

World  
Watch  
Research

## Kyrgyzstan: Full Country Dossier

March 2023



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

March 2023

© Open Doors International

[research@od.org](mailto:research@od.org)

# Contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>Introduction .....</b>   | <b>3</b>  |
| World Watch List 2023 .....   | 3         |
| Copyright note.....   | 4         |
| Sources and definitions.....  | 4         |
| <b>WWL 2023 Situation in brief / Kyrgyzstan.....</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         |
| Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period ..... | 6         |
| Specific examples of positive developments .....                        | 6         |
| External Links - Situation in brief .....                               | 7         |
| <b>WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Kyrgyzstan .....</b>               | <b>7</b>  |
| Links for general background information.....                           | 7         |
| Recent history .....  | 7         |
| Political and legal landscape .....                                     | 9         |
| Religious landscape .....   | 11        |
| Economic landscape.....   | 12        |
| Social and cultural landscape.....                                      | 13        |
| Technological landscape .....   | 15        |
| Security situation .....  | 16        |
| Trends analysis.....  | 17        |
| External Links - Keys to understanding .....                            | 17        |
| <b>WWL 2023: Church information / Kyrgyzstan .....</b>                  | <b>19</b> |
| Christian origins.....  | 19        |
| Church spectrum today.....  | 19        |
| Areas where Christians face most difficulties .....                     | 20        |
| Christian communities and how they are affected .....                   | 20        |
| External Links - Church information.....                                | 21        |
| <b>WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Kyrgyzstan.....</b>                 | <b>21</b> |
| Reporting period .....  | 21        |
| Position on the World Watch List .....                                  | 21        |
| Persecution engines .....   | 21        |

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| Drivers of persecution.....                          | 22        |
| The Persecution pattern.....                         | 24        |
| Pressure in the 5 spheres of life.....               | 24        |
| Violence.....  | 29        |
| 5 Year trends .....                                  | 31        |
| Gender-specific religious persecution / Female ..... | 33        |
| Gender-specific religious persecution / Male .....   | 34        |
| Persecution of other religious minorities.....       | 35        |
| Future outlook.....                                  | 35        |
| External Links - Persecution Dynamics.....           | 36        |
| <b>Further useful reports.....</b>                   | <b>36</b> |

# Introduction

## World Watch List 2023

| Rank | Country      | Private life | Family life | Community life | National life | Church life | Violence | Total Score WWL 2023 | Total Score WWL 2022 | Total Score WWL 2021 | Total Score WWL 2020 | Total Score WWL 2019 |
|------|--------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|----------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1    | North Korea  | 16.7         | 16.7        | 16.7           | 16.7          | 16.7        | 14.4     | 98                   | 96                   | 94                   | 94                   | 94                   |
| 2    | Somalia      | 16.5         | 16.7        | 16.6           | 16.6          | 16.6        | 8.7      | 92                   | 91                   | 92                   | 92                   | 91                   |
| 3    | Yemen        | 16.7         | 16.7        | 16.7           | 16.7          | 16.7        | 5.9      | 89                   | 88                   | 87                   | 85                   | 86                   |
| 4    | Eritrea      | 14.6         | 14.9        | 15.5           | 15.9          | 15.7        | 12.2     | 89                   | 88                   | 88                   | 87                   | 86                   |
| 5    | Libya        | 15.6         | 15.5        | 15.9           | 16.1          | 16.3        | 9.1      | 88                   | 91                   | 92                   | 90                   | 87                   |
| 6    | Nigeria      | 13.8         | 13.8        | 14.6           | 14.8          | 14.4        | 16.7     | 88                   | 87                   | 85                   | 80                   | 80                   |
| 7    | Pakistan     | 13.4         | 13.8        | 14.8           | 14.8          | 12.9        | 16.7     | 86                   | 87                   | 88                   | 88                   | 87                   |
| 8    | Iran         | 14.5         | 14.6        | 13.8           | 15.8          | 16.5        | 10.7     | 86                   | 85                   | 86                   | 85                   | 85                   |
| 9    | Afghanistan  | 15.4         | 15.7        | 15.4           | 16.1          | 16.6        | 4.6      | 84                   | 98                   | 94                   | 93                   | 94                   |
| 10   | Sudan        | 14.1         | 14.2        | 14.9           | 14.9          | 15.5        | 9.4      | 83                   | 79                   | 79                   | 85                   | 87                   |
| 11   | India        | 12.3         | 13.1        | 13.0           | 14.8          | 13.3        | 15.7     | 82                   | 82                   | 83                   | 83                   | 83                   |
| 12   | Syria        | 13.2         | 14.1        | 13.6           | 14.1          | 14.1        | 11.3     | 80                   | 78                   | 81                   | 82                   | 82                   |
| 13   | Saudi Arabia | 15.2         | 15.3        | 14.9           | 15.8          | 16.7        | 2.4      | 80                   | 81                   | 78                   | 79                   | 77                   |
| 14   | Myanmar      | 12.5         | 11.6        | 13.9           | 13.9          | 12.9        | 15.4     | 80                   | 79                   | 74                   | 73                   | 71                   |
| 15   | Maldives     | 15.4         | 15.3        | 13.8           | 16.0          | 16.4        | 0.2      | 77                   | 77                   | 77                   | 78                   | 78                   |
| 16   | China        | 12.9         | 10.0        | 12.7           | 14.5          | 15.6        | 11.1     | 77                   | 76                   | 74                   | 70                   | 65                   |
| 17   | Mali         | 11.1         | 10.1        | 14.7           | 10.3          | 15.1        | 15.0     | 76                   | 70                   | 67                   | 66                   | 68                   |
| 18   | Iraq         | 14.1         | 14.6        | 14.0           | 14.8          | 13.9        | 4.6      | 76                   | 78                   | 82                   | 76                   | 79                   |
| 19   | Algeria      | 14.1         | 14.1        | 11.5           | 13.7          | 15.1        | 4.8      | 73                   | 71                   | 70                   | 73                   | 70                   |
| 20   | Mauritania   | 14.5         | 14.2        | 13.3           | 14.1          | 14.2        | 1.3      | 72                   | 70                   | 71                   | 68                   | 67                   |
| 21   | Uzbekistan   | 14.9         | 12.7        | 13.9           | 12.7          | 15.6        | 1.5      | 71                   | 71                   | 71                   | 73                   | 74                   |
| 22   | Colombia     | 11.8         | 8.9         | 13.1           | 11.3          | 10.4        | 15.4     | 71                   | 68                   | 67                   | 62                   | 58                   |
| 23   | Burkina Faso | 9.4          | 9.7         | 12.5           | 9.6           | 13.8        | 15.6     | 71                   | 68                   | 67                   | 66                   | 48                   |
| 24   | CAR          | 10.3         | 8.6         | 13.9           | 9.6           | 12.2        | 15.6     | 70                   | 68                   | 66                   | 68                   | 70                   |
| 25   | Vietnam      | 11.8         | 9.6         | 12.8           | 14.6          | 14.4        | 6.9      | 70                   | 71                   | 72                   | 72                   | 70                   |
| 26   | Turkmenistan | 14.5         | 11.3        | 13.6           | 14.1          | 15.7        | 0.6      | 70                   | 69                   | 70                   | 70                   | 69                   |
| 27   | Cuba         | 13.1         | 8.3         | 13.1           | 13.2          | 14.9        | 7.0      | 70                   | 66                   | 62                   | 52                   | 49                   |
| 28   | Niger        | 9.4          | 9.5         | 14.5           | 7.7           | 13.1        | 15.4     | 70                   | 68                   | 62                   | 60                   | 52                   |
| 29   | Morocco      | 13.2         | 13.8        | 10.9           | 12.2          | 14.5        | 4.8      | 69                   | 69                   | 67                   | 66                   | 63                   |
| 30   | Bangladesh   | 12.6         | 10.7        | 12.8           | 11.3          | 10.6        | 10.7     | 69                   | 68                   | 67                   | 63                   | 58                   |
| 31   | Laos         | 11.7         | 10.2        | 13.3           | 14.2          | 14.0        | 5.0      | 68                   | 69                   | 71                   | 72                   | 71                   |
| 32   | Mozambique   | 9.3          | 8.5         | 13.9           | 8.4           | 12.5        | 15.6     | 68                   | 65                   | 63                   | 43                   | 43                   |
| 33   | Indonesia    | 11.3         | 12.0        | 11.6           | 11.1          | 9.2         | 12.8     | 68                   | 68                   | 63                   | 60                   | 65                   |
| 34   | Qatar        | 14.2         | 14.1        | 10.5           | 13.2          | 14.4        | 1.5      | 68                   | 74                   | 67                   | 66                   | 62                   |
| 35   | Egypt        | 12.7         | 13.5        | 11.6           | 12.1          | 10.8        | 7.0      | 68                   | 71                   | 75                   | 76                   | 76                   |
| 36   | Tunisia      | 12.0         | 12.8        | 10.4           | 12.0          | 13.5        | 6.5      | 67                   | 66                   | 67                   | 64                   | 63                   |
| 37   | DRC          | 8.0          | 7.9         | 12.6           | 9.7           | 13.0        | 15.6     | 67                   | 66                   | 64                   | 56                   | 55                   |
| 38   | Mexico       | 10.3         | 8.3         | 12.5           | 11.0          | 10.5        | 13.9     | 67                   | 65                   | 64                   | 60                   | 61                   |
| 39   | Ethiopia     | 9.9          | 10.3        | 13.1           | 10.4          | 12.1        | 10.6     | 66                   | 66                   | 65                   | 63                   | 65                   |
| 40   | Bhutan       | 13.2         | 12.3        | 11.6           | 13.9          | 14.2        | 1.1      | 66                   | 67                   | 64                   | 61                   | 64                   |
| 41   | Turkey       | 12.8         | 11.5        | 11.8           | 13.0          | 11.5        | 5.7      | 66                   | 65                   | 69                   | 63                   | 66                   |
| 42   | Comoros      | 12.7         | 14.0        | 11.2           | 12.4          | 14.2        | 1.5      | 66                   | 63                   | 62                   | 57                   | 56                   |
| 43   | Malaysia     | 12.8         | 14.3        | 11.4           | 12.2          | 11.1        | 3.9      | 66                   | 63                   | 63                   | 62                   | 60                   |
| 44   | Tajikistan   | 13.8         | 12.2        | 12.3           | 12.8          | 13.4        | 1.1      | 66                   | 65                   | 66                   | 65                   | 65                   |
| 45   | Cameroon     | 8.8          | 7.6         | 12.6           | 7.2           | 13.1        | 15.9     | 65                   | 65                   | 64                   | 60                   | 54                   |
| 46   | Brunei       | 14.8         | 14.6        | 10.1           | 10.9          | 14.4        | 0.4      | 65                   | 64                   | 64                   | 63                   | 63                   |
| 47   | Oman         | 14.0         | 14.1        | 10.3           | 13.3          | 12.9        | 0.6      | 65                   | 66                   | 63                   | 62                   | 59                   |
| 48   | Kazakhstan   | 13.2         | 11.6        | 11.9           | 12.7          | 14.2        | 1.1      | 65                   | 64                   | 64                   | 64                   | 63                   |
| 49   | Jordan       | 13.0         | 14.0        | 10.5           | 12.3          | 12.7        | 2.0      | 65                   | 66                   | 64                   | 64                   | 65                   |
| 50   | Nicaragua    | 10.8         | 5.9         | 11.9           | 12.8          | 13.6        | 9.4      | 65                   | 56                   | 51                   | 41                   | 41                   |

| Rank | Country                 | Private life | Family life | Community life | National life | Church life | Violence | Total Score WWL 2023 | Total Score WWL 2022 | Total Score WWL 2021 | Total Score WWL 2020 | Total Score WWL 2019 |
|------|-------------------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|----------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 51   | Kenya                   | 10.3         | 9.2         | 11.4           | 8.0           | 11.5        | 13.3     | 64                   | 63                   | 62                   | 61                   | 61                   |
| 52   | Kuwait                  | 13.5         | 13.7        | 9.8            | 12.3          | 13.1        | 1.1      | 64                   | 64                   | 63                   | 62                   | 60                   |
| 53   | Tanzania                | 9.3          | 10.8        | 10.3           | 8.6           | 8.7         | 15.6     | 63                   | 61                   | 58                   | 55                   | 52                   |
| 54   | UAE                     | 13.4         | 13.4        | 9.9            | 11.2          | 12.8        | 1.1      | 62                   | 62                   | 62                   | 60                   | 58                   |
| 55   | Nepal                   | 12.0         | 9.8         | 9.4            | 13.0          | 12.6        | 4.4      | 61                   | 64                   | 66                   | 64                   | 64                   |
| 56   | Djibouti                | 12.3         | 12.6        | 12.7           | 10.1          | 12.3        | 0.6      | 60                   | 59                   | 56                   | 56                   | 56                   |
| 57   | Palestinian Territories | 13.0         | 13.3        | 9.7            | 10.3          | 12.0        | 2.0      | 60                   | 59                   | 58                   | 60                   | 57                   |
| 58   | Azerbaijan              | 13.2         | 10.0        | 9.5            | 12.0          | 13.6        | 0.6      | 59                   | 60                   | 56                   | 57                   | 57                   |
| 59   | Kyrgyzstan              | 12.9         | 10.2        | 11.0           | 10.4          | 12.0        | 2.0      | 59                   | 58                   | 58                   | 57                   | 56                   |
| 60   | Chad                    | 11.6         | 8.2         | 10.2           | 10.2          | 10.3        | 7.6      | 58                   | 55                   | 53                   | 56                   | 48                   |
| 61   | Russian Federation      | 12.3         | 7.9         | 10.3           | 11.8          | 12.8        | 2.0      | 57                   | 56                   | 57                   | 60                   | 60                   |
| 62   | Sri Lanka               | 12.8         | 9.1         | 10.6           | 11.3          | 9.5         | 3.9      | 57                   | 63                   | 62                   | 65                   | 58                   |
| 63   | Rwanda                  | 9.4          | 7.7         | 9.0            | 10.4          | 11.7        | 8.9      | 57                   | 50                   | 42                   | 42                   | 41                   |
| 64   | Venezuela               | 6.0          | 4.6         | 11.7           | 10.2          | 11.4        | 11.7     | 56                   | 51                   | 39                   | 42                   | 41                   |
| 65   | Burundi                 | 7.6          | 7.8         | 9.4            | 9.8           | 9.7         | 11.1     | 55                   | 52                   | 48                   | 48                   | 43                   |
| 66   | Bahrain                 | 12.7         | 13.3        | 8.7            | 10.7          | 8.8         | 0.9      | 55                   | 57                   | 56                   | 55                   | 55                   |
| 67   | Honduras                | 7.1          | 5.0         | 11.9           | 7.6           | 9.8         | 11.9     | 53                   | 48                   | 46                   | 39                   | 38                   |
| 68   | Angola                  | 6.8          | 6.7         | 8.1            | 11.5          | 11.4        | 7.2      | 52                   | 51                   | 46                   | 43                   | 42                   |
| 69   | Uganda                  | 8.1          | 5.0         | 7.4            | 6.7           | 9.2         | 14.8     | 51                   | 48                   | 47                   | 48                   | 47                   |
| 70   | Togo                    | 9.2          | 6.7         | 9.3            | 7.1           | 11.0        | 5.4      | 49                   | 44                   | 43                   | 41                   | 42                   |
| 71   | Guinea                  | 10.3         | 7.5         | 8.3            | 8.3           | 10.5        | 3.0      | 48                   | 43                   | 47                   | 45                   | 46                   |
| 72   | South Sudan             | 5.7          | 4.4         | 7.0            | 6.3           | 7.6         | 15.0     | 46                   | 43                   | 43                   | 44                   | 44                   |
| 73   | El Salvador             | 7.7          | 4.2         | 10.6           | 7.4           | 9.1         | 6.7      | 46                   | 45                   | 42                   | 38                   | 30                   |
| 74   | Ivory Coast             | 12.0         | 6.5         | 8.7            | 5.9           | 8.0         | 3.3      | 44                   | 42                   | 42                   | 42                   | 43                   |
| 75   | Gambia                  | 8.3          | 8.2         | 8.9            | 8.8           | 8.9         | 1.1      | 44                   | 44                   | 43                   | 43                   | 43                   |
| 76   | Belarus                 | 9.5          | 3.8         | 4.8            | 9.4           | 12.1        | 3.3      | 43                   | 33                   | 30                   | 28                   | 35                   |

## Copyright note

This document is the property of World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. It may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © 2023 Open Doors International.

## 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 2023 reporting period was 1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022.
- 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 including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

# WWL 2023 Situation in brief / Kyrgyzstan

## Brief country details

| Kyrgyzstan: Population (UN estimate for 2022) | Christians | Chr% |
|---|------------|------|
| 6,728,000                                     | 277,000    | 4.1  |

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurló G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

## Map of country



| Kyrgyzstan: World Watch List | Points | WWL Rank |
|------------------------------|--------|----------|
| WWL 2023                     | 59     | 59       |
| WWL 2022                     | 58     | 59       |
| WWL 2021                     | 58     | 55       |
| WWL 2020                     | 57     | 55       |
| WWL 2019                     | 56     | 52       |

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

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

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

### Brief description of the persecution situation

The local authorities have considerable power and tend to be under the influence of the local Muslim community. This has strong repercussions for converts to Christianity. Russian Orthodox churches experience the least problems from the government as they do not usually attempt to make contact with the Kyrgyz population. It is the indigenous Christians with a Muslim background who are bearing the brunt of persecution. Some of these converts are locked up for long periods by their families and beaten. Local Islamic teachers preach against them and may cause them to be expelled from their communities.

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

The following examples are from Open Doors sources. For security reasons no detailed information can be given.

- A local pastor was arrested by the secret police, charged with creating interreligious conflict through his posts online. In his court trial, he faces a stiff prison sentence of up to 5 years.
- Three siblings who suffered extreme domestic violence due to their Christian faith have been forced to leave their parental home and move to the capital city, Bishkek.
- At least four other converts were known to have suffered physical harassment.

### Specific examples of positive developments

- A court in Bishkek has refused to deem publications from the Jehovah's Witnesses as extremist, rejecting a step by state authorities towards completely outlawing the religious group. The Birinchi Mai district court in the Kyrgyz capital rejected a request by the Prosecutor-General's Office to recognize 11 books, two brochures, and six videotapes belonging to a group of Jehovah's Witnesses as 'extremist'. (Source: [Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, RFE-RL, 3 December 2021](#))

- Ever since attending an autumn youth camp, a group of young Catholics in Kyrgyzstan have been making plans to spread Christian faith through music. A first event was the creation of a living nativity scene at a Christmas Eve service in 2021. The initiative involved collaboration between Catholics in various Central Asian countries. For instance, a member of the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Tashkent (Uzbekistan) made an invaluable contribution by offering keyboard training for the group. (Source: [Agenzia Fides, 4 February 2022](#))

## External Links - Situation in brief

- Specific examples of positive developments: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, RFE-RL, 3 December 2021 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-jehovahs-witnesses-extremist/31592362.html>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Agenzia Fides, 4 February 2022 - [http://www.fides.org/en/news/71578-ASIA\\_KIRGHIZSTAN\\_The\\_Gospel\\_in\\_music\\_with\\_the\\_youth\\_of\\_Central\\_Asia](http://www.fides.org/en/news/71578-ASIA_KIRGHIZSTAN_The_Gospel_in_music_with_the_youth_of_Central_Asia)

# WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Kyrgyzstan

## Links for general background information

| Name  | Quote Reference                         | Link  | Last accessed on |
|---|---|---|------------------|
| Amnesty International 2021/22 country report – covering 154 countries                   | AI country report 2021/22 (pp. 226-228) | <a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf">https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf</a>   | 28 June 2022     |
| BBC News country profile  | BBC country profile                     | <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16186907">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16186907</a>   | 28 June 2022     |
| Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 – covering 137 countries           | BTI report 2022                         | <a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/KGZ">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/KGZ</a>   | 28 June 2022     |
| CIA World Factbook  | CIA Factbook                            | <a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/kyrgyzstan/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/kyrgyzstan/</a>   | 28 June 2022     |
| Crisis24 country report (Garda World) – covering 193 countries                          | Crisis24 country report                 | <a href="https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/kyrgyzstan">https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/kyrgyzstan</a>   | 28 June 2022     |
| Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2021 – covering 167 countries               | EIU 2021 (pp. 44/46-47)                 | <a href="https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf">https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf</a>   | 28 June 2022     |
| FFP's Fragile States Index 2022 – covering 179 countries                                | FSI 2022                                | <a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>   | 5 August 2022    |
| Freedom House's 2022 Democracy index – covering 29 countries                            | Democracy Index 2022                    | <a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/kyrgyzstan/nations-transit/2022">https://freedomhouse.org/country/kyrgyzstan/nations-transit/2022</a>   | 28 June 2022     |
| Freedom House's 2022 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries                      | Global Freedom Index 2022               | <a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/kyrgyzstan/freedom-world/2022">https://freedomhouse.org/country/kyrgyzstan/freedom-world/2022</a>   | 28 June 2022     |
| Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2021 report – covering 70 countries                  | Freedom on the Net 2021                 | <a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/kyrgyzstan/freedom-net/2021">https://freedomhouse.org/country/kyrgyzstan/freedom-net/2021</a>   | 28 June 2022     |
| Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 (country chapter) – covering 100+ countries        | HRW 2022 country chapter                | <a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/kyrgyzstan">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/kyrgyzstan</a>   | 28 June 2022     |
| Internet World Stats 2022   | IWS 2022                                | <a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#kg">https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#kg</a>   | 28 June 2022     |
| RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries                           | World Press Freedom 2022                | <a href="https://rsf.org/en/kyrgyzstan">https://rsf.org/en/kyrgyzstan</a>   | 28 June 2022     |
| Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries | CPI 2021                                | <a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/kgz">https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/kgz</a>   | 28 June 2022     |
| UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators (country profile) – covering 189 countries   | HDI profile                             | <a href="https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#countries/KGZ">https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#countries/KGZ</a>   | 28 June 2022     |
| US State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom (country profile)            | IRFR 2021                               | <a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/kyrgyzstan/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/kyrgyzstan/</a>   | 28 June 2022     |
| USCIRF 2022 country reports – covering 15 CPC / 12 SWL, KGZ not included                | USCIRF 2022                             | <a href="https://www.uscifr.gov/countries">https://www.uscifr.gov/countries</a>   |                  |
| World Bank country overview – covering 178 countries                                    | World Bank overview 2022                | <a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kyrgyzrepublic">https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kyrgyzrepublic</a>   | 28 June 2022     |
| World Bank country profile data – covering 222 countries                                | World Bank profile (2020 data)          | <a href="https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=KGZ">https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=KGZ</a> | 28 June 2022     |
| World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 – covering 147 countries (divided per region)     | Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 (pp. 22-23)  | <a href="https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/d5f32ef28464d01f195827b7e020a3e8-0500022021/related/mpo-eca.pdf">https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/d5f32ef28464d01f195827b7e020a3e8-0500022021/related/mpo-eca.pdf</a>   | 28 June 2022     |

## Recent history

When Kyrgyzstan became an independent country in 1991 its ruling Communist regime remained in power. In March 2005 the people of Kyrgyzstan started to revolt against the regime in what became known as the “Tulip Revolution”. The result was a bloodless coup after which President Askar Akayev fled the country with his family. The subsequent democratically elected government was headed by Kurmanbek Bakiyev. These keywords “bloodless coup” and “democratic elections” need to be emphasized because this is unique in the entire region.

The new regime soon ran into the same issues that had ousted the Akayev regime, namely corruption, ineptitude and heavy-handed rule. On top of that, Kyrgyzstan experienced an ex-



tremely weak economic situation, high levels of crime and the growth of Islamic militancy in the Fergana Valley. In April 2010 this led to large-scale demonstrations organized by the political opposition. While the country was in uproar, violence between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz broke out in the cities of Osh and Jalal-Abad in the Fergana Valley. The clashes killed nearly 420 people, mostly Uzbeks, and another 80,000 were displaced. President Bakiyev [fled](#) with his family in the same month (Reuters, 15 April 2010).

A provisional government was formed in 2010, headed by Roza Otunbayeva, who became interim president, making her the first female ever to achieve such a high position in Central Asia. The ensuing political changes turned Kyrgyzstan into the first - and so far only - parliamentary democracy in Central Asia. Roza Otunbayeva announced that she did not intend to run for the presidential elections in November 2011. The election was won by Almazbek Atambayev, leader of the Social Democratic Party and prime minister at that time. Atambayev was sworn in as president on 1 December 2011 and Omurbek Babanov was appointed as new prime minister on the same day. Sooronbai Jeenbekov became Kyrgyzstan's fifth president after winning more than 54% percent of the vote in the October 2017 election to replace outgoing leader Almazbek Atambayev.

However, the government does not have complete control in Kyrgyzstan. A demonstration calling for the release of ex-deputy Sadyr Japarov was organized on 2 March 2020 in the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek. The rally was attended by over two thousand people and ended with clashes between demonstrators and the police, with 170 people arrested (but with charges only being brought against 4 of that number). In addition to the release of nationalist politician Sadyr Japarov from prison, the protesters presented a list of 20 requests to the authorities, effectively calling for regime change and free elections. (Source: [Asia News, 4 March 2020](#))

In early October 2020 there were large-scale protests over parliamentary election results. This led to the resignation of President Jeenbekov on 15 October 2020 ([BBC News, 15 October 2020](#)). According to the BBC News report, more than 1,200 people were injured and one person was killed in street clashes. Japarov was released from prison during the protests and took over as interim president until elections could take place in 2021 ([The Guardian, 16 October 2020](#)). After winning the presidential election on 10 January 2021, he vowed to fight corruption and allow more transparency into government operations. The Central Election Commission reported that Japarov received slightly more than 79% of the vote. There were 17 candidates in the presidential race and the closest rival only received 6.7% of the vote (Source: [RFE-RL, 10 January 2021](#)).

Pro-government parties won a majority in the Jogorku Kenesh (Kyrgyzstan's legislature) in November 2021 elections. Continuing concerns for Kyrgyzstan include the trajectory of democratization, endemic corruption, a history of tense, and at times violent, interethnic relations, border security vulnerabilities, and potential terrorist threats. (Source: CIA Factbook)

## Political and legal landscape

In 2005, Kyrgyzstan was the first country to replace its post-Soviet regime with a democratically elected government – unique in the entire region. Unlike other countries in Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan has a democratically elected president and parliament, with the president being elected by popular vote for a single six-year term. Since 2010, Kyrgyzstan's parliament has been made up of representatives of five different political parties. However, such democracy does not mean that the country has freedom of religion. Since 2009 restrictive religious legislation began to be introduced. Drafts for a new, more restrictive, religion law were issued in 2014, the most important change being the requirement that 500 citizens need to sign registration applications, which would make registration as good as impossible for most churches, since they do not have that many members. However, implementation has currently been delayed.

In October 2020 President Sooronbai Jeenbekov resigned as president of Kyrgyzstan. He was succeeded by Sadyr Japarov who won the January 2021 elections by a large margin (see above: *Recent history*). President Japarov submitted a draft constitution to the Kyrgyz Parliament on 9 February 2021. Human Rights Watch pointed out that the draft undermines human rights norms and weakens checks and balances necessary to prevent abuses of power. (Source: [HRW, 5 March 2021](#))

In April 2021, Kyrgyzstanis voted in favor of draft constitutional changes that consolidated power in the presidency. On 5 May 2021, President Japarov signed into law a bill on constitutional amendments approved by the nationwide referendum. This has been criticized by his opponents as being a move to increase his power as president. (Source: [RFE-RL, 5 May 2021](#))

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2021):

- "The constitution guarantees freedom of conscience and religion and bans religious groups from undertaking actions inciting religious hatred. It establishes the separation of religion and state and prohibits pursuit of political goals by religious groups. The law requires all religious groups to register with the government and prohibits activity by unregistered religious groups. Authorities maintained bans on 21 'religiously oriented' groups they considered extremist and detained nine members of one group for distributing banned religious material."
- "In May [2021], the government introduced an amendment to the religion law that would end the requirement for local governments to approve applications of religious organizations with the SCRA, but the government had not acted on that amendment by year's end. The government did not always separate those considered violent extremists from inmates incarcerated for lesser crimes, according to NGOs, particularly in women's prisons. NGOs also said the government did not always provide religious materials to prisoners convicted of affiliation with banned religious groups. According to Christian activists, non-Muslim religious minorities continued to face difficulties arranging for burial of their dead in public cemeteries. The SCRA-proposed solution, which would divide public cemeteries by religion so that all faith groups have burial space, was not implemented at all local levels, according to Christian activists."

Kyrgyzstan is not listed in the USCIRF 2022 reports as either a Country of Particular Concern or a Special Watch List country. The most recent inclusion was in [USCIRF 2017](#) and states:

- "Although Kyrgyzstan is less repressive than other Central Asian states, discriminatory decision-making, hostility, and indifference are still a reality for many religious communities. Kyrgyzstan's ethnic Uzbeks have been targeted by official discrimination, especially in the aftermath of bloody inter-ethnic clashes in Osh in 2010. USCIRF has monitored religious freedom conditions in Kyrgyzstan for several years. The constitution purports to provide for religious freedom for all citizens, but Kyrgyzstan's 2009 religion law violates international standards of freedom of religion or belief by criminalizing unregistered religious activity and imposing burdensome registration requirements, including that a religious group must include at least 200 resident citizens as founders. The Kyrgyz religion law limits conscientious objection to military service status to members of registered religious groups. In addition, the authority of the Kyrgyz State Committee for Religious Affairs (KSCRA) to censor religious materials—increased under 2012 amendments to the religion law—seems to apply particularly to non-traditional Muslim, Protestant, and minority religions. In 2015, draft religion law amendments were discussed that would have resulted in major new official restrictions on religious communities; as of February 2017, the amendments were still under consideration."

### **Gender perspective**

Kyrgyzstan's legal protection for women and girls is often overridden by social and cultural norms. Whilst forced marriages and child marriage are illegal, both practices continue. According to [Girls Not Brides](#), 13% of girls are married before the age of 18, and according to a 2017 study, one in five girls is targeted for abduction and forced marriage ([Thomson Reuters, 2 August 2017](#)). Despite bride kidnapping being outlawed in 2013, convictions are rare and women remain unwilling to report cases for fear of reprisals ([BBC News, 8 April 2021](#)). Representing a positive development, Kyrgyzstan's parliament recently banned a tradition whereby families pressurized the victims of domestic violence into reconciling with their abusers to avoid the situation of a divorce ([RFE-RL, 27 January 2021](#)). The bill also calls for tougher punishments for perpetrators of domestic violence, who previously enjoyed impunity for their actions (HRW 2021 country chapter).

There are no religious political parties in Kyrgyzstan. As a result, Christians are not involved in Kyrgyz politics at party level.

## Religious landscape

| Kyrgyzstan: Religious context   | Number of adherents | %    |
|---|---------------------|------|
| Christians  | 277,000             | 4.1  |
| Muslim  | 5,939,000           | 88.3 |
| Hindu   | 0                   | 0.0  |
| Buddhist  | 31,200              | 0.5  |
| Ethno-religionist   | 27,800              | 0.4  |
| Jewish  | 400                 | 0.0  |
| Bahai   | 1,800               | 0.0  |
| Atheist   | 71,500              | 1.1  |
| Agnostic  | 376,000             | 5.6  |
| Other   | 4,000               | 0.1  |
| <i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i> |                     |      |

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

According to the World Christian Database (WCD 2022), Muslims make up 88.3% of the population and are predominantly Sunni. The influence of traditional Sufi Islam is considerable, especially in the mountainous countryside – trees full of prayer flags can often be seen along major roads and people visit the tombs of past Muslim leaders and saints regularly. The government of the country, however, is strictly secular.

The relatively high proportion of agnostics and atheists (6.7%) can be regarded as the result of 70 years of atheist indoctrination by the Communists during the Soviet era. Representatives of this category are mainly to be found in the major cities. Rural areas tend to be more traditionally Muslim.

The initial growth of Christianity in Kyrgyzstan in the wake of independence in 1991 has come to a halt and numbers are now declining. As in many other countries in Central Asia, churches in Kyrgyzstan are experiencing the emigration of Russian, Ukrainian and German members. One of the major problems for Christians in Kyrgyzstan and the other countries in Central Asia is the fact that there is little cooperation between the various denominations, which plays into the hands of the government.

Christians in Kyrgyzstan experience more freedom than those in other Central Asian countries. The laws may be restrictive, but congregations which do not manage to obtain registration can still often function as house-churches. They know their meetings may be stopped, but this does not occur too often. The planned new restrictions on registration (drafted in 2014) have still not been implemented. This means that 'only' 200 signatures are currently needed for a church regi-

stration application, instead of the proposed 500.

## Economic landscape

According to the World Bank country profile:

- **GDP (current US\$) (billion):** 8.54 (in 2021)
- **GDP growth (annual %):** 3.6% (in 2021)

According to the CIA Factbook:

- "Kyrgyzstan is a landlocked, mountainous, lower middle income country with an economy dominated by minerals extraction, agriculture, and reliance on remittances from citizens working abroad. Cotton, wool, and meat are the main agricultural products, although only cotton is exported in any quantity. Other exports include gold, mercury, uranium, natural gas, and - in some years - electricity. The country has sought to attract foreign investment to expand its export base, including construction of hydroelectric dams, but a difficult investment climate and an ongoing legal battle with a Canadian firm over the joint ownership structure of the nation's largest gold mine deter potential investors. Remittances from Kyrgyz migrant workers, predominantly in Russia and Kazakhstan, are equivalent to more than one-quarter of Kyrgyzstan's GDP."
- "Following independence, Kyrgyzstan rapidly implemented market reforms, such as improving the regulatory system and instituting land reform. In 1998, Kyrgyzstan was the first Commonwealth of Independent States country to be accepted into the World Trade Organization. The government has privatized much of its ownership shares in public enterprises. Despite these reforms, the country suffered a severe drop in production in the early 1990s and has again faced slow growth in recent years as the global financial crisis and declining oil prices have dampened economies across Central Asia. The Kyrgyz government remains dependent on foreign donor support to finance its annual budget deficit of approximately 3 to 5% of GDP."
- "Kyrgyz leaders hope the country's August 2015 accession to the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) will bolster trade and investment, but slowing economies in Russia and China and low commodity prices continue to hamper economic growth. Large-scale trade and investment pledged by Kyrgyz leaders has been slow to develop. Many Kyrgyz entrepreneurs and politicians complain that non-tariff measures imposed by other EAEU member states are hurting certain sectors of the Kyrgyz economy, such as meat and dairy production, in which they have comparative advantage. Since acceding to the EAEU, the Kyrgyz Republic has continued harmonizing its laws and regulations to meet EAEU standards, though many local entrepreneurs believe this process as disjointed and incomplete. Kyrgyzstan's economic development continues to be hampered by corruption, lack of administrative transparency, lack of diversity in domestic industries, and difficulty attracting foreign aid and investment."

Kyrgyzstan is increasingly turning to Russia and away from the West. The EAEU mentioned above is a cooperation between Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus and Armenia. At the same time Kyrgyzstan has adopted [legislation](#) that requires Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that receive funding from abroad to register as "foreign agents" (the old Soviet term for describing spies).

This also affects religious organizations that receive funding from abroad (Reuters, 4 June 2015).

The COVID-19 crisis has had a big impact on the Kyrgyz economy, despite the fact that the number of infections were relatively low. However, many Kyrgyz migrant workers in Russia could not go to work. This meant that the amount of remittances dropped immensely. Hundreds of thousands of Kyrgyz work in Russia and many who lost their job and income wanted to return home. In August 2020, Kazakhstan allowed the transit of thousands of Uzbek and Kyrgyz migrant workers who had been stranded in Russia for months along the border with Kazakhstan due to the travel restrictions imposed to restrict the spread of the COVID-19 virus. (Source: [RFE-RL, 6 August 2020](#))

### Gender perspective

Like all other citizens, Christians in Kyrgyzstan are affected by the deteriorating economy. Women are, broadly speaking, more economically vulnerable in Kyrgyzstan as they are more likely to assume traditional domestic responsibilities in the home. Whilst there is gender parity in relation to access to education, employment opportunities remain restricted (UN Human Development Indicators, HDI 2020). Despite legal provisions that provide men and women with equal inheritance rights (Land Code art. 37; Civil Code art. 1118-1166), in practice patrilineal inheritance practices dominate, as men are usually considered the heirs to family land ([OECD, 2019](#)). Christian men may face economic discrimination on the grounds of their faith, often through business boycotts or state fines.

## Social and cultural landscape

According to the CIA World Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Kyrgyz 73.8%, Uzbek 14.8%, Russian 5.1%, Dungan 1.1%, other 5.2% (includes Uyghur, Tajik, Turk, Kazakh, Tatar, Ukrainian, Korean, German) (2021 est.)
- **Main languages:** Kyrgyz (official) 71.4%, Uzbek 14.4%, Russian (official) 9%, other 5.2% (2009 est.)
- **Urban population:** 37.5% of total population (2022)
- **Literacy rate:** 99.6% (male: 99.7%, female: 99.5%) (2018)

According to the UN Global Human Development Indicators (HDI country profile):

- **HDI score and ranking:** 0.697 (0.677 for females, 0.707 for males), ranking 120
- **Total population:** 6.4 million (2019)
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 71.5 years (75.6 for females, 67.4 for males) (2019)
- **Expected years of schooling:** 13.0 years (13.2 for females, 12.7 for males) (2019)
- **Gender Inequality index:** 0.369 (2019)
- **Labor Force Participation Rate (% ages 15 years and older):** Female: 44.8, Male: 75.7 (2019)

A major factor that dominates social life in Kyrgyzstan is the culture founded on Islamic values and traditions. 70 years of atheism during the Soviet era did not succeed in wiping this out. Rural parts are particularly affected and, as a result, Christians in these areas - especially those Christians with a Muslim background - not only have to cope with oppression from the govern-

ment, but also from society around them. For instance, there have often been reports over the years of burials for converts to Christianity being blocked by Muslim villagers.

Kyrgyzstan ranked 144 in the 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index of 180 countries (CPI 2021). Corruption is widespread and reaches the highest political strata, as was shown by the resignation of Prime Minister Mukhammedkalyi Abylgaziev in June 2020. Lawmakers had raised suspicions over his involvement in the sale of radio frequencies involving a leading cable television company and a major telecoms company, even though he was not named in the official investigation. (Source: [RFE-RL, 15 June 2020](#))

The COVID-19 crisis that hit Kyrgyzstan in early 2020 had severe social repercussions and there was concern as infections rose with there being a shortage of medical professionals, hospital beds, drugs and equipment (Source: [RFE-FL, 11 July 2020](#)). However, according to World Health Organization (WHO) figures, COVID-related deaths were less than 1,400 throughout 2020. (Source: [WHO, accessed 4 January 2021](#))

At the end of 2021 people in Kyrgyzstan knew that a rough winter was coming. Kyrgyzstan had trade deals for importing electricity from Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. In November 2021 all three of those countries stopped sending electricity to Kyrgyzstan and it was unclear if any of them would be able to help keep the lights on in Kyrgyzstan in the winter months. (Source: [RFE-RL, 22 November 2021](#))

In general, Christians experience the same problems as all other people in the country and are not especially targeted economically or socially. The only exception to this is the pressure from the social environment (family, local imams, villagers) on Christians with a Muslim background. The high literacy rate means that people who are interested in the Christian message can read material in their own language. The restrictions imposed by the government (all materials must be officially approved and only registered groups may be active in distribution) mean that most of this work must be done unofficially.

### **Gender perspective**

Kyrgyzstan has deeply entrenched patriarchal norms. Within this context women typically adopt subordinate roles and are stereotypically tasked with domestic duties ([OECD, 2019](#)). Domestic violence has long been a hot topic in Kyrgyzstan, particularly following high-profile cases, such as 33-year old Aruuzat who committed suicide following abuse from her husband and pressure from her family to reconcile with him ([RFE-RL, 27 January 2021](#)). At least three women were killed by their husbands or partners in the first 14 days of 2020. According to the Interior Ministry, of nearly 6,145 domestic violence cases registered by the police in 2019, only 649 resulted in criminal cases. Their deaths resulted from abuse including kicks to the head, burns, stabbing and severe beatings.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) added that domestic violence is underreported and reliable data is lacking. HRW's research in 2015 and 2019 found that poor police and judicial response, lack of services such as shelters, and social pressure from families and authorities inhibit victims from coming forward. Those who do seek help and justice often do not receive the needed support or protection (Source: [HRW, 5 March 2020](#)). Within the context of COVID-19, domestic violence

cases reportedly soared ([Majlis Podcast, 5 July 2020](#)).

Outcries also continue over so called ‘bride-kidnapping,’ whereby men abduct women with the intention of marrying them ([Asia News, 10 April 2021](#)). Female converts in conservative regions remain at risk of being abducted and married to a Muslim man.

## Technological landscape

According to [Internet World Stats](#) (IWS 2022):

- **Internet usage:** 55.0% penetration - survey date: January 2022
- **Facebook usage:** 55.0% penetration - survey date: January 2022

According to the World Bank country data profile:

- **Mobile cellular subscriptions:** 106.2 per 100 people (2020)

Kyrgyzstan is a relatively open country compared to other countries in Central Asia. Because the state controls the media, Christian communities cannot freely use the media to present their faith, but they can use the Internet for that purpose. Some registered churches have a Facebook page and their own website. However, non-registered churches do not openly use the Internet to present their faith.

According to [BuddeComm Research](#) (Publication date: March 2023):

- “The Kyrgyz Republic (more commonly known as Kyrgyzstan) has enjoyed relatively strong economic growth over the last decade – at least in terms of other Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries in Eastern Europe and Asia that formed following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.”
- “The country’s telecom sector (specifically the mobile segment) has likewise been able to prosper. However, ongoing political tension, increasing repression of the media and information, and continuing problems with corporate governance may be putting a strain on further growth by reducing the country’s appeal to much-needed foreign investors.”
- “Kyrgyzstan has been reasonably successful in its attempts to liberalise its economy and open up its telecom market to competition. The privatisation of state-owned entities – particularly the fixed-line incumbent provider Kyrgyztelecom and the mobile operator Alfa Telecom – has been less well received, with government ownership continuing despite repeated attempts to offload its stakes in those companies. They simply haven’t been able to generate enough interest from the private sector.”
- “Still, the Kyrgyzstan mobile market has achieved high levels of penetration (140% in 2021) along with a fairly competitive operating environment with four major players. Mobile broadband, too, has come along strongly, reaching over 125% penetration in 2019 before falling back slightly during the Covid-19 crisis. Slow-to-moderate growth is expected for both segments in coming years, supported by the anticipated rollout of 5G services starting from late-2022.”



According to Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022, Kyrgyzstan is listed as being 'Partly Free' with a score of 53 points:

- “Though internet access improved in Kyrgyzstan, the government implemented restrictive legislation that threatens the rights of users. The recently enacted Law on Protection from False Information enables a body within the Ministry of Culture, Information, Sport, and Youth Policy to request websites and social media platforms delete content within 24 hours and gives them the power to block noncompliant websites. Moreover, the law compels mobile operators and internet service providers (ISPs) to identify their users and subscribers. Additionally, the law on National Security Bodies allows security services to conduct video and audio surveillance without a prior court decision. The coverage period was also marked by significant criminal charges against journalists, illegal wiretapping, and numerous reported hacking attempts against journalists and members of civil society.”

## Security situation

### Tajikistan border clashes (2019 - 2022)

There were a number of clashes between Tajik and Kyrgyz border guards and civilians in 2019 (Source: [RFE-RL, 16 September 2019](#)). In June 2020 a Kyrgyz national was hospitalized with a gunshot wound received near a disputed segment of the Kyrgyz-Tajik border in the southern Batken region (Source: [RFE-RL, 2 June 2020](#)). On 28 April 2021 new clashes erupted. The situation rapidly escalated, leading to Kyrgyz and Tajik forces exchanging gunfire in the Leylek district of Kyrgyzstan's southwestern Batken region. At least 13 people were killed and 134 injured (Source: [RFE-RL, 30 April 2021](#)).

Authorities in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan reached a cease-fire after border clashes between the Central Asian neighbours' security forces left at least two people dead and many more wounded. The fighting on 27 January 2022, the most intense outbreak of violence between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan since a similar clash last year killed dozens, erupted along a segment of the countries' poorly demarcated border in a standoff over a blocked road. (Source: [RFE-RL, 28 January 2022](#)) Another incident occurred on 12 April 2022 when a Tajik guard was wounded and died a day later. (Source: [RFE-RL, 13 April 2022](#)) Several clashes and shootings occurred in June 2022 between Tajik and Kyrgyz border guards in the Kekh locality, 15 km from the dzhamoat (agricultural center) of Vorukh, part of the Tajik town of Isfar. (Source: [RFE-RL, 20 June 2022](#))

### Uzbekistan border (2020 - 2022)

Similar violent incidents also occurred along the border with Uzbekistan. In May 2020 clashes destroyed several homes and vehicles and left more than 200 people injured in the village of Birlik in the Kadamzhai district, which borders the Uzbek exclave of Soh (Source: [RFE-RL, 1 June 2020](#)). In March 2021, successful talks were held between the governments of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to settle outstanding border issues (Source: [RFE-RL, 2 April 2021](#)). However, regional experts expressed their doubts as to whether all issues were in fact resolved. Uzbek border guards shot dead two men at a disputed segment of the border with Kyrgyzstan. The Kyrgyz Border Guard Service said the incident took place late on 5 April 2022 when a group of Kyrgyz

men tried to illegally smuggle goods into Uzbek territory on horses. (Source: [RFE-RL, 6 April 2022](#))

### **Islamic State group (IS) recruitment**

A senior Kyrgyz official stated that 150 Kyrgyz nationals had been killed in Syria, fighting on the side of Islamic militants since the beginning of the Syrian civil war in 2011. Kanjarbek Bakaev, deputy head of Kyrgyzstan's Anti-terrorist Center, told lawmakers in Bishkek on 28 June 2018 that an estimated total of 850 Kyrgyz citizens had joined IS to fight in Syria. (Source: [RFE-RL, 28 June 2018](#)) Repatriation began in 2021. (Source: [RFE-RL, 16 March 2021](#))

## **Trends analysis**

### **1) Kyrgyz democracy was stable until mid-2018**

Kyrgyz politics have passed through a chaotic phase. Kyrgyzstan is untypical for Central Asia in that it has a democratically elected parliament and president, but since mid-2018 the political scene in Kyrgyzstan witnessed a rift and the parliamentary elections that were held in October 2020 resulted in a further destabilization as many people challenged the results. President Jeenbekov decided to step down. Nationalist Sadyr Japarov was released from prison and took over as interim president and was then elected into office in January 2021. According to The Diplomat (1 October 2022), he "is providing [much of the same old authoritarianism](#) in new populist clothes".

### **2) There is concern about proposals for future restrictions**

Although Kyrgyzstan is still one of the least oppressive countries in Central Asia for Christians to live in and the pressure from the authorities is far less than in the neighboring countries, nevertheless the Church in Kyrgyzstan is in a vulnerable situation. Both the recent chaotic political situation and the proposals for future restrictions (dating back to 2014) make life for Christians uncertain.

### **3) Christians continue to face pressure from the Islamic environment**

Pressure from Islamic society is particularly strong outside the capital city, Bishkek. Most of this hostility and pressure is aimed at converts to Christianity, but also at churches that are active in evangelism among Muslims.

### **4) Emigration is weakening the Church**

The constant emigration of Russians, Ukrainians and Germans poses serious problems for the churches in Kyrgyzstan. At present, they are not being replaced by Kyrgyz converts at the same rate that the others are leaving.

## **External Links - Keys to understanding**

- Recent history: fled - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kyrgyzstan-unrest-idUSTRE6363CR20100415>
- Recent history: Asia News, 4 March 2020 - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Failed-coup-attempt-in-Bishkek-49458.html>
- Recent history: BBC News, 15 October 2020 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-54553173>

- Recent history: The Guardian, 16 October 2020 - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/16/kyrgyzstan-parliament-confirms-sadyr-japarov-new-president?ref=hvper.com>
- Recent history: RFE-RL, 10 January 2021 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/japarov-kyrgyzstan-presidential-election-referendum-31040110.html>
- Political and legal landscape: HRW, 5 March 2021 - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/05/kyrgyzstan-withdraw-problematic-draft-constitution>
- Political and legal landscape: RFE-RL, 5 May 2021 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyz-president-signs-bill-on-constitutional-amendments-into-law/31238795.html>
- Political and legal landscape: USCIRF 2017 - <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Kyrgyzstan.2017.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: Girls Not Brides - <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/kyrgyzstan/>
- Political and legal landscape: Thomson Reuters, 2 August 2017 - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kyrgyzstan-women-bride-kidnapping-idUSKBN1AH5GI>
- Political and legal landscape: BBC News, 8 April 2021 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-56675201>
- Political and legal landscape: RFE-RL, 27 January 2021 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-abusive-marriage-tradition-reconciliation/31071481.html>
- Economic landscape: legislation - <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-kyrgyzstan-rights-law-idUKKBN0OK1KA20150604>
- Economic landscape: RFE-RL, 6 August 2020 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-allows-transit-of-uzbek-kyrgyz-workers-stranded-in-russia/30767694.html>
- Economic landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/KG.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: RFE-RL, 15 June 2020 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyz-prime-minister-abylgaziev-resigns-corruption-probe/30672225.html>
- Social and cultural landscape: RFE-FL, 11 July 2020 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyz-chaos-shortage-of-medics-hospital-beds-as-covid-19-cases-skyrocket/30720679.html>
- Social and cultural landscape: WHO, accessed 4 January 2021 - <https://covid19.who.int/table>
- Social and cultural landscape: RFE-RL, 22 November 2021 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-power-outage-winter-colder/31572858.html>
- Social and cultural landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/KG.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: RFE-RL, 27 January 2021 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-abusive-marriage-tradition-reconciliation/31071481.html>
- Social and cultural landscape: HRW, 5 March 2020 - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/05/grim-news-kyrgyzstan-domestic-violence>
- Social and cultural landscape: Majlis Podcast, 5 July 2020 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/majlis-podcast-with-coronavirus-domestic-violence-in-central-asia-has-gotten-much-worse/30707018.html>
- Social and cultural landscape: Asia News, 10 April 2021 - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Revolt-over-violence-against-women-and-police-inertia-52835.html>
- Technological landscape: Internet World Stats - <https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#kg>
- Technological landscape: BuddeComm Research - <https://www.budde.com.au/Research/Kyrgyzstan-Telecoms-Mobile-and-Broadband-Statistics-and-Analyses>
- Security situation: RFE-RL, 16 September 2019 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/deadly-clashes-on-tajik-kyrgyz-border/30167378.html>
- Security situation: RFE-RL, 2 June 2020 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/one-kyrgyz-national-hospitalized-in-fresh-incident-on-kyrgyz-tajik-border/30648046.html>
- Security situation: RFE-RL, 30 April 2021 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-tajikistan-border-clashes-deaths-ceasefire/31230943.html>
- Security situation: RFE-RL, 28 January 2022 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyz-tajik-border-shootout-batken/31674508.html>
- Security situation: RFE-RL, 13 April 2022 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/31801545.html>
- Security situation: RFE-RL, 20 June 2022 - <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Border-clashes-continue-between-Tajiks-and-Kyrgyz-56070.html>

- Security situation: RFE-RL, 1 June 2020 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/dozens-injured-as-fresh-clashes-erupt-along-kyrgyz-uzbek-border/30646065.html>
- Security situation: RFE-RL, 2 April 2021 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-uzbekistan-border-demarcation-disputes/31183594.html>
- Security situation: RFE-RL, 6 April 2022 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/31788625.html>
- Security situation: RFE-RL, 28 June 2018 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/official-150-kyrgyz-citizens-killed-in-syria-fighting-alongside-is/29325374.html>
- Security situation: RFE-RL, 16 March 2021 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-repatriates-children-iraq/31154206.html>
- Trends analysis: much of the same old authoritarianism - <https://thediplomat.com/2022/10/kyrgyzstans-revolutionary-president-japarov-2-years-on/>

## WWL 2023: Church information / Kyrgyzstan

### Christian origins

In the 7th and 8th centuries, Nestorian Christianity spread through southern Central Asia and reached Kyrgyzstan. According to Islamic tradition, this was about the same time that Islam entered the country. After the invasion by the Mongols, Nestorian Christians continued to live in peace until the Mongol rulers converted to Islam. One of them was Timur Lenk (1336-1406) - also called Tamar Lane - and he eradicated Christianity from the region in the 14th century.

From the 16th century on, Kyrgyzstan became part of the Uzbek khanates of Khiva and Bukhara. In 1867 the Russian Empire expanded its territory into Central Asia during a number of military campaigns, conquering the two khanates. The regime brought in ethnic Russians, who belonged mostly 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 to Central Asia. With them, various Christian denominations found their way into Kyrgyzstan.

Since the late 1980s, and especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, many of the non-Kyrgyz Christians emigrated. This caused several churches to struggle for survival. But there was also a positive development: Since there was now much more religious freedom in Kyrgyzstan, non-traditional Christian groups used the opportunity to reach out to the Kyrgyz. Evangelism in Kyrgyzstan was much more successful than in other countries in Central Asia.

### Church spectrum today

| Kyrgyzstan: Church networks | Christians | %    |
|-----------------------------|------------|------|
| Orthodox                    | 218,000    | 78.7 |
| Catholic                    | 500        | 0.2  |
| Protestant                  | 23,500     | 8.5  |
| Independent                 | 27,200     | 9.8  |

|  |                |             |
|--|----------------|-------------|
| Unaffiliated   | 15,000         | 5.4         |
| Doubly-affiliated Christians   | -7,600         | -2.7        |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>276,600</b> | <b>99.9</b> |
| <i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i> |                |             |
| Evangelical movement   | 2,800          | 1.0         |
| Renewalist movement  | 25,800         | 9.3         |

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

**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 the biggest denominations in Kyrgyzstan are:

- The Russian Orthodox Church
- Unaffiliated Christians
- The Ukrainian Orthodox Church

## Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Pressure from the Muslim environment on converts is greater outside the major cities.

## Christian communities and how they are affected

**Communities of expatriate Christians:** Expatriate Christians are not involuntarily isolated and are hence not treated as a separate category for WWL analysis.

**Historical Christian communities:** These groups (of which the Russian Orthodox Church, ROC, is by far the largest) are not involved in evangelism among the Kyrgyz population and are not considered to be a threat by the authorities. The government has no interest in provoking Russia by attacking the ROC – the events in [eastern Ukraine](#) have set an example (BBC News, Ukraine conflict, last accessed 9 March 2023).

**Converts to Christianity:** Because Kyrgyzstan's society is culturally Islamic, Christians with a Muslim background bear the brunt of persecution. They are under strong pressure from family, friends and community (including local authorities).

**Non-traditional Christian communities:** These groups are persecuted mostly because of their evangelistic activities and youth work. They suffer occasionally from raids, threats, arrests and fines by the authorities.

## External Links - Church information

- Christian communities and how they are affected: eastern Ukraine - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/crr7mlg0d21t/ukraine-crisis>

# WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Kyrgyzstan

## Reporting period

1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022

## Position on the World Watch List

| Kyrgyzstan: World Watch List | Points | WWL Rank |
|------------------------------|--------|----------|
| WWL 2023                     | 59     | 59       |
| WWL 2022                     | 58     | 59       |
| WWL 2021                     | 58     | 55       |
| WWL 2020                     | 57     | 55       |
| WWL 2019                     | 56     | 52       |

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

The rise in overall score was due to an increase in the violence score from 1.5 to 2.0 points. Average pressure remained at 11.3 points. As in most other countries in Central Asia, the pressure in Kyrgyzstan is highest in the *Private* and *Church spheres of life*. *Islamic oppression/Clan oppression* dominates in the *Private* and *Family spheres of life*, while *Dictatorial paranoia* dominates in the *National* and *Church spheres of life*. The three 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. No religious activities beyond state-run and state-controlled institutions are allowed.

## Persecution engines

| Kyrgyzstan: 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 |
| Secular intolerance                     | SI   | Not at all |
| Dictatorial paranoia                    | DPA  | Medium     |
| 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.

### Islamic oppression (Strong), blended with Clan oppression (Strong)

Kyrgyzstan society is more traditional than many other countries in Central Asia. Pressure on Christians is particularly aimed at converts from a Muslim background. If indigenous Muslims convert to Christianity, they will 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 for long periods by their families and beaten. Local Islamic teachers preach against them and may cause them to be expelled from their communities. The Christian burial of converts is problematic and frequently provokes opposition from Muslim villagers.

### Dictatorial paranoia (Medium)

No religious activities beyond state-run and state-controlled institutions are allowed. In 2009, a new Religion law was introduced which imposed many restrictions. Pressure from the authorities was stepped up in 2015 and a new draft law on religion is still under discussion. This new law (not yet implemented) would make the registration of church congregations almost impossible, as it would require each to have at least 500 church members.

## Drivers of persecution

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

| Kyrgyzstan:  |        |    |     |        |           |      |    |        |     |
|--|--------|----|-----|--------|-----------|------|----|--------|-----|
| Drivers of Persecution                                     | IO     | RN | ERH | CO     | CDP       | CPCO | SI | DPA    | OCC |
|  | STRONG | -  | -   | STRONG | VERY WEAK | -    | -  | MEDIUM | -   |
| Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs | Strong | -  | -   | Strong | Very weak | -    | -  | Medium | -   |
| One's own (extended) family                                | Strong | -  | -   | Strong | Very weak | -    | -  | -      | -   |
| Political parties  | Weak   | -  | -   | -      | -         | -    | -  | Weak   | -   |

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 Islamic oppression (blended with Clan oppression)

- **Extended family (Strong):** Muslim family members will exert high pressure on converts to Christianity to make them recant. This includes threats, verbal and physical abuse.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Muslim clerics are open in their hostility to especially non-Orthodox Christians and particularly against converts from Islam.
- **Normal citizens (Strong):** As part of the community normal citizens may pressurize converts to recant their new faith.
- **Ethnic or Clan group leaders (Strong):** Especially in rural communities, the majority of ethnic community leaders strongly support Islam and have been sources of persecution, igniting religious hatred in the community towards Christians, primarily targeting converts from Islam and also Protestants whom they suspect of converting Muslims to Christianity.
- **Government officials (Medium):** Especially at the local level, government officials often join community leaders in persecuting Christians - especially converts.

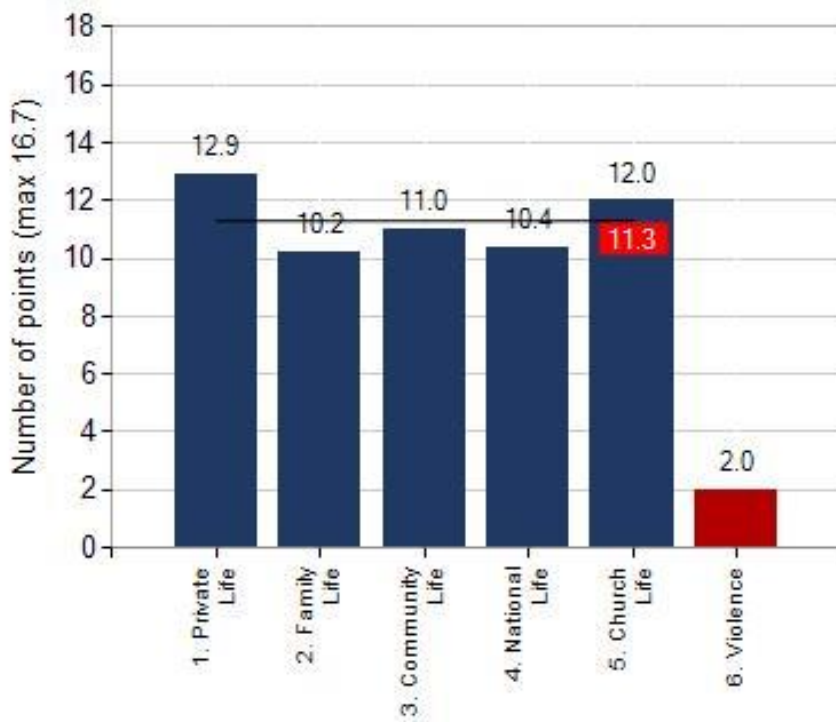
### Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Medium):** The authorities apply very strict laws (e.g. concerning the registration of churches) which it enforces against non-sanctioned religious groups. It emanates from the federal level but most persecution is carried out by the local authorities at the more communal level.
- **Normal citizens (Medium):** Hand in hand with *Islamic oppression*, the influence of Muslim citizens at the local level is significant since they will oppose any perceived attempts at conversion and have a negative attitude towards all Christian activities.



## The Persecution pattern

WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Kyrgyzstan



The WWL 2023 Persecution pattern for Kyrgyzstan shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (11.3 points), the same score as in WWL 2022. There was a slight increase in the *Family sphere of life*, and an equally small decline in the *Community sphere of life*.
- Pressure is very high in the *Private, Church and Community spheres of life* and at high levels in all other spheres of life. The highest scores in the *Private and Church spheres of life* are an indication that pressure on Christians in Kyrgyzstan comes from two main sources: *Islamic oppression (blended with Clan oppression)* in the *Private sphere of life* and *Dictatorial paranoia* in the *Church sphere of life*.
- Kyrgyzstan is one of the few countries in Central Asia where *Islamic oppression (blended with Clan oppression)* is stronger than *Dictatorial paranoia*.
- The score for violence is low, reaching 2.0 points in WWL 2023, rising from 1.5 points in WWL 2022.

## 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 2023 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. (3.25 points)**

Converts need to be careful to hide their religious materials or else they will be taken away by their Islamic family. Also, since non-recognized Christian denominations are considered illegal, any Christian possessing materials from these denominations are also at risk.

### **Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (3.25 points)**

Converts know that wearing/displaying Christian symbols would immediately draw attention to themselves. Many will therefore refrain from doing so. Christians belonging to unregistered churches will also avoid wearing crosses etc. so as not to 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). (3.25 points)**

The Muslim environment reacts negatively when a convert tries to talk about their Christian faith. This can also be seen as an attempt at evangelism and invoke persecution from the authorities as opposed to simply the family or close community. Non-traditional Protestants also need to be careful of being accused of evangelism - particularly in areas where the local authorities are strongly influenced by the Islamic community.

### **Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (3.25 points)**

Known converts will be monitored by their family etc. If they want to meet, they need to be particularly careful. There are usually no problems if 2 - 3 Christians meet up for non-church-related activities.

## Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

### **Block 2.5: Burials of Christians have been hindered. (3.25 points)**

Families of converts may experience difficulties in burying their dead because the local community usually refuses this. Also, relatives of non-convert Christians sometimes have a long search before a final resting place for burying the dead can be found.

### **Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.25 points)**

As the state is secular, parents have no option to select a school which will provide Christian teaching. Furthermore, the law forbids youthwork by churches. Therefore, parents can only do this at home. For converts the situation is very different: The wider family will oppose the children of converts being raised in the Christian faith. They will try to remove the children from them and raise them according to Islamic principles.

**Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.25 points)**

Sometimes, the administration in schools and institutes arrange state-funded meetings to combat "sects", which is basically a propaganda drive against religious minorities, including Evangelical churches. These meetings are supposedly voluntary, but everyone is strongly urged to attend. Also, the Muslim environment (family, friends, community) will put pressure on children of converts in particular to receive Islamic teaching - sometimes even against the wishes of their parents.

**Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.25 points)**

Children of converts are usually isolated from having close contact with other children. They often face humiliation and insults at school from teachers and fellow pupils when it is discovered that they are Christians.

## 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.). (3.25 points)**

Christians are regularly threatened and their lives are made difficult in Kyrgyzstan. The state opposes Christians belonging to unregistered church groups and converts face hostility from Muslim family, friends and local community.

**Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.25 points)**

This is often the first reaction of family, friends and community when a conversion becomes known. Christians from historical churches who have joined non-traditional church groups also face pressure to revert back to their original faith. In this case, such pressure is exerted by the social environment, not the authorities.

**Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment. (3.00 points)**

When people realize that their employee is an active Christian they can fire him on the spot. In some areas converts from Islam cannot find a job because of their new faith.

**Block 3.11: Christians have been hindered in the operation of their businesses for faith-related reasons (e.g. access to loans, subsidies, government contracts, client boycotts). (3.00 points)**

When it is known that a businessman is a convert to Christianity, the Islamic community will boycott it. However, the state will not close down a Christian's business just because he is a Christian. In the past, some Kyrgyz Christians have also had their businesses attacked.

## 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. (3.75 points)**

The Constitution guarantees freedom of conscience and religion and bans religious groups from undertaking actions inciting religious hatred. It establishes the separation of religion and state and prohibits pursuit of political goals by religious groups. The law requires all religious groups to register with the government and prohibits activity by unregistered religious groups. Authorities maintained bans on 21 "religiously oriented" groups they considered extremist and detained nine members of one group for distributing banned religious material. In May 2021, the government introduced an amendment to the religion law that would end the requirement for local governments to approve applications of religious organizations with the SCRA, but the government had not acted on that amendment by year's end. The government did not always separate those considered violent extremists from inmates incarcerated for lesser crimes, according to NGOs, particularly in women's prisons. NGOs also said the government did not always provide religious materials to prisoners convicted of affiliation with banned religious groups. According to Christian activists, non-Muslim religious minorities continued to face difficulties arranging for burial of their dead in public cemeteries. The SCRA-proposed solution, which would divide public cemeteries by religion so that all faith groups have burial space, was not implemented at all local levels, according to Christian activists. (Source: US State Department IRFR 2021)

### **Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (3.50 points)**

The Constitution guarantees freedom of conscience and religion and bans religious groups from undertaking actions inciting religious hatred. It establishes the separation of religion and state and prohibits pursuit of political goals by religious groups. (Source: US State Department IRFR 2021)

### **Block 4.12: Christians, churches or Christian organizations have been hindered in publicly displaying religious symbols. (3.25 points)**

Many churches will not display Christian symbols because they do not wish to provoke a negative reaction from the local Islamic community. Christianity is hardly present in the countryside except for converts, who will avoid drawing attention to themselves and certainly not want to use visible Christian symbols.

### **Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (3.25 points)**

Local officials and community leaders who use violence to put converts under pressure, usually enjoy the support of the local Muslim community and impunity. State agents at any level can act without ever being prosecuted.

## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

### **Block 5.2: It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government. (3.50 points)**

Church registration is obligatory, but the registration process with the authorities is cumbersome and includes many restrictions. The biggest problem is that a church needs 200 signatures to obtain a registration permit, a demand that practically no church can meet. A draft law has been pending for years which would raise the number of signatures needed for registration to 500.

### **Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (3.50 points)**

Any religious activity outside of an official place of worship requires the advance approval by the local authorities which may take a long time in coming. Unauthorized religious activity - especially in public - is illegal; Muslims who encounter such activity will regard it as a form of evangelism, obstruct it and report it to the authorities.

### **Block 5.6: Work among youth in particular has been restricted. (3.50 points)**

Article 4 of the 2009 Religion Law prohibits the involvement of children in religious organizations without their parents' consent. Muslims oppose Christian activities aimed at youth and they will block youth events and summer camps.

### **Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored. (3.25 points)**

The law provides for the right of registered religious groups to produce, import, export, and distribute religious literature and materials in accordance with established procedures, which may include examination by state experts. The law does not require government examination of religious materials (such as literature and other printed or audio or video materials), and it does not define the criteria for state religious experts. The law prohibits the distribution of religious literature and materials in public locations or in visits to individual households, schools and other institutions. The law specifies fines based on the nature of the violations. The law requires law enforcement officials to demonstrate an intent to distribute extremist materials before arresting a suspect. (Source: US State Department IRFR 2021)

## 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. For further discussion** (with a focus on the complexity of assessing the numbers of Christians killed for their faith) please see World Watch Monitor's article dated 13 November 2013 available at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/11/number-of-christian-martyrs-continues-to-cause-debate/>.

**4. 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 WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

| Kyrgyzstan: Violence Block question   | WWL 2023 | WWL 2022 |
|---|----------|----------|
| 6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?   | 1        | 0        |
| 6.2 How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons? | 0        | 1        |
| 6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?   | 1        | 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)?   | 10       | 109      |
| 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?                       | 2        | 0        |
| 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?  | 4        | 5        |
| 6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?   | 0        | 0        |

In the WWL 2023 reporting period, Open Doors sources reported the following:

- **Christians killed:** An Orthodox Christian was killed by a Muslim man in early November 2021.
- **Christians arrested:** A local pastor was arrested by the secret service.
- **Christians attacked:** The majority of the 52 cases reported involved beatings, threats, isolation etc. from Muslim family or community.
- **Christian properties damaged:** Local Muslim residents deliberately smashed the windows of a known Christian home.
- **Christians forced to leave their homes:** Three Christians were forced to leave their parental home because of extreme domestic violence.

## 5 Year trends

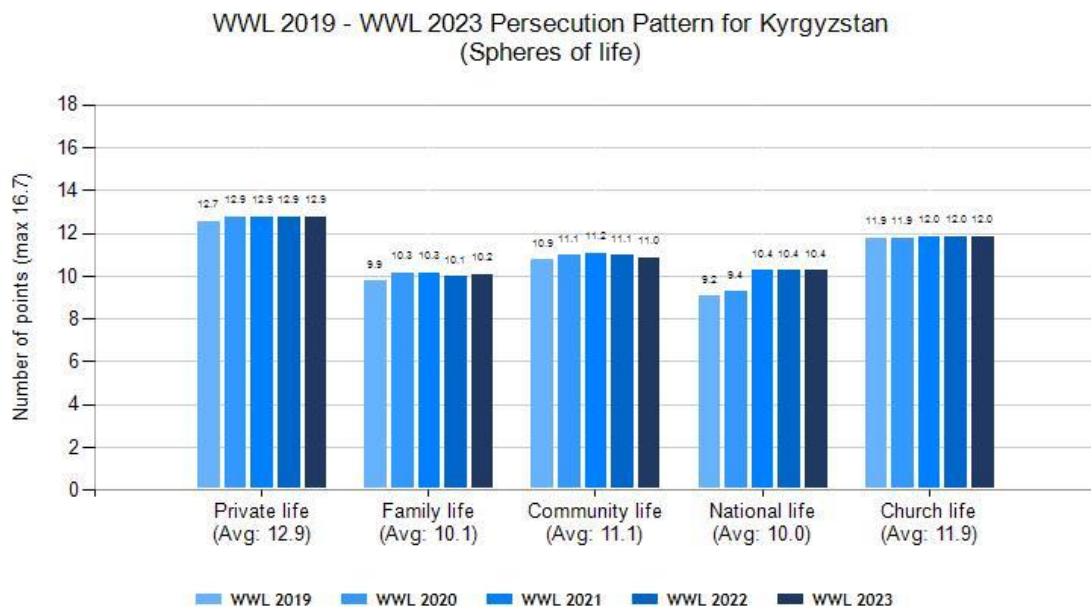
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

| Kyrgyzstan: WWL 2019 - WWL 2023<br>Persecution Pattern history | Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life |
|--|---|
| 2023   | 11.3                                    |
| 2022   | 11.3                                    |
| 2021   | 11.4                                    |
| 2020   | 11.1                                    |
| 2019   | 10.9                                    |

As can be seen from the table above, the average pressure on Christians in Kyrgyzstan slowly increased at first but now seems to have stabilized at the level of 11.3/11.4 points. Despite the political disruption that struck the country in 2020/2021, Kyrgyzstan still has the lowest WWL score in the Central Asian region. But Christians in Kyrgyzstan (especially converts) still have to live under very high pressure.

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



Overall, the pressure on Christians in all *spheres of life* seems to have stabilized. The details are as follows:

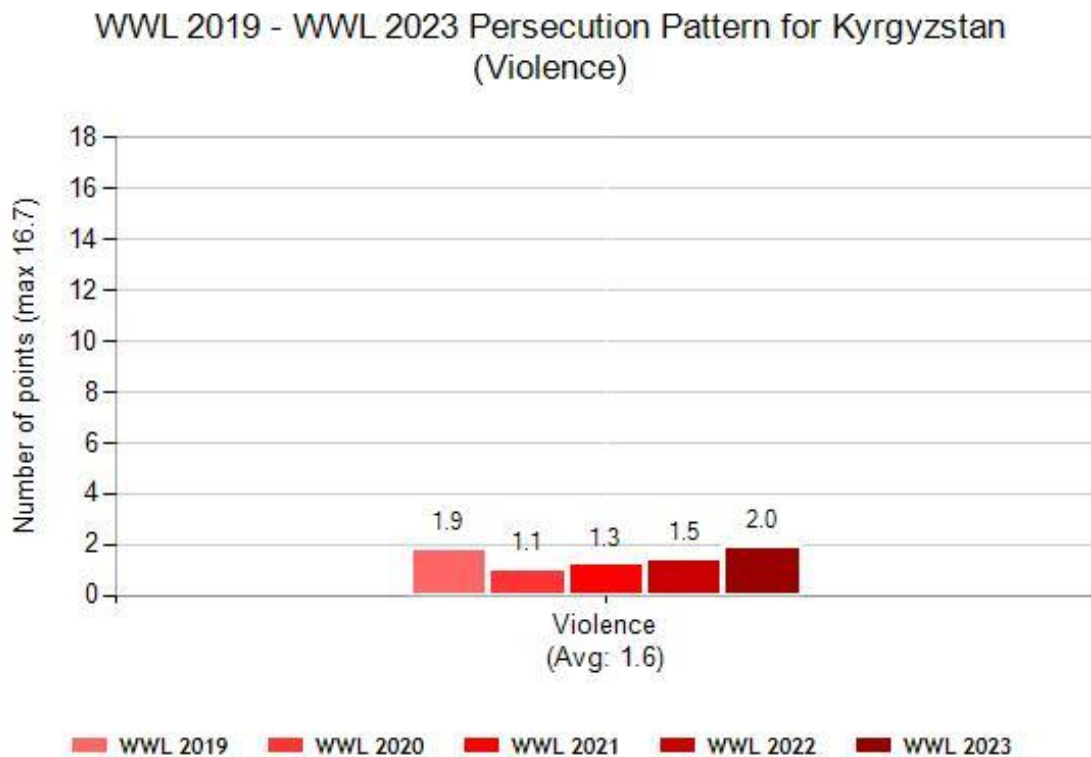
- Pressure in *Private sphere of life* over the past five years has never been lower than 12.7



points. Since WWL 2019, it has been the highest scoring *sphere of life*, indicating very high pressure on converts in particular.

- Pressure in *Family and Community spheres of life* has stabilized at the 10.1-10.3 and 11.0-11.2 point mark respectively, indicating that the pressure on the life of converts exerted by family and local community members has continued virtually unchanged at a high level.
- Pressure in *National sphere of life* steadily increased from 9.2 points in WWL 2019 to 10.4 points in WWL 2021 and then levelled off. Despite its reputation as being one of the overall lowest scoring WWL countries in the region, Kyrgyzstan’s government is now exerting a constant high level of pressure on the Christian minority.
- Pressure in *Church sphere of life* is stable at the very high level of 11.9-12.0 points, indicating constant, very high pressure caused by *Dictatorial paranoia*.

## 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



As in many other former Soviet republics, the number of reported violent incidents in Kyrgyzstan tends to be low or very low. Over the past five reporting periods, the violence score has averaged 1.6 points, with the highest score in WWL 2023. Many incidents go unreported.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

| Group               | Female Pressure Points  |
|---------------------|---|
| Economic            | -   |
| Political and Legal | Forced divorce; Forced marriage   |
| Security            | Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual |
| Social and Cultural | Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological                      |
| Technological       | -   |

While laws in Kyrgyzstan give equal rights to men and women, traditional Islamic culture places women at a level subservient to men within the family context. Women and girls are excluded from decision-making processes and exposed to violence in a breadth of forms, including domestic violence, bride kidnapping, early marriages and physical abuse ([Girls Not Brides, Accessed February 2023](#)).

Within this context, women are not free to choose their own religion and will face persecution upon conversion to Christianity. The tight structure of society means that women are also targeted for persecution as a means of inflicting psychological harm on their husbands or other family members. Over the years, Christian women and girls have been known to suffer from verbal and physical abuse, home detention, forced marriage, family violence and rape. An increase in domestic violence was reported across Kyrgyzstan following the imposition of COVID-19 measures; local experts also reported a rise in family violence for female converts trapped in the home ([The Diplomat, 16 June 2022](#)).

As noted in previous years, Kyrgyzstan has a long tradition of bride-stealing; in rural areas, female converts in conservative regions run the risk of being kidnapped and married off to a Muslim. According to a country expert: “This happens most frequently in the countryside. This kind of pressure does not come from the state, but having said that, local councils will allow this to happen. So, in a sense they co-operate.” If already married at the point of conversion, Muslim husbands commonly divorce their wives and deny them access to their possessions.

Female converts from a Muslim background are also subject to house-arrest by their families as 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. Exemplifying these pressures, two sisters who came to faith at a Christian camp and started attending a church, met with resistance from their Muslim parents. Upon discovery of their faith, the parents became aggressive and angry. The sisters, who were forbidden any contact with other Christians, are reportedly now under house-arrest and released only to attend school or college.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

| Group               | Male Pressure Points   |
|---------------------|--|
| Economic            | Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access; Economic harassment via fines |
| Political and Legal | -  |
| Security            | -  |
| Social and Cultural | Denied communal resources; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal   |
| Technological       | -  |

Male converts to Christianity face various forms of pressure and violence from family members and their local community. Over the years, Christian men and boys have been known to suffer from verbal and physical abuse, arrest, interrogation, fines, imprisonment, job loss, home detention, disinheritance, and exclusion from participation in communal institutions. According to country experts, local authorities are known to cooperate with local Muslims to ensure access to communal forums is blocked. Furthermore, young converts dependent on their parents risk their financial support being severely reduced which, in the case of students, may mean an end to their further education.

Kyrgyz Christian men are most at risk when they are church and family leaders. When a businessman is known to be a Christian, the community may boycott or hinder his business. Men are usually the heads of their families and the main bread winners, so when a Christian man loses his job or business because of his faith, his whole family will suffer. When churches are raided, it is mostly church leaders who are detained, interrogated and fined. Muslims will hold church leaders primarily responsible for the conversion of their people. There have been instances where Kyrgyz Christian leaders could no longer continue with their ministry because their (non-church) business was attacked. The persecution of a church leader (contextually, usually male) impacts the wider congregation, instilling fear and anxiety. During the 2023 reporting period, there was only one recorded case of an Orthodox Christian killed by a Muslim man. The details of the incident remain unclear which, according to a local source, is typical as cases of Christian-related deaths are “very underreported on a community level.”

Christian men face daily discrimination, be it in the workplace, army or local community. Pressure is highest in rural areas, away from large cities. There are reportedly a very small number of Christians in government bodies, a country expert explained, “to give the impression that all is well.”

## Persecution of other religious minorities

Non-Muslims trying to bury their dead according to their own rites regularly face mob violence and state complicity in such hostility (Source: [Forum 18](#), 1 February 2018).

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2021):

- “Since March, the Jehovah's Witnesses have said that the criminal case against them remained open, although there was no other contact with law enforcement and the seized property was returned. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) reported that the government continued to arrest social media users who shared or liked digital content that the government considered extremist, especially religious literature connected to banned groups. On November 23, the Prosecutor General's Office (PGO) filed a claim in civil court requesting that the court declare some Jehovah's Witnesses' texts 'extremist'. The court dismissed the case on procedural grounds, but Jehovah's Witnesses representatives said they anticipated additional efforts by the government to disrupt their activities.”
- "The State Commission on Religious Affairs (SCRA) continued to refuse to register Jehovah's Witnesses congregations in the south of the country, based on a provision of law requiring religious groups to register also with local councils. This was despite a finding by the UN Human Rights Committee in 2019 that the requirement violated the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Constitution, and a Supreme Court ruling in 2016 that the requirement was unconstitutional.”
- "In a July 14 publication, the UN Human Rights Committee concluded that the country violated the Jehovah's Witnesses' fundamental right to practice their religion by refusing requests to register Jehovah's Witnesses Centers in the Osh, Naryn, and Jalal-Abad regions.”

## Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

### **Islamic oppression, blended with Clan oppression**

Islam in Kyrgyzstan is not the state religion, but the country is one of the most conservative Muslim countries in the region. Several Islamic movements are active, and hundreds of the young Kyrgyz who joined the ranks of the Islamic State group abroad have been returning home. The pressure exerted by Muslim families on converts is very intense in Kyrgyzstan - house-arrests, bride kidnapping and burial refusals are all fairly common and likely to remain so in the future.

### **Dictatorial paranoia**

Although the state proclaims itself to be secular, many government officials (certainly at the local level) side with the Muslim community and oppose converts to Christianity in particular. Another issue is the pending adaptation of the legislation regarding registration. Registration is obligatory, but the registration procedure is cumbersome and involves many restrictions. If the draft law (which has been pending for a number of years) is implemented in the future, then the 500 membership signatures needed for registration would be impossible for virtually all Christian congregations.

The probable outcome of the mixture of *Islamic oppression* and *Dictatorial paranoia* in Kyrgyzstan will be a growing influence of Islam in the country with all possible consequences for Christians. Converts to Christianity will continue to face the brunt of persecution.

## External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Girls Not Brides, Accessed February 2023 - <https://atlas.girlsnotbrides.org/map/kyrgyzstan/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: The Diplomat, 16 June 2022 - <https://thediplomat.com/2022/06/central-asias-shadow-pandemic-violence-against-women/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Forum 18 - [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2349](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2349)

## Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the new Research & Reports page of the website od.org. As in earlier years, they are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) using the following links:

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