



RUSSIAN FEDERATION: Country Dossier

June 2018



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research Unit

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World Watch List 2018

		1. Private Life	2. Family Life	3. Community Life	4. National Life	5. Church Life	6. Violence	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2018	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2017	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2016	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2015	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2014
Rank	Country	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	92	92	92	90
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.0	93	89	88	81	78
3	Somalia	16.0	16.2	16.1	16.3	16.4	10.4	91	91	87	90	80
4	Sudan	14.2	14.5	14.3	15.6	16.0	12.0	87	87	84	80	73
5	Pakistan	14.4	13.5	13.8	15.0	13.1	16.7	86	88	87	79	77
6	Eritrea	15.2	14.5	15.8	16.1	15.2	9.4	86	82	89	79	72
7	Libya	15.2	15.3	14.2	15.7	15.5	10.4	86	78	79	76	71
8	Iraq	14.7	14.7	14.9	14.9	15.1	11.3	86	86	90	86	78
9	Yemen	16.7	16.6	16.4	16.5	16.7	2.6	85	85	78	73	74
10	Iran	14.0	14.1	14.5	15.8	16.4	10.0	85	85	83	80	77
11	India	12.6	12.7	13.2	14.7	12.9	14.4	81	73	68	62	55
12	Saudi Arabia	14.9	13.7	14.2	15.5	16.4	4.1	79	76	76	77	78
13	Maldives	15.2	15.5	13.5	15.8	16.7	1.1	78	76	76	78	77
14	Nigeria	11.8	11.5	13.1	12.1	12.1	16.5	77	78	78	78	70
15	Syria	14.4	14.3	14.1	14.5	14.7	3.7	76	86	87	83	79
16	Uzbekistan	15.5	12.1	13.0	13.1	16.0	3.5	73	71	70	69	68
17	Egypt	11.3	12.8	12.2	11.7	9.5	12.4	70	65	64	61	61
18	Vietnam	12.4	8.4	12.7	14.2	13.8	7.4	69	71	66	68	65
19	Turkmenistan	15.2	10.3	12.9	12.8	15.2	1.9	68	67	66	63	62
20	Laos	12.9	8.6	13.6	13.9	14.9	3.5	67	64	58	58	62
21	Jordan	13.2	13.3	11.5	10.9	13.0	4.3	66	63	59	56	56
22	Tajikistan	13.3	11.3	11.8	11.8	12.9	4.3	65	58	58	50	47
23	Malaysia	12.0	14.9	12.8	12.4	9.3	3.9	65	60	58	55	49
24	Myanmar	11.6	11.1	13.2	10.4	11.0	7.8	65	62	62	60	59
25	Nepal	12.6	11.9	10.7	11.5	12.4	4.6	64		(not in WWL)		
26	Brunei	14.3	14.2	10.7	10.2	13.5	0.9	64	64	61	58	57
27	Qatar	13.4	12.9	11.7	11.3	14.1	0.0	63	66	65	64	63
28	Kazakhstan	12.8	10.0	10.2	12.2	13.7	3.7	63	56	55	51	49
29	Ethiopia	9.8	10.0	10.8	10.9	10.5	10.4	62	64	67	61	65
30	Tunisia	11.9	13.2	10.6	10.7	12.0	3.9	62	61	58	55	55
31	Turkey	12.5	9.7	9.8	11.7	9.6	8.7	62	57	55	52	(not in WWL)
32	Kenya	12.0	10.9	10.0	7.9	11.7	9.4	62	68	68	63	48
33	Bhutan	11.9	11.6	12.4	11.4	13.1	1.1	62	61	56	56	54
34	Kuwait	13.4	12.6	11.6	10.9	12.3	0.4	61	57	56	49	50
35	Central African Republic	9.0	8.1	10.1	8.9	8.8	16.1	61	58	59	67	67
36	Palestinian Territories	12.1	12.8	10.7	10.5	12.6	1.1	60	64	62	58	53
37	Mali	11.4	9.6	11.2	8.1	9.2	9.6	59	59	55	52	54
38	Indonesia	10.3	11.0	11.5	10.0	9.3	6.9	59	55	55	50	46
39	Mexico	8.3	7.6	12.1	10.7	9.7	10.4	59	57	56	55	(not in WWL)
40	United Arab Emirates	13.6	12.2	10.0	10.4	11.8	0.2	58	55	55	49	51
41	Bangladesh	10.4	8.8	11.4	9.6	7.5	10.0	58	63	57	51	46
42	Algeria	12.3	13.1	7.5	10.4	12.4	2.0	58	58	56	55	54
43	China	9.2	7.2	8.0	10.7	13.3	9.1	57	57	57	57	51
44	Sri Lanka	11.1	7.6	10.5	11.3	10.1	6.9	57	55	(not in WWL)	51	55
45	Azerbaijan	13.1	9.1	9.3	11.1	12.4	2.4	57	(not in WWL)	57	50	(not in WWL)
46	Oman	12.1	12.2	9.9	9.4	12.6	1.1	57	53	53	55	56
47	Mauritania	11.5	11.3	11.1	12.2	11.0	0.0	57	55	(not in WWL)	50	51
48	Bahrain	12.9	13.1	10.2	9.9	10.3	0.2	57	54	54	(not in WWL)	48
49	Colombia	7.9	7.6	11.9	8.6	8.5	11.9	56	53	55	55	56
50	Djibouti	12.2	12.2	10.3	9.9	11.7	0.0	56	57	58	60	46

WWL 2018 Persecution Watch Countries¹

		1. Private Life	2. Family Life	3. Community Life	4. National Life	5. Church Life	6. Violence	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2018
Rank	Country	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score
51	Comoros	11.7	11.5	9.1	9.4	13.9	0.4	56
52	Kyrgyzstan	11.7	9.5	10.0	8.1	11.6	2.8	54
53	Tanzania	10.1	10.3	10.1	9.5	9.0	3.9	53
54	Russian Federation	11.1	8.4	10.1	8.9	10.7	2.0	51
55	Morocco	10.4	11.5	7.6	8.8	12.0	0.6	51
56	Cuba	8.5	4.9	10.7	10.4	12.2	2.4	49
57	Uganda	10.9	8.7	9.5	8.7	4.8	3.9	46
58	Niger	9.9	9.7	9.0	7.0	7.1	2.6	45

¹ These countries reached a score of 41 points or more but did not receive enough points to be included in the WWL Top 50.

RUSSIAN FEDERATION – Country Dossier

(June 2018)

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Introduction

This country report is a collation of documents based around [Open Doors World Watch List \(WWL\)](#)¹ including statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations, and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database ([WCD](#))². Further news and analysis is supplied by [World Watch Monitor](#)³ and WWR staff.

RUSSIAN FEDERATION		
World Watch List	Score	Rank
WWL 2018	51	54
WWL 2017	46	-
WWL 2016	48	-
WWL 2015	-	-
WWL 2014	-	-

¹ See: <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/countries/>

² WCD website: <http://www.brill.com/publications/online-resources/world-christian-database>

³ See: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/>

WWL 2018: Keys to understanding RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Link for general background information:

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

Recent country history

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

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

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

The religious landscape

Russia is the biggest country on earth with a population of 143,375,000. 82.39% of them are Christians according to the World Christian Database (WCD). The overwhelming majority of these Christians are Russian Orthodox believers (96.7%).

Despite decades of atheistic propaganda by the Communists during the Soviet era, most Russians consider themselves Christians. However, most Russians have not read the Bible and few attend church services. Outreach activities by non-Orthodox denominations are not welcomed. Protestants make up most of the remaining percentage (approx. 3.5%) of Christians in Russia.

The next biggest religious group in Russia - according to WCD - are Muslims – mostly Sunnis – with 11.85% of the population. They live mainly in the northern Caucasus (in southern Russia) and in the mid-Volga region around the city of Kazan, 800 kilometers east of Moscow. While the Muslims in the Caucasus region tend to be conservative and have been involved in armed fighting against the Russian army, the Muslims in the mid-Volga region are more moderate. A further group of Muslims not included in these statistics are the hundreds of thousands of migrant workers from the Central Asian countries. Most are living under bad conditions, are poorly paid, and are regarded with suspicion (they might be Muslim militants). While working abroad these migrant workers are much more open to outreach by Christians.

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

At least 4.6% of the Russian population consider themselves to be non-religious or atheist, the result of 70 years of atheist indoctrination by the Communists during the Soviet era. Another 0.38% of the Russian population are Buddhists, mainly living in Kalmykia (near the Caspian Sea) and Tuva province (bordering on Mongolia).

The political landscape

According to the [Constitution of Russia](#), the country is a federation and semi-presidential republic, with a president as the head of state and prime minister as head of government. According to the Russian constitution, elections for the presidency are held every four years, with the next round due in 2018. The Russian Federation is structured as a multi-party representative democracy, with the federal government composed of a legislative, executive and judicial branch. Leading political parties include United Russia (the party of both President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev), the Communist Party and the Liberal Democratic Party. There are notable opposition groups, however these are constantly obstructed and members have often been given prison sentences.

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

- On 9 June 2012 a new bill was hastily passed by both houses of parliament which dramatically raises potential fines for people found guilty of participating in unsanctioned rallies.
- After the initial reading on 6 July 2012 an amendment to the Russian information bill was rushed through the parliamentary process limiting Internet access, so that sites deemed undesirable can be blacklisted. This affects access to (foreign) Christian websites as well.
- On 13 July 2012, the State Duma overwhelmingly approved a bill concerning foreign-funded NGOs active in the political field. Christian charitable activities have suffered

too from this. Before 2012 corruption, bureaucracy and taxes were hampering such work, but now Christian charities fully depend on donations from Russian citizens.

- On 6 July 2016, President Putin signed amendments - referred to as “anti-evangelism” restrictions - to the country’s religion law which came into effect on 20 July 2016. The first consequences of this new legislation could be seen in the charges brought against various Christians as [reported](#) by Forum 18 on 26 August 2016.
- On 20 April 2017 [Russia's Supreme Court](#) in Moscow declared the Jehovah's Witness national headquarters in St Petersburg and all 395 local organizations "extremist", banned all their activity immediately, and ordered their property to be seized by the state. Russia's Catholic Church [condemned](#) the ban claiming the move represents a threat to religious freedom generally. In contrast, the ban was [welcomed](#) by representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The socio-economic landscape

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

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

Concluding remarks

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

WWL 2018: Church History and Facts

How many Christians?

Pop 2017	Christians	Chr%
143,375,000	117,987,000	82.3

Source: WCD, May 2017

How did Christians get there?

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

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

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

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

What church networks exist today? ⁴

Orthodox	Catholic	Protestant	Independent	Unaffiliated	Double-aff	Evangelical	Renewalist
114,044,000	709,000	1,813,000	2,238,000	182,000	-999,000	1,239,000	3,661,000

Source: WCD, May 2017

The communities of expatriate Christians are very diverse in Russia – there are Americans, Koreans, Germans and many other nationalities. Many speak Russian and are committed to long-term work in Russia. They are often active in serving the church with training, discipling, “tentmaking” and business-as-mission projects. The government is wary and sometimes even hostile to the presence of people who are openly active as missionaries. The threat of intimidation, expulsion and even violence exists, even if it is not common. A special group of expatriate Christians are those with a Muslim background from the countries in Central Asia. They have either escaped pressure in their home-countries and have moved to Russia, or they have converted while working in Russia as migrant workers. The exact size of the expatriate community is not known but has decreased over the years due to government policy towards foreigners.

The historical Christian communities are by far the largest group in Russia (96.7% of all Christians according to WCD). The biggest denomination in this group is the ROC which alone accounts for 79.54% of the Russian population. The ROC experienced a revival in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, when the state dropped its ideological drive for atheism and most churches could function more or less freely. The current government favors the ROC, which means that other Christian denominations experience occasional problems.

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

The non-traditional Christian communities have frequently been targeted by the ROC for so-called sheep-stealing – robbing the Orthodox Church of its members – and for false teaching. The state regards these groups as un-Russian, Western spies. In Muslim areas, these Christians

⁴ **Orthodox:** Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world’s 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Believers who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelicals:** 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. **Renewalists:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal movements.

are often targeted because they are suspected of being active in evangelism. The non-traditional Christian communities number about 2% of the total population in Russia.

Religious context (selection)

Christian	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Ethno-religionist	Jewish	Bahai	Atheist & others ⁵
143,375,000	16,987,000	43,000	543,000	1,023,000	161,000	19,700	6,605,970

Source: WCD, May 2017

Russian people are immensely proud of their culture and history: Russia has produced strings of world-famous writers, artists and composers and has never been conquered in war by any other nation. It is important to understand that Russians view these national achievements as occurring without the help or influence from foreign powers and they wish to retain this independence and keep out foreign influences. This has consequences on a religious level as well: While Russian Orthodoxy is regarded as typically Russian, Roman Catholicism and especially Protestantism are seen as Western and alien.

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

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

Notes on the current situation

- Since 2011, a number of legal restrictions have been imposed in Russia. As there is a trend towards greater state control, it is likely that more such legislation will be passed in the coming years. As the country's ties to Western countries are becoming more strained, the Russian Federation may become increasingly isolated. This will particularly affect those Christians who belong to denominations regarded as Western. There continue to be outbursts of violence from radical Muslims. In particular for Christians with a Muslim background, the Caucasus and the region around the city of Kazan are expected to continue being difficult to live in.
- Russia is becoming less open. Although it has never been a Western-style, open democracy, the new laws mean that some freedoms that were gained after the collapse of the Soviet Union are being cut back. It is true that the regime is targeting the opposition (and Western influence), but there is a realistic chance that non-ROC Christians, will become increasingly affected too.

⁵ This category includes Atheists, Agnostics and New religionists.

- On 20 April 2017 [Russia's Supreme Court](#) declared the Jehovah's Witness national headquarters in St Petersburg and all 395 local organizations "extremist", banned all their activity immediately, and ordered their property to be seized by the state.

WWL 2018: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

WWL 2018 Points: 51 / Position: 54

WWL 2017 Points: 46 / Position: -

WWL 2016 Points: 48 / Position: -

Where persecution comes from

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

How Christians are suffering

Most Christian communities are experiencing some form of persecution or restriction. Russian Orthodox churches experience the least problems from the government. Unregistered churches active in evangelism may face obstructions in the form of surveillance and invitations to come to the police station for interrogation. It is the indigenous Christians with a Muslim background in the Muslim majority regions who are bearing the brunt of persecution both at the hands of family and friends and from the local community.

Since 2011, a number of legal restrictions have been imposed. As there is a trend towards greater state control, it is likely that more such legislation will be passed in the coming years. As ties to Western countries are becoming more and more strained, the Russian Federation may become increasingly isolated. This will affect especially those Christians who belong to denominations that are regarded as Western. The activities of militant Islamic groups are likely to continue with outbursts of violence and attacks. For converts from the Muslim majority regions, difficulties can also be expected to continue.

Examples

- In December 2016, the pastor of an unregistered Council of Churches Baptist congregation in Zabaikalsk Region became the first known religious leader charged for not notifying the authorities of a group's activities. On 6 December 2016 the regional Prosecutor's Office stated that, after an inspection of "compliance with the legislation on extremist activity, freedom of conscience, and freedom of religion and belief and

religious associations", Chernyshevsk District prosecutors were charging the pastor under Administrative Code Article 19.7 ("Failure or late provision of information to a state body"). This carries a fine of 100 to 300 Rubles for private individuals, and 300 to 500 Rubles for people in an official capacity. (Source: [Forum 18](#)⁶)

- In the period July 2017-March 2017 there were: 11 prosecutions (nine of organizations, two of community leaders) under Part 3 ("Implementation of activities by a religious organization without indicating its official full name, including the issuing or distribution, within the framework of missionary activity, of literature and printed, audio, and video material without a label bearing this name, or with an incomplete or deliberately false label"); 35 prosecutions (three of organizations, 32 of individuals) under Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity"); and seven prosecutions of individuals under Part 5 ("Foreigners conducting missionary activity"). (Source: [Forum 18](#)⁷)
- Indian Protestant pastor Victor-Immanuel Mani is the first known case of a foreigner being deported under Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 5 ("Foreigners conducting missionary activity"). He is planning to appeal further, and his lawyers argue that the deportation order is in contradiction of a 2013 Supreme Court ruling that "expulsion from the country, which is home to members of [the defendant's] family, may violate the right to respect for family life". The deportation occurred early 2017. (Source: [Forum 18](#)⁸)

⁶ See: http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2246, last accessed 14 February 2018.

⁷ See: http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2261, last accessed 14 February 2018.

⁸ Id.

WWL 2018: Persecution Dynamics

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

WWL 2018 Points: 51 / Position: 54

WWL 2017 Points: 46 / Position: -

WWL 2016 Points: 48 / Position: -

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Position on World Watch List (WWL)

The score for the Russian Federation shows a 5 point increase compared to WWL 2017. It remains a so-called Persecution Watch country. Russia has implemented a long list of restrictive legislation over the past years, but the number of violent incidents is remarkably low. After the banning of Jehovah’s Witness in April 2017 many feared that Non-traditional Christian communities (e.g. Baptists, Evangelicals, and Pentecostals) would be banned next, but this has not happened so far. The rise in score is mainly due to a scoring refinement giving a better representation of the situation in Russia: Communities of expatriate Christians in Russia are no longer taken as a separate category of Christianity in WWL analysis since these Christians are not involuntarily isolated.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Russia ⁹	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	Strong
Religious nationalism	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	Not at all
Denominational protectionism	Medium
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	Strong
Organized corruption and crime	Very weak

Islamic oppression (Strong):

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

Dictatorial paranoia (Strong):

Under President Putin, a former KGB officer, a significant number of restrictions have been introduced in the legislation. The authoritarian government continues to restrict freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion and other human rights.

Denominational protectionism (Medium):

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

⁹ The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Russia	Level of influence
Government officials at any level from local to national	Strong
Ethnic group leaders	Strong
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Very strong
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Medium
Violent religious groups	Very weak
Ideological pressure groups	Not at all
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Medium
Own (extended) family	Very strong
Political parties at any level from local to national	Medium
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Not at all
Organized crime cartels or networks	Very weak
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Weak

Drivers of Islamic oppression:

Converts from Islam to Christianity experience intense pressure from their Muslim families, friends, Islamic teachers and local community.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia:

Government officials at various levels and political parties (especially the United Russia party of President Putin) persecute Christians all over Russia.

Drivers of Denominational protectionism:

Local authorities, church leaders and families belonging to the ROC will put pressure on family members who have been attending non-ROC church services.

Context

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

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

For Christians in the country the situation is becoming more difficult due to the implementation of a whole range of laws. One of the most problematic laws is the one that imposes controls over NGOs. Russian NGOs that receive financial support from abroad should register themselves as “foreign agents”, the term that used to designate spies in the days of the USSR.

Persecution of other faith groups: The government definitely shows ROC and traditional Hanafi Islam preferential treatment. All other religions are regarded with suspicion. Jehovah’s Witnesses were banned in April 2017.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

Expatriate Christians are not involuntarily isolated in Russia, hence this category is not included for WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities:

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

Communities of converts to Christianity:

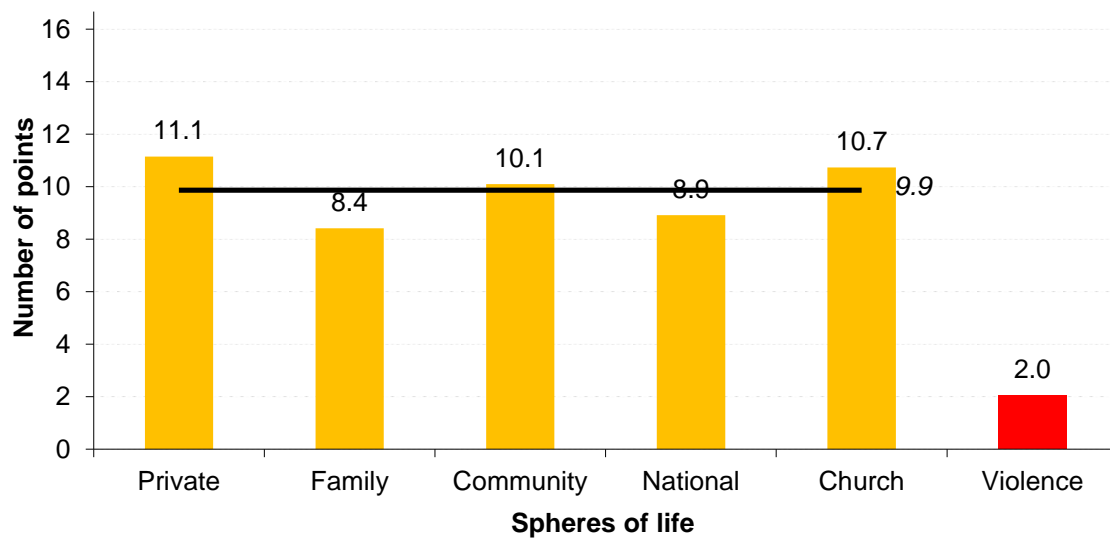
Christian converts with a Muslim background experience most pressure from Muslims in the Caucasus region. Here all Christians are facing violence and pressure, but converts from Islam bear the brunt of it. Converts living in Chechnya or Dagestan, for example, are considered to be betraying their national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

Non-traditional Christian communities:

Non-traditional Christian groups have frequently been targeted by the Russian Orthodox Church for so-called sheep stealing – robbing the Orthodox Church of its members. The ROC often considers Protestant groups as sects who are teaching heresy. The state regards these groups as un-Russian, Western spies. In Muslim areas, these Christians are often targeted because they are suspected of being active in evangelism.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Russia



(The maximum score for each block is 16.7)

The WWL 2018 Persecution pattern for Russia shows:

- Overall, the pressure on Christians in Russia increased in the WWL 2018 reporting period. The average pressure went up from 9.0 in WWL 2017 to 9.9.
- Pressure is highest in the *Private sphere of life* (especially for converts from Islam) with 11.1 points and in the *Church sphere* with 10.7 points. This can be linked directly with the two main Persecution engines that are present in Russia: *Islamic oppression* and *Dictatorial paranoia*.
- The score for violence has risen from 1.1 in WWL 2017 to 2.0 in WWL 2018. There were arrests and churches damaged, but it is interesting to note that the implementation of restrictive legislation has not resulted in more violence.

Private sphere:

Russia has one region where very conservative Islam is dominant - the North Caucasus. Here pressure is very high for all Christians, but especially for converts with a Muslim background. Conversion is strongly opposed. Many Christian converts have fled this region over the past decades, while those who stayed have to live as secret believers - they have to be extremely careful not to draw attention to their Christian faith through openly displaying Christian symbols or materials, or by tuning into Christian media. Speaking about their faith with family or guests or meeting with other believers is very dangerous. The monitoring of Christians is carried out both by the state (FSB) and by the community in the Muslim majority regions. After a conversion is discovered, the family will put pressure on the convert to give up his/her new faith. The first thing that they will do is to lock up the believer and put huge pressure on him/her to recant the faith – if this does not help, they may be killed.

Family sphere:

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

Community sphere:

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

National sphere:

Officially, Russia is a secular state, but the regime is openly courting the ROC at the disadvantage of other denominations (which are often regarded as foreign). In the Muslim regions, the rulers are explicitly courting Sunni Islam. In July 2015 changes were made to Russia's Religion law which now requires all religions without legal status to register with the authorities and notify them of their activities, including the names and addresses of all members and meetings. Also, registered groups are limited in their activities within the first ten years of their existence, e.g. teaching and invitations to foreign preachers are very restricted. Unregistered groups experience discrimination all over Russia. In the North Caucasus, Christians cannot hold public office. On Russian TV channels and printed media there is a permanent campaign against sects and Evangelicals who are criticized along with Satanists and Scientologists.

Church sphere:

Christians with a Muslim background in the North Caucasus region have to live their faith essentially in secret and are constantly hindered from meeting each other. In Russia as a whole, registration is currently not particularly problematic. Churches which do not register do this to avoid state influence. All Christians in the North Caucasus are hindered in organizing Christian activities inside and outside their buildings. In Russia as a whole, the FSB is watching the activities of churches (both registered and unregistered). Religious materials considered

"extremist" are not only monitored, they are also confiscated. Numerous Jehovah Witnesses have been prosecuted for possessing "extremist" literature. In the North Caucasus pastors and other Christian leaders have left the region because of being targeted. It is impossible to print Christian materials in the North Caucasus region, nor can materials be imported into the region. Also, it is not possible in this region for Christian groups to establish charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural institutions or associations.

Violence:

In the WWL 2018 reporting period, Russian troops demolished a dilapidated Polish Catholic church and cemetery in Tsebelda, Abkhazia. Unrelated to this, at least 10 Christians were physically attacked and some 20 Christians were briefly detained by Russian police. One Christian from India and two from South Korea were extradited.

Further examples:

- In December 2016, the pastor of an unregistered Council of Churches Baptist congregation in Zabaikalsk Region became the first known religious leader charged for not notifying the authorities of a group's activities. On 6 December 2016 the regional Prosecutor's Office stated that, after an inspection of "compliance with the legislation on extremist activity, freedom of conscience, and freedom of religion and belief and religious associations", Chernyshevsk District prosecutors were charging the pastor under Administrative Code Article 19.7 ("Failure or late provision of information to a state body"). This carries a fine of 100 to 300 Rubles for private individuals and 300 to 500 Rubles for people in an official capacity. (Source: [Forum 18](#)¹⁰)
- In the period July 2017-March 2017 there were: 11 prosecutions (nine of organizations, two of community leaders) under Part 3 ("Implementation of activities by a religious organization without indicating its official full name, including the issuing or distribution, within the framework of missionary activity, of literature and printed, audio, and video material without a label bearing this name, or with an incomplete or deliberately false label"); 35 prosecutions (three of organizations, 32 of individuals) under Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity"); and seven prosecutions of individuals under Part 5 ("Foreigners conducting missionary activity"). (Source: [Forum 18](#)¹¹)
- Indian Protestant pastor Victor-Immanuel Mani is the first known case of a foreigner being deported under Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 5 ("Foreigners conducting missionary activity"). He is planning to appeal further, and his lawyers argue that the deportation order is in contradiction of a 2013 Supreme Court ruling that "expulsion from the country, which is home to members of [the defendant's] family, may violate the right to respect for family life". The deportation occurred early 2017. (Source: [Forum 18](#)¹²)

¹⁰ See: http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2246, last accessed 14 February 2018.

¹¹ See: http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2261, last accessed 14 February 2018.

¹² Id.

Gender profile of persecution

Female:

- In rural and Asian areas of the Russia, social pressure on Christian girls to get married and have a family force women into marriage with non-Christians. In these cases, women sometimes find themselves isolated in two ways: 1) from the non-Christian partner not sharing faith-based life, and 2) from the local Christian community that usually practices excommunication in the case of marriage to non-Christians. This is about social pressure and not persecution, but the results and its influence on the further life of Christian women are no less traumatizing.
- In Russia's Muslim regions, daily life is based on Islamic culture which gives women inferior status. Women are expected to show total submission to their parents and - if married - to their husbands. This makes them more vulnerable to persecution - both as Christians and as women who challenge the existing order.
- The persecution of women and girls affects the whole family - their husbands, parents and children.

Male:

- Due to the growth of patriotism in Russia (partly based on militarism and the memory of the Great Patriotic war - the Russian name for their involvement in WWII), it has become popular for young men to serve in the armed forces. Christians who choose community service as an alternative to military service risk being discriminated against.
- Men are also the heads of their families and usually the main bread winners. When a Christian man becomes a target of persecution – through being fined or imprisoned - his whole family will suffer. Losing employment will affect the whole family. Church leaders are normally male - if he is persecuted in some way, this often has a negative effect on the church and can result in fear.

Future outlook

Since 2011, a number of legal restrictions have been imposed; as there is a trend towards greater state control, it is likely that more such legislation will be passed in the coming years. As ties to Western countries are becoming increasingly strained, the Russian Federation may become increasingly isolated. This will affect especially those believers who belong to denominations that are regarded as Western. The activities of militant Islamic groups are likely to continue with outbursts of violence and attacks. For converts in the Muslim areas (the Caucasus and the region around the city of Kazan) difficulties can also be expected to continue.

Policy considerations

Currently under review.

WWR in-depth reports

There are currently no in-depth reports on Russia available at:

<http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/> (password: freedom)

Open Doors article(s) from the region

There are currently no Open Doors articles on Russia available at:

<http://opendoorsanalytical.org/articles/> (password: freedom).

World Watch Monitor news articles

Up-to-date articles are available at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/russian-federation/>

- [A 'dire time for human rights in Russia' as World Cup begins](#)
14 June 2018
"This is a very dire time for human rights in Russia," according to the Russia program director for Human Rights Watch, Tanya Lokshina, speaking ahead of the start of the 2018 Football World Cup, which kicked off in Moscow earlier today.
- [Dagestan church attacker linked to militant group, as unlikely hero emerges](#)
23 February 2018
Three people have been arrested in connection with the gun attack at a Russian Orthodox Church in Kizlyar, Dagestan, last Sunday (18 February), in which five people died and five others were injured.
- [Russia: 'Extremist' identified after five women killed in Dagestan church attack](#)
19 February 2018
Authorities in one of the least stable parts of Russia have identified the suspected gunman who killed five women at a church yesterday (18 February) before being shot dead by security forces.
- [US agency accuses Russia of abusing anti-extremism laws](#)
14 February 2018
Russia's anti-extremism laws are being used to crack down on peaceful religious minorities such as Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses and Hare Krishnas, the top US religious-freedom watchdog says.

- [Is Putin’s ‘education to patriotism’ bill another endorsement of Russian Orthodox Church?](#)

29 November 2017

A new law on “education to patriotism” set to be introduced in Russia on New Year’s Day is a further sign of Russia distancing itself from the West, but is not necessarily a sign of President Vladimir Putin favoring one Church over another, according to an analyst for the Christian charity Open Doors.

- [Russian Patriarch and UK archbishop call for greater support for persecuted Christians](#)

23 November 2017

The Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Archbishop of Canterbury have called for more aid to reach Middle Eastern refugees, especially Christians, and for robust safeguards against extremist ideology, which they say has spread “like an epidemic”.

- [Crimea also affected in first year of Russia’s ‘anti-missionary law’](#)

27 July 2017

Since Russia’s President Vladimir Putin signed into law what some commentators referred to as an “anti-missionary bill” in July last year, individuals and groups have been targeted because of their religious affiliation in both Russia and the annexed Crimea.

- [US missionary appeals to European Court of Human Rights over Russian law](#)

29 March 2017

Today, Donald Ossewaarde filed an application to the European Court of Human Rights, arguing that his right to religious freedom has been violated. Mr. Ossewaarde had held weekly Bible meetings at his home in the Russian city of Oryol for many years before being found guilty of conducting illegal missionary activities by a local court.

Recent country developments

Up-to-date articles are available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=russia> (password: freedom).

- [Russia: Putin consolidates his power](#)

14 June 2018

Vladimir Putin took his fourth oath of office as president of Russia on 7 May 2018 and promised to “multiply the strength and prosperity of Russia”.

- [Russia: New law on “education to patriotism”](#)
8 December 2017
A draft law “On education to patriotism in the Russian Federation” was presented to the State Duma on 15 November 2017. This law on patriotism is being proposed by a group of members of President Putin’s “United Russia” party.
- [Russia: Protestantism belongs to Russia’s traditional religions, says Kremlin](#)
7 December 2017
A senior Russian official has said that Protestant Christians are part of Russia’s traditional religious communities, and praised the important role they have played in Russian society.
- [Russia: Patriarch publicly condemns both Communist era and Western culture](#)
6 December 2017
The head of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), Patriarch Kirill, has heavily criticized the 1917 October Revolution in a recent speech.
- [Russia: Leader of radical Orthodox group sentenced to 30 days in prison](#)
20 October 2017
Aleksandr Kalinin, the leader of an organization that calls itself “Christian State – Holy Rus”, was detained on 20 September 2017 as a suspect in the 11 September arson attack aimed at the director of the film “Matilda”.
- [Russia: Contrasting views on Jehovah Witness ban](#)
May 2017
Russia’s Roman Catholic Church has condemned Russia’s Supreme Court decision of 20 April 2017 to ban the activities of Jehovah’s Witnesses. It claims the move represents a threat to all areas of religious freedom.
- [Russia: History repeating itself?](#)
2 May 2017
Russia’s Supreme Court has officially banned all activities of Jehovah’s Witnesses, declaring them to be an extremist group.
- [Russia: If Jehovah’s Witnesses are banned, which religious groups will be targeted next?](#)
1 April 2017
Russia’s Justice Ministry is seeking Supreme Court action against the Administrative Centre of Jehovah’s Witnesses. If the Justice Ministry wins, Jehovah’s Witnesses will be declared an “extremist” organization and banned across Russia.

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