church spheres of life, stayed the same in the Family and Community spheres of life. The violence score increased from 1.5 points in WWL 2023 to 1.7 points. Islamic oppression (blended with Clan oppression) dominates in the Private and Family spheres of life, while Dictatorial paranoia dominates in the National and Church spheres of life. Both engines 'meet' each other in the Community sphere of life. Muslim families, friends and villagers exert pressure on converts in particular, while the government imposes many restrictions on church activities and Christians belonging to non-registered churches have suffered from police raids, threats, arrests and fines. An improvement in the situation for Christians was expected when President Mirziyoyev came to power, but this has not materialized.

## Persecution engines

Uzbekistan: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Strong
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Very weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all

Uzbekistan: Persecution engines (continued)	Abbreviation	Level of influence
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.

### Dictatorial paranoia (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), blended with Clan 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 imams 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

Uzbekistan: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG	-	-	STRONG	VERY WEAK	-	-	STRONG	-
Government officials	Medium	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	Strong	-
Ethnic group leaders	Medium	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong	-	-	Strong	-	-	-	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	-	Very weak	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	Very weak	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

<b>Uzbekistan: Drivers of Persecution (continued)</b>	<b>IO</b>	<b>RN</b>	<b>ERH</b>	<b>CO</b>	<b>CDP</b>	<b>CPCO</b>	<b>SI</b>	<b>DPA</b>	<b>OCC</b>
	STRONG	-	-	STRONG	VERY WEAK	-	-	STRONG	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong	-	-	Strong	-	-	-	Medium	-
One's own (extended) family	Strong	-	-	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.

#### Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

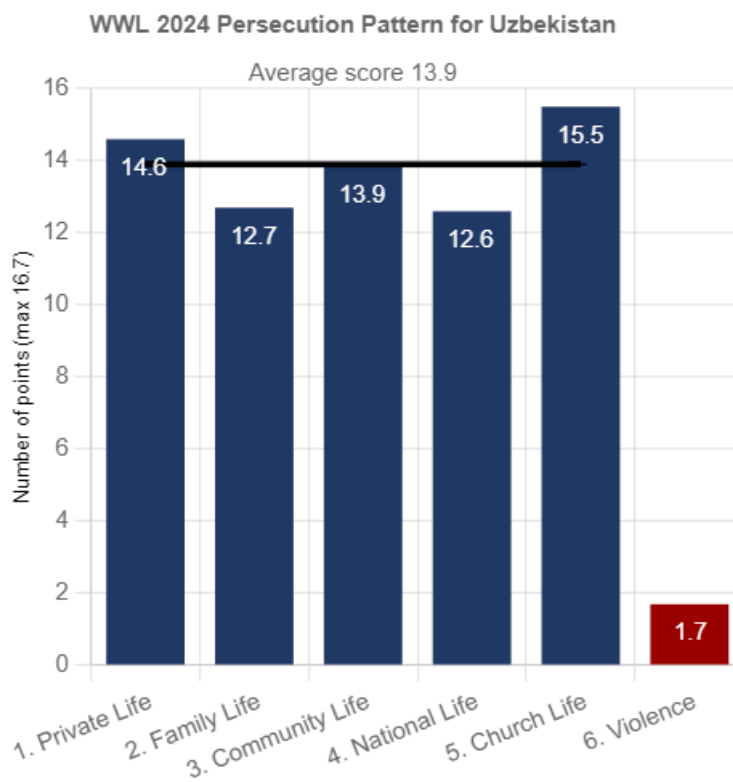
- **Government officials (Strong):** The law prohibits all unregistered religious activity and religious propagation in any form. Religious literature can only be used by registered religious associations within its registration area. Protestant groups are regarded as suspect and are forbidden from distributing 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 confiscate (or steal) Christian property and possessions. A clever way of prohibiting proselytization is that it is illegal to preach in the Uzbek language; one can only do it in Russian. However, Russian is mainly only spoken by the older generation, making church growth more difficult.
- **Political parties (Strong):** Few parties are allowed in Uzbekistan but the ruling party which controls the government of President Mirziyoyev participates in persecution insofar as much of the pressure and violence targeting Christians is government-sanctioned.
- **Normal citizens (Medium):** Especially at the local level, mobs with support from the government have been known to interrupt Christian religious festivals and celebrations.

#### Drivers of Islamic oppression, blended with Clan oppression

- **Extended family (Strong):** Pressure from family, friends and community can be harsh on converts, especially in rural areas. This can lead to threats, beatings, house-arrest and ostracism.

- **Ethnic or Clan group leaders (Strong):** With the support of the authorities, leaders of [Mahalla community groups](#) have been given government authorization to prohibit Christian missionary activity (Global Informality Project, updated 17 May 2019).
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Most Muslim clerics are open in their hostility towards non-Orthodox Christians - particularly towards converts from Islam.
- **Normal citizens (Strong):** Converts to Christianity are treated severely by the local community.
- **Government officials (Medium):** At the community level there is a link between local 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 to be secular).

## The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2024 Persecution pattern for Uzbekistan shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at an extremely high level (13.9 points), more or less the same as the 14.0 points score in WWL 2023. This indicates that very little has changed in Uzbekistan over the last reporting period.
- The Church, Private and Community spheres of life have extremely high values. The scores for the Family and National spheres of life are classified as very high. The fact that the highest score is still in the Church sphere of life reflects the extreme pressure the state is continuing to impose through many restrictions.
- The score for violence remained low in WWL 2024, very slightly higher than in WWL 2023.

## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

*In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2024 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).*

### Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

#### **Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (3.75 points)**

In the case of converts, persecution comes most of all from their family or community if they find Christian materials. Christian materials are considered as hard evidence for conversion. Discovery can lead to fierce reactions. Pressure from the government is also high since it is illegal to possess religious materials. Even a Bible must bear a stamp indicating that it was published in Uzbekistan. It is illegal to have more than one Bible per person. It is illegal to carry a Bible outside your home. It is illegal to read the Bible or any religious literature in public. A family was once fined for a Christian poem found on a piece of paper in the bed of a boy who was memorizing it for Sunday school.

#### **Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.75 points)**

From the Muslim perspective, this has two sides to it: First, converts who reveal their new faith will instantly draw the ire of their family, friends and community; and secondly, other Christians will immediately be suspected of having carried out evangelism. As the state opposes evangelism, Christians must be very careful in this respect. Any Christian who reveals his/her faith publicly will immediately draw the attention of the state and its agents.

#### **Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.75 points)**

It is already very risky for a convert to talk about his new faith with members of the family and the latter will make it virtually impossible for the convert to do this with non-family members. The shame and honor culture will make sure that the family will try to prevent this at all costs. Also, the state views such behavior as an attempt at evangelism and will oppose it by arresting these Christians.

#### **Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (3.50 points)**

Converts run the risk of drawing unwanted attention from their social environment when they meet with other Christians. Many Uzbek Christians only meet one to one as it is less dangerous and often change places where they meet. Worship must be silent or very quiet. Due to the very high level of surveillance in Uzbekistan all non-Orthodox Christians are very careful in this respect. Religious activities can officially only occur in buildings of registered churches. No such activities are allowed to happen in house churches, for instance.

## Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

### **Block 2.6: Christian couples have been hindered in adopting children or serving as foster parents because of their faith. (3.75 points)**

Muslim families and communities will block the adoption of an ethnic Central Asian child if it is known that the adopting person is a convert or other Christian. The government imposes no restrictions regarding adoption. However, a case was recorded of a boy being taken back to the orphanage after reporting to a social worker that his adopted parents had been teaching him about the Christian faith.

### **Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (3.50 points)**

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. The Muslim environment will go to extremes to prevent baptisms of converts. The state will oppose baptisms of converts as they fear this could lead to tensions and problems in the community. Also, the state will oppose unregistered groups in all their activities, including baptisms. Baptisms are not, however, legally forbidden.

### **Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.50 points)**

The extended family of converts will try to bring the children of converts back to Islam and raise them accordingly. The school system also contributes to this since - as Uzbekistan is officially a secular state - no religious teaching is provided in schools. The only place for parents to provide Christian teaching is at home, since all youthwork for churches has been made illegal. Parents must be careful that they do not draw too much attention from both family and the local authorities by doing this.

### **Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.50 points)**

The Muslim environment (family, friends, community) will pressurize children of converts in particular to receive Islamic teaching - sometimes even against the wishes of their parents. Anti-religious propaganda at schools and universities happens on a regular basis, for instance in the form of lectures. Attendance at such lectures is compulsory.

## Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

### **Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.75 points)**

Converts are threatened by family, friends and community (including the local imam). Local Muslim communities will also harass Protestants, often accusing them of carrying out evangelism. Members of non-traditional Christian communities also frequently face harassment, threats, discrimination etc. from the authorities.

**Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (3.75 points)**

Converts are constantly monitored by family and the surrounding community. At the community level, Muslims also monitor the activities of Protestant groups closely and report on their activities to the local police. Government agents at all levels are constantly monitoring Christian activities - all but the Russian Orthodox Church are on their radar.

**Block 3.12: Christians have been fined for faith-related reasons (e.g. jizya tax, community tax, protection money). (3.75 points)**

Fines are issued by state agents for a long list of possible offences, e.g. for meeting illegally, for the possession of religious literature, for having Christian songs on their smartphones, etc. Even technically legal groups (such as Baptists) face this kind of persecution.

**Block 3.13: Christians have been interrogated or compelled to report to the local vigilante/police for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points)**

Known converts experience harassment and interrogation (sometimes harsh) from their family and community. When meetings or houses are raided (which is a common thing), all those present face interrogation. Known converts will be required to go to the local police station from time to time, to keep them intimidated. They can also be stopped in the street, searched and interrogated.

## Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

**Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (4.00 points)**

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

**Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (4.00 points)**

There are no Christian political parties or Christian civil society organizations in Uzbekistan. The fact of applying for registration could be sufficient to be arrested by the police on the grounds of trying to establish an extremist organization. Any Christian organization will be regarded as an attempt to convert people to Christianity and will be blocked.

**Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.75 points)**

This is very dangerous for non-Orthodox Christians and will cause threats of reprisals from both the government and the local Uzbek community. The level of persecution is so intense that con-

verts and non-Orthodox Christians must keep their religion effectively secret. Any public expression of their faith is likely to be perceived by the government as proselytization. Russian Orthodox Christians normally do not speak about their religious beliefs in public. Muslims consider Christian preaching and evangelism undesirable and will obstruct this with all means available.

**Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (3.50 points)**

When the authorities act against Christians, they do so with the backing of the law and generally interpret their enforcement of the law as they deem acceptable. The authorities can generally expect to act with utter impunity. Harm caused to converts and Christians accused of evangelism by the Muslim community (mostly at the local and provincial level) will almost certainly happen with impunity as well.

## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

**Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (4.00 points)**

Any Christian activities outside the buildings of registered churches are prohibited. The Muslim community would anyway immediately oppose any such action and report it to the authorities.

**Block 5.6: Work among youth in particular has been restricted. (4.00 points)**

Religious work among youth and minors - including Sunday schools and youth summer camps - are prohibited. The Muslim community will report any sign of youth events and summer camps taking place to the authorities.

**Block 5.7: Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts. (4.00 points)**

The criminal code punishes proselytism - the attempt to convert persons belonging to a certain religion to another religion - 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. Conversion is vehemently opposed, especially by Muslims in rural areas.

**Block 5.13: Churches have been hindered in importing Christian materials from abroad. (4.00 points)**

All religious materials must be approved by the government. Very few items are able to pass this hurdle. Even the Bible Society is having problems doing this. Muslims will report to the authorities if they discover Christians are importing religious materials illegally.



## Violence

Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following 5 points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:

**1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced.** Possible reasons for this may be:

- Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.
- In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.
- If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives.
- In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.

**2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons:**

- Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).
- In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.
- Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.

**3. The use of symbolic numbers:** In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10\*, 100\* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10\* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100\* could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1,000\* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000\*, 100,000\* and 1,000,000\*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWL chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

Uzbekistan: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	1	0
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	10	0
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	0	0
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	0
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	60	48
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	1
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	0	3
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	6

In the WWL 2024 reporting period:

- **Churches damaged:** According to [Forum 18](#): Police raided the Baptist Church in Karshi during worship on Easter Sunday, 9 April 2023. They "damaged the door of the prayer house, behaved crudely, and arrested three church members", Baptists said. Police "brutally beat David Ibragimov and a few more church members in front of our fellow believers" and "used electric shock prods and other implements to incapacitate" church members. Police refused to explain why they raided the church and tortured church members.
- **Christians arrested:** According to [Forum 18](#): Local Baptists said 10 church members, including young people, were taken to the police station. Video images show police officers holding one church member Yokub round the neck as he was on the ground, and as they put him in a police van. The officer warns another officer that a church member is filming

the arrest and a man runs towards the camera. Another church member, Yusuf, was already in the police van in handcuffs.

- **Christians attacked:** According to sources, at least 57 converts have been abused and beaten by their families and villagers. [Forum 18](#) reported at least 5 Christians being tortured.

## 5 Year trends

The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Uzbekistan: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024	13.9
2023	14.0
2022	13.8
2021	14.0
2020	14.0

As can be seen from the table above, the average pressure has remained extremely high and stable - within the range of 13.8 - 14.0 points - for the last five WWL reporting periods. This is a clear indication of how little the situation in the country has changed in recent years.

### 5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

As can be seen in the chart below, over the past five years the scores in the five *spheres of life* in Uzbekistan have not changed dramatically. This means that the situation for Christians in the country has been quite stable, with few changes occurring. The highest levels of pressure on Christians have continued to be recorded in the *Church* and *Private spheres of life*, which reflect the operation of the two main Persecution engines in Uzbekistan: *Dictatorial paranoia* (in the *Church sphere of life*) and *Islamic oppression*, blended with *Clan oppression* (in the *Private sphere of life*).



### 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



As can be seen in the chart above: since WWL 2021, the scores for violence have been roughly half of those recorded in WWL 2020 (and WWL 2019 which is not shown above), when they were at the level 'fairly high'. The score for WWL 2024 is 1.7 points – slightly higher than that of WWL 2023 (1.5 points).

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

While laws in Uzbekistan give equal rights to men and women, traditional Islamic culture places women lower than men and subservient to them within the family context. Total submission is expected from women to their parents, or if married, to their husbands. Perpetrators of violence against women have historically gone unpunished, in part due to the lack of legislation addressing domestic violence and marital rape (HRW 2023 country chapter Uzbekistan). However, after many years of campaigning, vital steps to address gender violence have been taken this year. In April 2023, Uzbekistan's upper house of Parliament unanimously passed legislation to criminalize domestic violence and provide women and children with additional protection mechanisms ([Amnesty International UK Press Release](#), 6 April 2023). There is still work to be done to implement the new law, and address cultural norms around domestic violence, but it is hoped this can be a step in the right direction.

Within Uzbekistan's patriarchal context, women are not free to choose their own religion and are likely to face severe opposition upon conversion to Christianity. Persecutors target women both to inflict harm upon them, but also as an instrument to cause psychological harm on their husbands and wider family members. Incarceration by a convert's family (i.e. house arrest) remains a common and socially accepted form of putting female converts under pressure. Access to social networks, specifically Christian networks, is restricted in the hope that the convert will return to Islam.

Female converts, particularly those in conservative regions with traditions of bride-kidnapping, run the risk of being kidnapped by their own communities and married off to a Muslim, especially in rural areas. While no cases have been reported in the WWL 2024 reporting period, this remains an ongoing risk. Families, too, arrange such marriages in the hope that the convert will return to Islam. Sexual violence within those marriages is an often unacknowledged component that becomes normalized under the legitimization that marriage gives. If already married at the point of conversion, Muslim husbands commonly divorce their wives and deny them their possessions. Pressure to divorce often comes from the wider family.

A country expert explains that sexual violence “remains unreported in most cases. New-believing women from Muslim backgrounds are especially vulnerable. Based on what I heard, family violence and rape are common and up to 90% women suffer some sort of sexual violence; since culturally it is considered shameful for the woman and her fault, women do not speak about it even to close family members. In case of conversion, the risk of being raped or sexually harassed increases as it can be used as a form of punishment.”

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Church leaders, most of whom are men, are common targets for violations of rights. Typically, they will be fined, detained, denied exit visas to leave the country, or put under house arrest. They can be fined for such offences as meeting illegally, possession of religious literature, or having Christian songs on their smartphones. The persecution of church leaders is a deliberate tactic, as targeting them causes a ripple effect, spreading fear and anxiety throughout their congregations. Pastors and lay leaders of unregistered churches in particular have been insulted, beaten and humiliated. A country expert shared that in one area of the country “every pastor and his family were surveilled by about 30 people. Practically every step was watched.”

Christian men continue to face inequalities in every area of their lives. Some men will be denied promotion at work, while others may lose their job altogether unless they renounce their faith. Christian businessmen face constant state monitoring to see if they are involved in any illegal activities, as well as pressure from the local Muslim community who will often obstruct their business activities; this occurs mainly at the local level, rather than at the national level. As the man is normally the provider, this form of economic harassment has a crippling effect on the whole family. Family members feel fear, anger and anxiety. To avoid this, many Christian businessmen choose to keep their Christian faith secret.

Converts to Christianity also suffer from verbal, physical and psychological abuse, regularly being mocked in their places of work and study and coming under greater pressure from police officials.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

According to USCIRF 2023 Uzbekistan SWL:

- “Local governments and mahallas (local neighborhood committees) still arbitrarily blocked some registration applications submitted by Jehovah's Witnesses and Protestant Christians.”
- “Throughout the year, authorities continued to detain, arrest, imprison, and ill-treat Muslims for distributing unauthorized or illegal religious materials, criticizing state-approved imams, holding prayers in unsanctioned areas, and leading informal classes on Islam without government permission. Law enforcement authorities conducted raids against and detained alleged members of the Islamic group Hizb ut-Tahrir for meeting to discuss religious texts or sharing such texts online.”
- “Authorities sought to limit some elements of Islam and Islamic practice unofficially considered inappropriate. For instance, in May police in two districts of Tashkent rounded up at least 10 men and threatened them with arrest if they refused to have their beards shaved, drawing criticism from the U.S. ambassador to Uzbekistan. Similarly, officials have harassed women and girls who wear the hijab and maintained that only a “light-colored national headscarf” may be worn in schools. Despite a public announcement made in recent years that children can attend mosques, in April security officials in the exclave of So’x (or Sokh) reportedly raided and drove out children from the Hazrati Ali mosque during the holy month of Ramadan. Authorities allegedly dissuaded or hindered attempts by Muslims to reopen previously closed places of worship, such as the Abu Zar mosque and the Nazira Bibi Xonim mosque in Tashkent, and required Muslims interested in performing the Hajj or Umra pilgrimages to apply to their mahalla.”

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Uzbekistan):

- “The government continued to ban Islamic groups it defined as extremist and criminalized membership in such groups, which included 22 religious organizations. The government reported that at year's end, the following organizations remained banned: Akramites, Islamic Movement of Turkestan, Islamic Jihad Group, Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami, al-Jihad, al-Qa'ida, World Jihad Foundation, Muslim Brotherhood, Zamiyati Islomi Tablig, Jamaat-e-Islami-i-Pakistan, Eastern Turkestan Liberation Organization, East Turkestan Islamic Movement, Boz Kurd, Abu Saif Group, Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam, Islamic State, Tavhid va Jihad, Katibat al-Imam al-Bukhariy, Jamoat-e-Ansarulloh, Jabhat al-Nusra, Jihadists, and Nurchists. The government stated its actions against persons or groups suspected of religious extremism were not an infringement on religious freedom, but rather were a matter of preventing the overthrow of secular authorities and the incitement of interreligious instability and hatred.”
- “The government continued to restrict access to websites, including Forum 18. The government maintained a list of illegal websites it said were linked to Islamic extremist activity.”
- “According to government authorities and human rights activists, more than 1,800 prisoners remained in detention, convicted of involvement in terrorist and extremist activities or of belonging to religious fundamentalist organizations. ... According to Forum

18, an international religious freedom organization, on May 17 [2022], the Andijan criminal court sentenced former religious prisoner Oybek Khamidov to five years in prison for sharing a prohibited audio sermon with his wife. Forum 18 reported that on June 23, a Bukhara court sentenced Bobirjon Tukhtamurodov to five years and one month in prison for participating in a group that met to study the banned works of Islamic theologian Said Nursi. ... Human rights activists continued to state that President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's reforms and the law on religion did not resolve the cases of prisoners who remained incarcerated under former President Islam Karimov for their religious practices and beliefs. According to local activists, despite improvements and the release of many religious prisoners since the start of Mirziyoyev's presidency in 2016, a significant number of prisoners remained in custody for engaging in peaceful religious practices.”

#### Further information

- “Hojiakbar Nosirov, a 25-year-old consumer rights activist from Tashkent, posted a video on social media on 5 April declaring that the red colouring agent carmine he had found in locally-sold yoghurt is *haram* (forbidden) for Muslims. Police investigated and commissioned an "expert analysis" from the regime's Religious Affairs Committee that claimed Nosirov had expressed "enmity, intolerance or discord". A 3-minute closed online trial jailed him for 15 days. (Source: [Forum 18, 13 April 2023](#))
- “Prisoner of conscience and devout Muslim, 52-year-old Alijon Mirganiyev has been transferred to a strict regime prison to serve a 6 and a half year sentence imposed after he returned to Uzbekistan from Turkey. He was promised he would not be arrested if he returned to end criminal charges brought against him for his exercise of freedom of religion and belief, but was arrested on arrival at Tashkent Airport. 'This is one of the numerous fabricated cases made against influential Muslims', says human rights defender Yelena Urlyayeva.” (Source: [Forum 18, 26 May 2023](#))

## Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

### **Dictatorial paranoia**

The current government exerts a very high level of control over the country. Little has changed since President Mirziyoyev succeeded his predecessor Karimov, despite the claims of both the US State Department and USCIRF. Government officials at all levels are the strongest drivers of pressure and violence targeting Christians in Uzbekistan. They have imposed all kinds of legal restrictions, monitor all religious activities, raid meetings and block the availability of religious materials. A special committee has been established to control the restrictions on religion - the Council for Religious Affairs (CRA). The chances that this situation will change in the near future are slim.

### **Islamic oppression/Clan oppression (blended)**

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 and on those Christians



active in evangelistic activities. The chances that this will ever change are as good as non-existent.

Due to the stability of these main Persecution engines, Christians in Uzbekistan will continue to face considerable levels of surveillance and other forms of pressure.

## External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Drivers of persecution description: Mahalla community groups - [https://informality.com/wiki/index.php?title=Mahallah\\_\(Uzbekistan\)](https://informality.com/wiki/index.php?title=Mahallah_(Uzbekistan))
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: Forum 18 - [https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2824](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2824)
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: Forum 18 - [https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2824](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2824)
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: Forum 18 - [https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2824](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2824)
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Amnesty International UK Press Release - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/04/uzbekistan-parliament-passes-long-overdue-legislation-criminalizing-domestic-violence/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Forum 18, 13 April 2023 - [https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2825](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2825)
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Forum 18, 26 May 2023 - [https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2834](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2834)

## Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

As in earlier years, these are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Uzbekistan>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>.