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# Kyrgyzstan: Full Country Dossier

March 2024



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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# Introduction

## World Watch List 2024

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

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

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## Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2024 reporting period was 1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/> and on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom): <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>.

# WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Kyrgyzstan

## Brief country details

Kyrgyzstan: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
6,825,000	271,000	4.0

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

## Map of country



Kyrgyzstan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	59	61
WWL 2023	59	59
WWL 2022	58	59
WWL 2021	58	55
WWL 2020	57	55

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Kyrgyzstan:	
Main persecution engines	Main drivers
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Political parties
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

*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

- **2022/2023:** Violent attacks against non-Muslims in regions outside the capital Bishkek continued in 2022 and into 2023, local Protestants told Forum 18. Officials refused to explain why perpetrators are not prosecuted and punished, and what is being done to stop such attacks. When such attacks happen, Protestants stated that "local believers are afraid to complain to the authorities" as "they are afraid of reprisals from the authorities and local mobs for complaining". "These are only isolated cases," Kanatbek Midin uuly of the State Commission for Religious Affairs claimed. (Source: [Forum 18, 23 January 2023](#))

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

- **October 2022:** There were several cases of converts to Christianity being targeted because of their new found faith (Persecution engine: *Islamic oppression*).
- **February 2023:** In the eyes of people in her village, Nina (pseudonym) was an infidel who had abandoned her faith. At first, her husband, who was Muslim had no idea that she had become a Christian and was attending church in secret until the villagers found out and told him. They said he could not now be buried in his native village because they considered him an infidel too. He was so angry at the perceived shame Nina brought on him that he beat her so badly she could not leave home for 5 days and ended up in hospital for over a week. He also beat his son because he too went to church with his mother.

- **June 2023:** In Kyrgyzstan, female converts face severe opposition. Most often it is a woman in a family who is the first person to become a Christian. That is then the starting point for family members to threaten her. In many cases women have had to flee their family, village and region. From January - June 2023, three women are known to have faced this sort of persecution.

## Specific examples of positive developments

Kyrgyzstan will soon have its first Catholic cathedral. Pope Francis blessed the first stone of the future cathedral while attending a conference in neighboring Kazakhstan in September 2022. Construction is expected to be completed within 3 years. (Source: [Agencia Fides, 14 November 2022](#))

## External Links - Situation in brief

- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Forum 18, 23 January 2023 - [https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2804](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2804)
- Specific examples of positive developments: Agencia Fides, 14 November 2022 - [http://www.fides.org/en/news/73048-ASIA\\_KIRGHIZSTAN\\_The\\_project\\_for\\_the\\_construction\\_of\\_the\\_first\\_Catholic\\_cathedral\\_has\\_been\\_presented](http://www.fides.org/en/news/73048-ASIA_KIRGHIZSTAN_The_project_for_the_construction_of_the_first_Catholic_cathedral_has_been_presented)

# WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Kyrgyzstan

## Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/23 Kyrgyzstan country report	AI Kyrgyzstan 2022	<a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/kyrgyzstan/report-kyrgyzstan/">https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/kyrgyzstan/report-kyrgyzstan/</a>	1 September 2023
BBC News Kyrgyzstan country profile - updated 24 March 2023	BBC Kyrgyzstan profile	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16186907">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16186907</a>	1 September 2023
Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI Kyrgyzstan Report 2022	<a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/KGZ">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/KGZ</a>	1 September 2023
Crisis24 Kyrgyzstan report (Garda World)	Crisis24 Kyrgyzstan report	<a href="https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/kyrgyzstan">https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/kyrgyzstan</a>	1 September 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2022 – covering 167 countries	EIU 2022 Eastern Europe/Central Asia pp.50-54	<a href="https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/DI-final-version-report.pdf">https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/DI-final-version-report.pdf</a>	1 September 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2023 Kyrgyzstan	<a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>	1 September 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index – covering 29 countries	Democracy Index 2023 Kyrgyzstan	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/kyrgyzstan/nations-transit/2023">https://freedomhouse.org/country/kyrgyzstan/nations-transit/2023</a>	1 September 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2023 Kyrgyzstan	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/kyrgyzstan/freedom-world/2023">https://freedomhouse.org/country/kyrgyzstan/freedom-world/2023</a>	1 September 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report – covering 70 countries	Freedom on the Net 2023 Kyrgyzstan	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/kyrgyzstan/freedom-net/2023">https://freedomhouse.org/country/kyrgyzstan/freedom-net/2023</a>	26 February 2024
Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 – covering 170 countries	GIWPS 2021 Kyrgyzstan	<a href="https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/kyrgyzstan/">https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/kyrgyzstan/</a>	1 September 2023
Girls Not Brides Kyrgyzstan report	Girls Not Brides Kyrgyzstan	<a href="https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/kyrgyzstan/">https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/kyrgyzstan/</a>	1 September 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 - Kyrgyzstan country chapter	HRW 2023 Kyrgyzstan country chapter	<a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/kyrgyzstan">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/kyrgyzstan</a>	1 September 2023
Internet World Stats 2023 Kyrgyzstan	IWS 2023 Kyrgyzstan	<a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#kg">https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#kg</a>	1 September 2023
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2023 Kyrgyzstan	<a href="https://rsf.org/en/kyrgyzstan">https://rsf.org/en/kyrgyzstan</a>	1 September 2023
Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2022 Kyrgyzstan	<a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/kgz">https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/kgz</a>	1 September 2023
UNDP's Human Development Report Kyrgyzstan - updated 8 September 2022	UNDP HDR Kyrgyzstan	<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>	1 September 2023
US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom (country profile)	IRFR 2022 Kyrgyzstan	<a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/kyrgyzstan/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/kyrgyzstan/</a>	1 September 2023
USCIRF 2023 country reports – covering 17 CPC / 11 SWL, KGZ not included	USCIRF 2023	<a href="https://www.uscifr.gov/countries">https://www.uscifr.gov/countries</a>	
World Bank Kyrgyzstan data - 2021	World Bank Kyrgyzstan sata	<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>	1 September 2023
World Bank Kyrgyzstan overview 2023	World Bank Kyrgyzstan overview	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kyrgyzrepublic/overview">https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kyrgyzrepublic/overview</a>	1 September 2023
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook Kyrgyzstan - April 2023	Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Kyrgyzstan	<a href="https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/d5f32ef28464d01f195827b7e020a3e8-0500022021/related/mpo-kgz.pdf">https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/d5f32ef28464d01f195827b7e020a3e8-0500022021/related/mpo-kgz.pdf</a>	1 September 2023
World Factbook Kyrgyzstan - updated 29 August 2023	World Factbook Kyrgyzstan	<a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/kyrgyzstan/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/kyrgyzstan/</a>	1 September 2023



## 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 extremely 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 then went on to win a majority in the Jogorku Kenesh (Kyrgyz-

stan'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 threats from radical Islamic elements. (Source: World Factbook Kyrgyzstan)

In an article published on [3 November 2022](#) RFE/RL stated that the regime of President Japarov was imposing more and more restriction on his country. Many who protested against the border deal concluded with Uzbekistan had been sent to jail. New laws were restricting foreign media. "It's not a big secret that Kyrgyzstan is becoming more authoritarian," Temur Umarov, a fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, told RFE/RL. "Nearly everything that Japarov has been doing with the country's domestic and foreign policy is aimed at strengthening his hold on power as much as possible."

## 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 2022 Kyrgyzstan):

- "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 at least 39 members of one group for distributing banned religious material. On May 30, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reported that five suspected members of the banned Islamic Yakyn Incar religious group were arrested in raids in March and May. Police said that during the raids, they confiscated books, flyers, and computer-data storage devices containing material that promoted the group's ideology. In its annual report, Jehovah's Witnesses stated that a criminal case against it that followed a government raid on its offices in Bishkek in 2021 remained open. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported that the government continued to arrest social media users who circulated or "liked" digital content that the government considered extremist especially religious literature connected to banned groups. 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 nullified provision of law that formerly required religious groups to register also with local councils, with the most recent denial coming in November. In May, the SCRA denied the importation of a religious text by Jehovah's Witnesses.”
- “According to Christian activists, non-Muslim religious minorities continued to face difficulties arranging for burial of their dead in public cemeteries. An 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 2023 reports as either a Country of Particular Concern or a Special Watch List country. The most recent inclusion was in [USCIRF 2017](#) and stated:

- "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."

Politicians in Kyrgyzstan have for years attempted to push through controversial legislation that would impose restrictions on non-governmental organizations that receive funding from abroad. But lawmakers have rejected multiple draft bills, fearing it would harm the Central Asian country's democratic credentials and lead to donors pulling foreign aid. However, the authorities' latest effort to force through a Russian-style "foreign agents" law could succeed, with observers citing growing authoritarianism in Kyrgyzstan and attempts by Russia, Bishkek's

ally, to stamp out Western influence in the country. (Source: [RFE/RL, 3 June 2023](#))

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

### 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.

### Religious landscape

Kyrgyzstan: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	271,000	4.0
Muslim	6,058,000	88.8
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	30,800	0.5
Ethno-religionist	27,200	0.4
Jewish	400	0.0
Bahai	1,800	0.0
Atheist	63,500	0.9
Agnostic	367,000	5.4
Other	3,970	0.1
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

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

According to the World Christian Database (WCD March 2023), Muslims make up 88.8% 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 (6.3%) 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 on a regular basis. The planned restrictions on registration (drafted in 2014) have still not been implemented. This means that 'only' 200 signatures are currently needed for a church registration application, instead of the proposed 500.

## Economic landscape

According to the World Bank Kyrgyzstan data:

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

According to the World Factbook Kyrgyzstan:

- The Kyrgyz republic is a “landlocked, lower-middle-income Central Asian economy; natural resource rich; growing hydroelectricity and tourism; high remittances; corruption limits investment; COVID-19 and political turmoil hurt GDP, limited public revenues, and increased spending.”

Kyrgyzstan is increasingly turning to Russia and away from the West. The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) 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 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](#)).

In November 2022 the Kyrgyz government took steps to boost Kyrgyzstan's weak economy. The plan was to make the legal framework more transparent to encourage the inflow of foreign investments. President Japarov promised "all forms of protection for those who want to do business in Kyrgyzstan". (Source: [AsiaNews, 30 November 2022](#))

The war in Ukraine offered Kyrgyzstan the opportunity to boost its economy. Exports to Russia more than doubled, imports from next-door China almost tripled, and a whole range of products that Kyrgyzstan was not known for exporting in the past were sent abroad. (Source: [RFE/RL, 18 February 2023](#))

### 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 (UNDP HDR Kyrgyzstan). 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. 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 World Factbook Kyrgyzstan:

- **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:** 37.8% of total population (2023)
- **Literacy rate:** 99.5% (male: 99.7%, female: 99.5%) (2018)

According to the UNDP Human Development Report Kyrgyzstan:

- **HDI score and ranking:** 0.691 (0.675 for females, 0.698 for males), ranking 118 (2021)
- **Total population:** 6.5 million (2021)
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 70.0 years (73.4 for females, 65.8 for males) (2021)
- **Expected years of schooling:** 13.2 years (13.4 for females, 13.0 for males) (2021)
- **Gender Inequality index:** 0.37 (2021)
- **Labor Force Participation Rate (% ages 15 years and older):** Female: 42.1, Male: 71.7 (2021)

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 government, 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 #140 in the 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index of 180 countries (CPI 2022 Kyrgyzstan). 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 there would be shortages 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 in total low at 1,024 (Source: [WHO, accessed 1 September 2023](#)).

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 February 2023, the government decided to take strong measures to combat poverty at a time of severe economic crisis, also looking to the example of Chinese policies. A subsidy of 100 thousand som (about 1,000 euros) was made available to 10,000 needy families in 2023. In 2022, a similar policy reached 2,800 families, and according to the authorities it proved very effective. (Source: [AsiaNews, 1 February 2023](#))

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. 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 re-



sponse, 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 ([Mailis 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 2023 Kyrgyzstan):

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

According to the World Bank Kyrgyzstan data:

- **Mobile cellular subscriptions:** 107.3 per 100 people (2021)

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: June 2023):

- 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 liberalize its economy and open up its telecom market to competition. The privatization 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 2023, Kyrgyzstan is listed as being 'Partly Free' with a score of 52 points:

- "Internet freedom worsened in Kyrgyzstan during the coverage period. The government enforced the Law on Protection from False Information, which was enacted during the previous coverage period, to block news sites and force online news outlets to remove content. Radio Azattyk, the Kyrgyzstan service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), was blocked after it posted a video depicting border clashes between the militaries of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The Ministry of Culture also tried to shut down the outlet; the parties reached a settlement after the coverage period. Courts also issued prison sentences to journalists and social media users who criticized the government online and deported Bolot Temirov, a prominent investigative journalist. In a positive development, internet access continued to improve, according to some measurement sources."
- "After two revolutions that ousted authoritarian presidents in 2005 and 2010, Kyrgyzstan adopted a parliamentary form of government. Governing coalitions proved unstable, however, and corruption remains pervasive. Unrest surrounding the annulled 2020 parliamentary elections led to significant political upheaval and the violent repression of opponents of nationalist politician Sadyr Japarov. Major constitutional changes adopted in 2021 significantly increased presidential authority, concentrating political power in the presidency and reducing the size and role of the parliament. Both the judiciary and vigilante violence are increasingly used to suppress political opponents and civil society critics."

Recent developments show that the regime of President Japarov is imposing more and more restrictions on the media. "Freedom of media and expression are once again under siege in Kyrgyzstan today with a slew of highly restrictive legislative initiatives, as well as a spate of criminal cases against independent journalists and media outlets," said Synat Sultanalieva, Central Asia researcher at Human Rights Watch. "The authorities should stop trying to control and censor journalists work and withdraw these bills." (Source: [Human Rights Watch, 27 June 2023](#))

## Security situation

### Tajikistan border clashes (2019 - 2023)

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](#))

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](#)) Uzbek Foreign Minister Vladimir Norov and his Kyrgyz counterpart, Jeenbek Kulubaev, signed a number of documents on border delimitation, including an agreement on jointly managing the Kempir-Abad water reservoir, an issue that has been a source of contention between the two Central Asian neighbors over the past years. The Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry said the documents were signed on 3 November 2022 in Bishkek. (Source: [RFE/RL, 3 November 2022](#))

On 22 September 2023 [AsiaNews](#) reported: "Against the backdrop of the endless war between Russia and Ukraine, and the latest chapter in the ongoing confrontation between Azeris and Armenians over Nagorno Karabakh, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are also relaunching their differences on border issues, another open problem that remains from the post-imperial Soviet phase."

### **Islamic State group (IS) recruitment and other Muslim militant activities**

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](#)). On 3 October 2022 Kyrgyz officials said seven members of the banned *Hizb ut-Tahrir* Islamic group had been detained. (Source: [RFE/RL, 3 October 2022](#))

## **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 on religious minorities

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>
- Recent history: 3 November 2022 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-crackdown-civil-society-japarov-analysis/32114410.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: RFE/RL, 3 June 2023 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-foreign-agent-law/32442912.html>
- Political and legal landscape: Thomson Reuters, 2 August 2017 - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kyrgyzstan-women-bride-kidnapping-idUSKBN1AH5GI>
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- 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-idUKKBN00K1KA20150604>
- Economic landscape: RFE-RL, 6 August 2020 - <https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-allows-transit-of-uzbek-kyrgyz-workers-stranded-in-russia/30767694.html>
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## WWL 2024: 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	212,000	78.2
Catholic	500	0.2
Protestant	25,500	9.4
Independent	28,400	10.5
Unaffiliated	15,000	5.5
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-10,200	-3.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>271,200</b>	<b>100.1</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	2,900	1.1
Renewalist movement	26,200	9.7

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

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

**Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Renewalist movement:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

According to the World Christian Database March 2023 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 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Kyrgyzstan

## Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

## Position on the World Watch List

Kyrgyzstan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	59	61
WWL 2023	59	59
WWL 2022	58	59
WWL 2021	58	55
WWL 2020	57	55

The relatively stable score of Kyrgyzstan (now at 59 points in WWL 2024) hides certain developments occurring in the country. On the one hand, the levels of pressure in the *five spheres of life* all rose in WWL 2024. On the other hand, the number of reported violent incidents went down. As in most other countries in Central Asia, the pressure in Kyrgyzstan is highest in the *Private and Church spheres of life*. *Islamic oppression* (blended with *Clan oppression*) dominates in the *Private and Family spheres of life*, while *Dictatorial paranoia* dominates in the *National and Church spheres of life*. 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	Strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Not at all

*The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.*

### Dictatorial paranoia (Strong)

No religious activities beyond state-run and state-controlled institutions are allowed. 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.

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

Society in Kyrgyzstan is more traditional than in 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.

### Drivers of persecution

Kyrgyzstan: Drivers of persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG	-	-	STRONG	VERY WEAK	-	-	STRONG	-
Government officials	Medium	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	Strong	-
Ethnic group leaders	Strong	-	-	Strong	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong	-	-	Strong	-	-	-	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	-	Very weak	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	Very weak	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong	-	-	Strong	Very weak	-	-	Medium	-
One's own (extended) family	Strong	-	-	Strong	Very weak	-	-	-	-
Political parties	Weak	-	-	-	-	-	-	Medium	-

(table is continued on next page)



Kyrgyzstan: Drivers of persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG	-	-	STRONG	VERY WEAK	-	-	STRONG	-
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Organized crime cartels or networks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. Please note that "-" denotes "not at all". For more information see WWL Methodology.

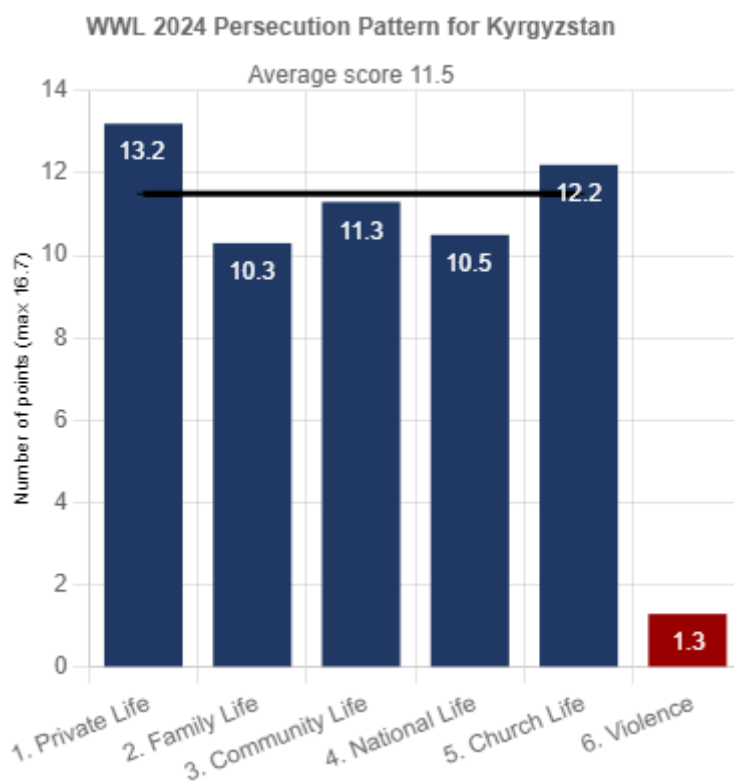
### Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Strong):** The 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.
- **Political parties (Medium):** With growing authoritarianism, the party of President Japarov is getting more and more repressive. In the last few years, politicians have been considering tightening the Religion Law.

### 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 towards non-Orthodox Christians and particularly towards 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, authorities are strongly influenced by the Islamic community in many areas. As a result, government officials often join community leaders in persecuting Christians - especially converts.

## The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2024 Persecution pattern for Kyrgyzstan shows:

- The average pressure on Christians was at a very high level (11.5 points), slightly above the score in WWL 2023 (11.3 points). There were increases in all *five spheres of life* (mostly very slight).
- Pressure was 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*. These two elements meet in *Community sphere of life*, where local authorities often line up with the local Muslim community.
- The score for violence is low, decreasing from 2.0 points in WWL 2023 to 1.3 points in WWL 2024. Reports on incidents of violence are scarce.

## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

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

## Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

### **Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (3.25 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 this will immediately draw attention to themselves. Many will therefore refrain from displaying Christian symbols such as a cross. 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 community will refuse this. Burials of Christians are frequently being denied by the local community and their leaders. Sometimes, relatives have to search a long time to find a final resting place to bury the dead.

### **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 3.5: Christians have been put under pressure to take part in non-Christian ceremonies. (3.25 points)**

Converts are under pressure from their community to continue habits, codes etc. and to attend Islamic festivities in their villages. Participation in religious ceremonies is a part of Community life and even ROC members are pushed to "honor" the local tradition. Local councils will support this.

**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 3.11: 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 consider extremist." (Source: US State Department IRFR 2022 Kyrgyzstan)

### **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 ... prohibits pursuit of political goals by religious groups." (Source: US State Department IRF 2022 Kyrgyzstan)

### **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. (3.75 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 5.1: Activities of churches have been monitored, hindered, disturbed or obstructed. (3.50 points)**

According to the law, registration is obligatory. The demands for official registration are huge (200 signatures per congregation) which in principle means that it is made impossible (read: ob-

structed). Few churches have passed the registration hurdle and so the majority are functioning outside the law. Most Christian meetings in Kyrgyzstan are therefore vulnerable (e.g. for raids by state agents). This impacts non-Orthodox Christians, but mostly evangelical groups. However, police raids occur relatively rarely and physical violence is used on a very limited scale. In rural areas, Muslims will often obstruct meetings of home groups in which known converts are present. They will also notify local authorities if such meetings occur.

**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.

## 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 points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:*

**1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced.**

*Possible reasons for this may be:*

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

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

- *Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).*
- *In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.*

- *Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.*

### 3. The use of symbolic numbers

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

Kyrgyzstan: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	1
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	0	1
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?	1	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 *	10
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?	1	2
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?	8	4
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	0

In the WWL 2024 reporting period:

- Christians attacked: Violent mobs attacked at least 10 Christians and threatened to kill them if they did not convert to Islam. (Source: Open Doors research)
- Christians sentenced to jail: [Forum 18](#) reported on 26 October 2023 that Protestant Aytbek Tynaliyev completed his prison sentence on 13 September 2023. Arrested in May, a Chuy Region court convicted him in July 2023 for "inciting religious enmity" through social media posts, sharing his faith and questioning the authorities' religious policy.
- Christian properties damaged: The Baptist Union reported that local residents continued to harass the office of a Christian organization in Karakol, throwing stones and threatening legal action to evict them from their property on multiple occasions during the reporting period because the residents were upset that religious activities were taking place in a residential building. (Source: Open Doors research)
- Christians forced to leave their homes: Eight Christians were forced to leave their parental home because of extreme domestic violence. (Source: Open Doors research)

## 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.

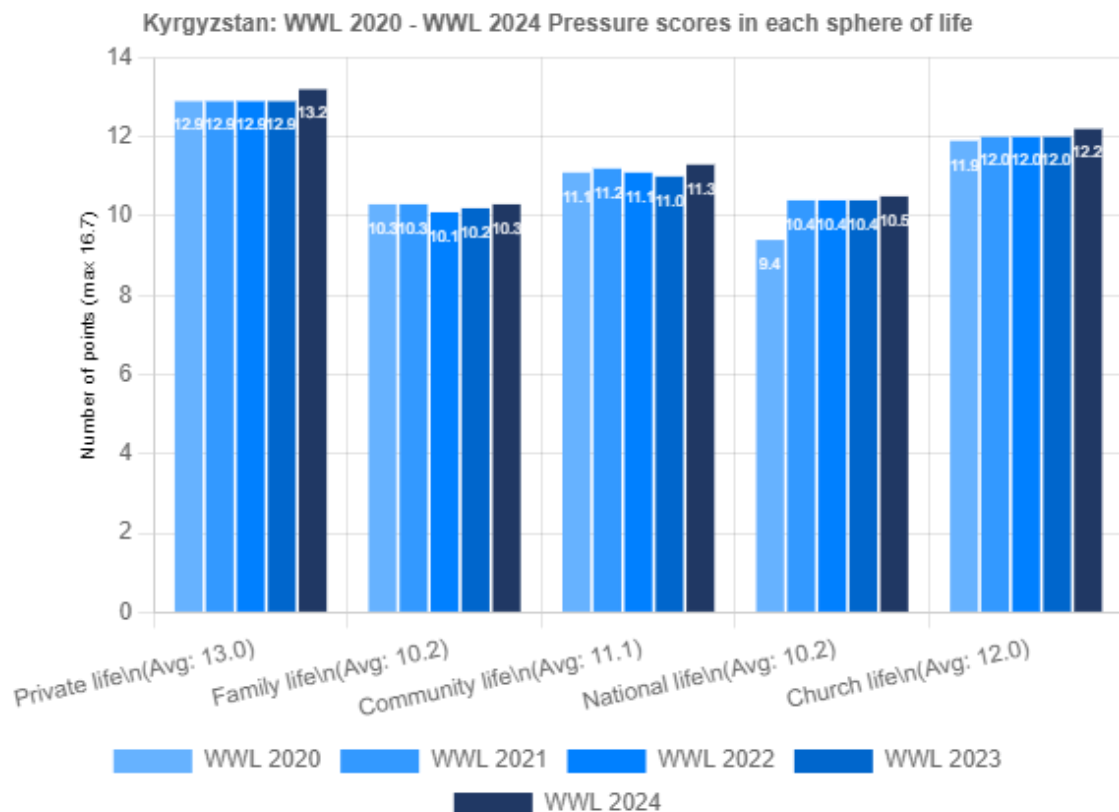
### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Kyrgyzstan: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024	11.5
2023	11.3
2022	11.3
2021	11.4
2020	11.1

As can be seen from the table above, the average pressure on Christians in Kyrgyzstan has crept up very gradually over the last five WWL reporting periods, reaching a new high in WWL 2024 of 11.5 points. Life in Kyrgyzstan under President Japarov is becoming less tolerant. Kyrgyzstan still has the lowest WWL score in the Central Asian region, but Christians in the country (especially converts) still have to live under very high pressure.



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

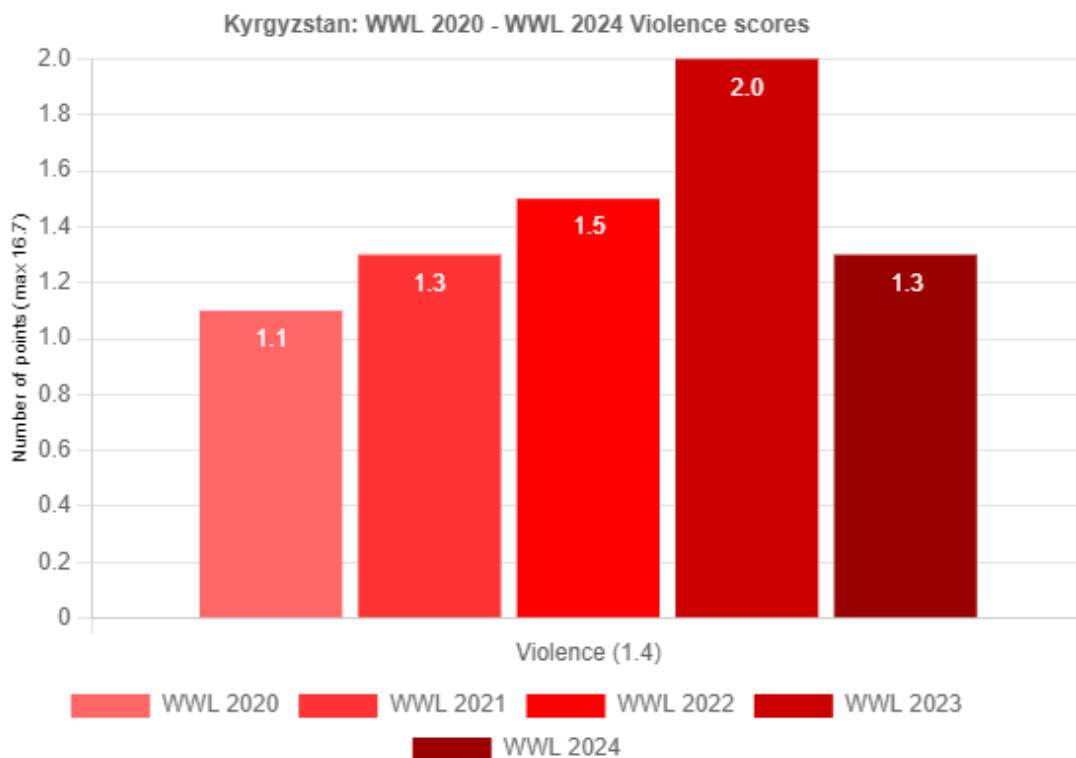


In each sphere of life, the pressure on Christians rose (very) slightly. The details are as follows:

- Pressure in *Private sphere of life* had been stable at 12.9 points and has been the highest scoring sphere of life, indicating very high pressure on converts in particular. In WWL 2024 it reached a new record score for Kyrgyzstan with 13.2 points.
- Pressure in *Family sphere of life* in Kyrgyzstan went very slightly up from 10.2 points in WWL 2023 to 10.3 points in WWL 2024. This means that pressure on the life of converts exerted by family is increasing.
- Pressure in the *Community sphere of life* also rose slightly from 11.0 points in WWL 2023 to 11.3 points in WWL 2024. This means that pressure on the life of converts exerted by local community members has continued and their situation has deteriorated.
- Pressure in *National sphere of life* had been stable at 10.4 points but rose to 10.5 points in WWL 2024. This is another indication that the current regime in Kyrgyzstan is tightening the screws on the Christian minority.
- The same can be deduced from the increased score in *Church sphere of life*. Pressure went up from being stable in 12.0 points to 12.2 points in WWL 2024.

## 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. The score in WWL 2023 was the highest in the past five years. In WWL 2024, the score for violence dropped again to 1.3 points (see chart below).



## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied access to social community/networks; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code
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 Kyrgyzstan).

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 COVID-19 measures; local experts also reported a rise in family violence for female converts trapped in the home ([The Diplomat, 16 June 2022](#)). This rise in violence was [fueled by](#) pre-existing gender inequality and social stereotypes combined with economic and social stress caused by the crisis surrounding the pandemic (IA report, June 2021). There is a strong belief in Kyrgyzstan that it is acceptable for men to use violence against women.

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. While this kind of pressure does not explicitly come from the state, local councils will allow this to happen. If already married at the point of conversion, Muslim husbands commonly divorce their wives and deny them access to their possessions. In rural Kyrgyzstan, where over 60% of the country’s population lives, a survey suggests that 1 in 3 marriages begin with a bridal-kidnapping. Here, bridal kidnapping is known as “ala kachuu” which translates as “to take and run away”. Although the practice became illegal in 1994, it is still widely tolerated. Local NGOs estimate that almost 12,000 women and girls are abducted for marriage annually, leaving girls particularly isolated and vulnerable ([UN Women, 2013](#)).

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 in the WWL 2024 reporting period, met with resistance from their Muslim parents. Upon discovery of their faith, they became aggressive and angry. The sisters, who were forbidden from contacting other believers, are reportedly now under house arrest and released only to attend school or college.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	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 deten-

tion, disinheritance, and exclusion from participation in communal institutions. According to country experts, local authorities can cooperate with local Muslims to ensure access to communal forums are blocked.

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. Known converts will be harassed and interrogated harshly by their family and local community. In some cases, the local imam will also take part in these interrogations, causing psychological weariness and threat to male converts. 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.

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 small number of Christians in government bodies, an expert explains, “to give the impression that all is well.”

## Persecution of other religious minorities

As reported by [Forum 18 on 26 October 2023](#):

- "The National Security Committee (NSC) secret police informed the public in early August it closed 39 mosques and 21 religious schools in Osh Region for not having official registration. It gave no details."
- "The State Commission for Religious Affairs (SCRA) in Bishkek continues to refuse state registration to Jehovah's Witness communities, especially in southern Kyrgyzstan. It 'currently refrains from registering the local organisations of Jehovah's Witnesses in Osh, Batken and Jalal-Abad regions, because of the conflicts between the local people in those areas and Jehovah's Witness communities', the SCRA claimed in a 10 August response to Forum 18."

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

- “Authorities maintained bans on 21 'religiously oriented' groups they considered extremist and detained at least 39 members of one group for distributing banned religious material. On May 30, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reported that five suspected members of the banned Islamic *Yakyn Incar* religious group were arrested in raids in March and May. Police said that during the raids, they confiscated books, flyers, and computer-data storage devices containing material that promoted the group's ideology. In its annual report, Jehovah's Witnesses stated that a criminal case against it that followed a government raid on its offices in Bishkek in 2021 remained open.”
- Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported that the government continued to arrest social media users who circulated or 'liked' digital content that the government considered extremist especially religious literature connected to banned groups.”

“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 nullified provision of law that formerly required religious groups to register also with local councils, with the most recent denial coming in November. In May, the SCRA denied the importation of a religious text by Jehovah's Witnesses.”

- “The government continued to arrest members of the pan-Islamic organization *Hizb ut-Tahrir* on extremism charges. According to local press, the government arrested at least 39 individuals it said were members of *Hizb ut-Tahrir* during the year, compared with nine the previous year. The 39 were detained under suspicion of distributing banned religious materials, either through in-person meetings or via social media networks, or for holding leadership positions in the organization. In most cases, those arrested were held in the State Committee for National Security's pretrial detention center that housed individuals characterized by the government as violent extremists.”
- “According to Jehovah's Witnesses, there were no government raids against them during the year. The criminal case that followed a March 2021 raid on the Jehovah's Witnesses office in Bishkek remained open, however, according to the group's annual report for 2022.”
- “Jehovah's Witnesses reported that the SCRA continued to refuse to register their local houses of worship in the south of the country, with the most recent refusal occurring in November, based on the SCRA continuing to interpret the law as requiring religious groups to register with local councils to establish new places of worship. The SCRA continued to impose the requirement despite a finding by the UNHRC in 2019 that it was in violation of Article 18 of the ICCPR and the constitution, and a Supreme Court ruling in 2016 that the requirement was unconstitutional. In June, in light of the UNHRC finding, the Supreme Court returned a Jehovah's Witnesses request for registration to the Bishkek city council for reconsideration that the city council had rejected in 2011. According to Jehovah's Witnesses, in response to the court's action, the SCRA stated that the UNHRC was not an international tribunal and that its views must only be considered, not implemented. In August, the city council agreed and refused to reconsider. Jehovah's Witnesses representatives stated that they appealed the decision to the Constitutional Court, but in November that court let stand the prior local Bishkek decision, which denied the Jehovah's Witnesses' registration. Jehovah's Witnesses representatives said they would file a lawsuit against the SCRA for its lack of action in registering their congregations.”

## Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

### **Dictatorial paranoia**

Although the state declares itself to be secular, many government officials (certainly at the local level) side with the Muslim community and oppose converts to Christianity in particular. Under President Sadyr Japarov, who took over the office of president in January 2021, Kyrgyzstan has generally become less free. 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 im-

plemented in the future, then the 500 membership signatures needed for registration would be impossible for virtually all Christian congregations.

### **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.

The probable outcome of the mixture of *Dictatorial paranoia* and *Islamic oppression* 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**

- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: Forum 18 - [https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2870](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2870)
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: The Diplomat, 16 June 2022 - <https://thediplomat.com/2022/06/central-asias-shadow-pandemic-violence-against-women/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: fueled by - <https://www.international-alert.org/stories/how-we-challenged-65-rise-domestic-violence-kyrgyzstan/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: (UN Women, 2013). - <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2013/2/new-law-in-kyrgyzstan-toughens-penalties-for-bride-kidnapping>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Forum 18 on 26 October 2023 - [https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2870](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2870)

### **Further useful reports**

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

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

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

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