
World Watch Research

Turkmenistan: Persecution Dynamics

January 2025



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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Contents

World Watch List 2025 – Top 50.....	2
World Watch List 2025 – Ranks 51-78	4
Copyright, sources and definitions	5
Reporting period	5
Brief country details.....	5
Map of country	6
Dominant persecution engines and drivers.....	7
Brief description of the persecution situation.....	7
Summary of international obligations and rights violations.....	7
Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period	8
Christian communities and how they are affected.....	8
Areas where Christians face most difficulties.....	8
Position on the World Watch List	8
Persecution engines.....	9
Drivers of persecution.....	10
The Persecution pattern	11
Pressure in the 5 spheres of life.....	12
Violence	15
5 Year trends.....	18
Gender-specific religious persecution / Female	19
Gender-specific religious persecution / Male.....	20
Persecution of other religious minorities	21
Trends Summary	23
Further useful reports.....	23
External Links	23

World Watch List 2025 – Top 50

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	98	96	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.7	11.1	94	93	92	91	92
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	89	89	88	87
4	Libya	16.0	16.2	15.9	16.2	16.4	10.6	91	91	88	91	92
5	Sudan	14.1	14.2	15.5	14.9	15.3	16.1	90	87	83	79	79
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.9	12.2	89	89	89	88	88
7	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.6	14.9	14.5	16.7	88	88	88	87	85
8	Pakistan	13.6	13.9	15.0	15.0	12.9	16.7	87	87	86	87	88
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.9	16.5	10.9	86	86	86	85	86
10	Afghanistan	15.6	15.9	15.9	16.4	16.7	5.0	85	84	84	98	94
11	India	12.2	12.9	13.3	14.9	13.9	16.5	84	83	82	82	83
12	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.8	16.6	3.3	81	81	80	81	78
13	Myanmar	12.6	11.1	13.5	14.1	12.9	16.5	81	79	80	79	74
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	13.0	15.2	15.6	80	79	76	70	67
15	China	13.2	10.1	12.8	14.6	16.1	11.1	78	78	77	76	74
16	Maldives	15.6	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.7	78	78	77	77	77
17	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.3	14.8	13.9	6.1	78	79	76	78	82
18	Syria	13.5	14.4	13.9	14.4	14.3	7.0	78	81	80	78	81
19	Algeria	14.7	14.3	11.5	14.7	16.0	6.3	77	79	73	71	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	14.0	15.6	76	75	71	68	67
21	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.6	12.9	14.3	8.3	74	71	69	69	67
22	Laos	11.8	10.7	13.5	14.1	13.9	9.8	74	75	68	69	71
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	2.8	74	72	72	70	71
24	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.7	11.3	10.4	16.1	74	71	69	68	67
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.5	12.4	15.5	4.4	73	71	71	71	71
26	Cuba	13.2	8.5	13.9	13.3	15.1	9.1	73	73	70	66	62
27	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	14.0	15.6	72	70	70	68	66
28	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	14.6	15.7	72	70	70	68	62

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
29	Turkmenistan	14.3	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.3	1.5	71	70	70	69	70
30	Nicaragua	12.4	7.6	13.7	13.3	14.1	9.6	71	70	65	56	51
31	Mexico	11.7	9.0	12.5	11.8	11.0	14.6	71	68	67	65	64
32	Oman	14.5	14.1	10.9	13.8	14.1	3.0	70	69	65	66	63
33	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	15.6	70	69	66	66	65
34	Tunisia	12.4	13.2	10.1	12.6	13.8	8.1	70	69	67	66	67
35	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	10.8	14.5	16.1	70	67	67	66	64
36	Bhutan	13.2	13.2	12.3	14.1	14.2	2.2	69	68	66	67	64
37	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.9	68	68	68	65	63
38	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.6	12.2	12.8	14.2	4.3	68	65	65	64	64
39	Tajikistan	14.1	12.7	12.7	13.2	13.7	1.9	68	66	66	65	66
40	Egypt	12.7	13.7	12.1	12.4	10.9	6.3	68	68	68	71	75
41	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.7	67	67	68	74	67
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	2.6	67	66	66	63	62
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.4	13.1	16.1	67	66	65	65	64
44	Vietnam	10.8	9.5	12.2	14.1	14.1	5.9	67	68	70	71	72
45	Turkey	13.0	11.7	11.7	13.2	11.5	5.4	67	64	66	65	69
46	Colombia	11.0	7.9	12.7	11.5	10.5	12.6	66	68	71	68	67
47	Kyrgyzstan	13.5	10.3	11.7	11.4	12.4	6.9	66	59	59	58	58
48	Brunei	14.8	14.8	10.8	10.8	14.0	0.6	66	66	65	64	64
49	Chad	11.0	8.2	10.2	9.9	10.3	15.9	65	61	58	55	53
50	Jordan	12.9	14.3	10.4	12.2	12.8	2.4	65	65	65	66	64

World Watch List 2025 – Ranks 51-78

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
51	Malaysia	12.8	13.7	11.7	12.4	11.2	3.0	65	64	66	63	63
52	Azerbaijan	13.3	10.2	9.6	12.2	13.7	5.6	65	60	59	60	56
53	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.9	64	63	64	63	62
54	Nepal	12.2	10.6	9.5	12.6	12.3	5.9	63	62	61	64	66
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.4	63	62	63	61	58
56	Russian Federation	12.7	7.9	10.7	13.1	14.1	4.4	63	58	57	56	57
57	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.1	1.7	61	61	60	59	56
58	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	61	64	64	63
59	Indonesia	10.9	11.9	10.9	11.6	10.2	5.7	61	66	68	68	63
60	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.6	61	61	62	62	62
61	Sri Lanka	12.7	8.7	11.5	11.5	8.5	7.6	60	60	57	63	62
62	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	10.3	10.7	12.1	0.2	60	60	60	59	58
63	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	14.6	59	57	55	52	48
64	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	12.1	9.4	58	58	57	50	42
65	Honduras	7.9	4.7	11.7	7.3	9.9	13.1	55	55	53	48	46
66	Togo	9.2	6.7	10.4	7.1	11.5	9.3	54	52	49	44	43
67	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	0.6	54	55	55	57	56
68	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	8.9	54	52	48	43	47
69	Ukraine	6.8	5.0	7.8	12.5	13.5	7.2	53	44	37	37	34
70	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	8.3	53	52	52	51	46
71	Venezuela	6.3	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	9.6	52	53	56	51	39
72	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	16.1	52	52	51	48	47
73	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	9.6	51	44	44	42	42
74	Lebanon	11.5	10.1	7.0	6.2	6.7	7.2	49	48	40	35	34
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	4.4	48	47	44	44	43
76	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	8.1	15.6	47	46	46	43	43

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
77	Belarus	9.9	3.7	5.0	10.8	14.1	3.1	47	46	43	33	30
78	Philippines	9.2	6.6	6.6	6.1	5.7	8.5	43	40	32	34	26

Copyright, sources and definitions

World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- [Background country information](#) (published annually in summer)
- Persecution dynamics (published annually in January).

These documents are the property of World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. They include data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and 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 end of each document under the heading “External links”. These documents may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © Open Doors International.

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 and on the Open Doors Analytical website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/> (password: freedom).

Reporting period

The WWL 2025 reporting period was 1 October 2023 - 30 September 2024.

Brief country details

Turkmenistan: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
6,598,000	164,000	2.5

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Turkmenistan: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	164,000	2.5
Muslim	6,165,000	93.4
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	970	0.0
Ethnic religionist	1,100	0.0
Jewish	510	0.0
Bahai	1,500	0.0
Atheist	50,100	0.8
Agnostic	214,000	3.2
Other	820	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Map of country



Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

Turkmenistan is ruled by an authoritarian government where state agents constantly monitor religious groups and individuals, and impose restrictions. Even Russian Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic churches may experience Sunday services being monitored. The printing or importing of Christian materials is restricted. Christians from a Muslim background bear the brunt of the rights violations both at the hands of the state and from family, friends and community.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Turkmenistan has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights in the following international treaties:

1. [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#)
2. [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(ICESCR\)](#)
3. [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment \(CAT\)](#)
4. [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(CEDAW\)](#)
5. [Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CRC\)](#)

Turkmenistan is not fulfilling its international obligations by regularly violating or failing to protect the following rights of Christians:

- Non-registered churches are raided, its members arrested, threatened and fined (ICCPR Arts. 9 and 18)
- Christians and their activities are closely monitored by the authorities (ICCPR Art. 17)
- Christian converts experience pressure and violence from their family and community to renounce their faith (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Access to religious literature is severely restricted and subject to official screening and approval (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)

- Female converts face physical beatings, house arrest, verbal and physical abuse, threats and rejection from their own family because of their faith (ICCPR Arts. 9, 12 and 18)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- Christians are regularly interviewed by the secret police and forced to reveal details of church activities.
- The use of violence by family members against converts from Islam to the Christian faith (beatings, forced isolation etc.) is common.
- A pastor was forced to leave the country due to fabricated accusations.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: These do not exist according to Open Doors sources and were therefore not counted as a separate category in the WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities: The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has accustomed itself to the limitations provided by the government and is therefore left more or less undisturbed. Sunday services may be monitored, but they are conducted unhindered and members can meet. Printing or importing Christian materials is restricted.

Converts to Christianity: Christian converts from a Muslim background bear the brunt of persecution in Turkmenistan. Apart from the state, they are also under strong pressure from family, friends and community. The latter pressure is by far the more powerful because it dominates their everyday life.

Non-traditional Christian communities: After converts, this category of Christians experiences the most rights violations for their faith, especially when their churches have not been registered. Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal groups suffer from raids, threats, arrests and fines.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Rights violations targeting all Christian communities and carried out by government officials can occur all over the country. Pressure from family, friends and community on converts is stronger outside the urban areas.

Position on the World Watch List

Turkmenistan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2025	71	29
WWL 2024	70	29
WWL 2023	70	26
WWL 2022	69	25
WWL 2021	70	23

The WWL 2025 score for Turkmenistan is actually less than 1 point higher than in WWL 2024. The situation is one of stability, with only minor changes in some areas of pressure and violence in the country. The pressure on Christians is extremely high in the *Church, Private and National spheres of life*. The two main Persecution engines in Turkmenistan are *Dictatorial paranoia* and *Islamic oppression* blended with *Clan oppression*. They are active in all spheres of life, but *Islamic oppression* (blended with *Clan oppression*) dominates in the *Private and Family spheres of life*, while *Dictatorial paranoia* dominates in the *National and Church spheres of life*. Both engines 'meet' each other in the *Community sphere of life*. State agents constantly monitor churches and Christians. Muslim families, friends and villagers exert pressure on converts.

Persecution engines

Turkmenistan: 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	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Very strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Not at all

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

Dictatorial paranoia (Very strong)

No religious activities beyond state-run and state-controlled institutions are allowed. Protestants are frequently branded 'extremists' due to their religious activities outside state-sanctioned structures. Members of Protestant churches are often regarded as followers of a foreign sect that has only one goal, namely to spy on and destroy the current political system. From this perspective, they need to be not only controlled, but if necessary, eradicated.

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

If indigenous citizens (who are Muslim) convert to Christianity, they are likely to experience pressure and occasionally physical violence from their families, friends and local community to force them to return to their former faith. Some converts are locked up by their families for long periods, beaten and may eventually be expelled from their communities. Local imams preach against them, so adding

pressure. As a result, converts will do their best to hide their faith – they become so-called secret believers.

Drivers of persecution

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

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

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Very strong):** Officials at all levels are very hostile towards religious groups. All religious activity is closely monitored to see if government rules are being followed. If not, raids, detentions, confiscations and fines are likely. Such measures are very common in Turkmenistan.
- **Political parties (Strong):** Although few political parties are allowed in Turkmenistan, the ruling party which controls the government of President Berdymukhamedov by definition participates in the violation of rights of Christians insofar as much of the pressure and violence directed at Christians is government-sanctioned.
- **Normal citizens (Medium):** Especially at the local level, citizens will monitor any religious activities they see and report to the authorities.

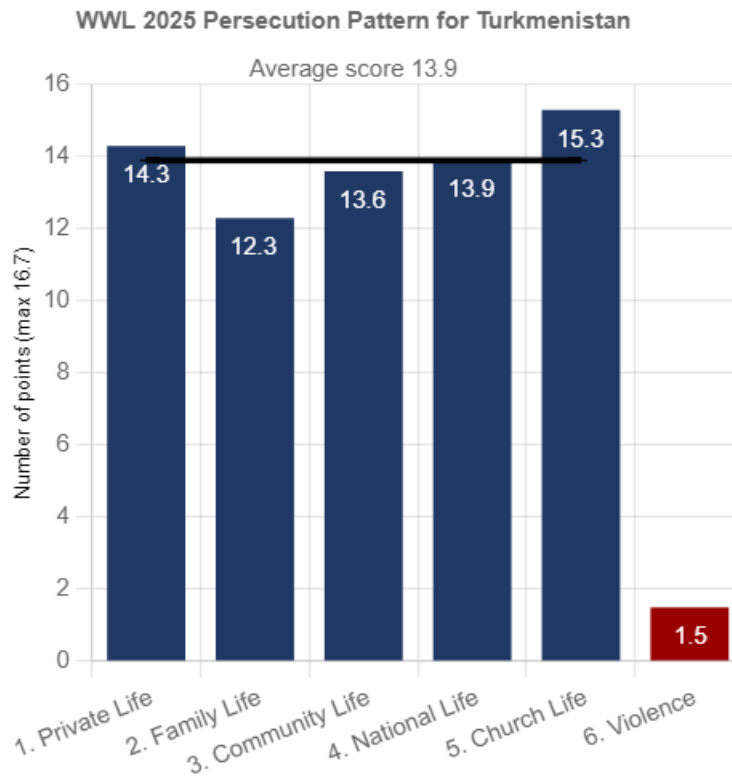
Drivers of Islamic oppression (blended with Clan oppression)

- **Extended family (Strong):** Especially in rural areas, Muslim family members will exert high pressure on converts to Christianity. This can lead to threats, beatings, house arrest or ostracism.
- **Normal citizens (Strong):** At the community level, members of society will exert additional pressure on converts to return to Islam. In the case of conversion, converts are persecuted severely by the local community and religious leaders.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Muslim clerics are open in their hostility towards non-Orthodox Christians and particularly against converts from Islam.
- **Ethnic or Clan group leaders (Medium):** With the support of the authorities, Turkmen ethnic leaders encourage all the forms of persecution mentioned above. Mahalla community groups ("Mahalla" refers to a self-governing administrative unit of residents) have been provided with authority by the government to carry out official action against Christians and prohibit missionary activity.
- **Government officials (Medium):** At the community level there is a link between local government and Muslim pressure. Often, active Muslims and local officials know each other. This is why the pressure on converts is stronger at the community level than at the state level, where officials claim that they are secular.

The Persecution pattern

The WWL 2025 Persecution pattern for Turkmenistan shows (see chart below):

- The average pressure on Christians is at an extremely high level (13.9 points), the same score as in WWL 2024. Pressure decreased slightly in the *National* and *Church spheres of life* and rose very slightly in the *Private* sphere.
- The scores for pressure are extremely high in *Church life* (15.3), *Private life* (14.3) and *National life* (13.9). The fact that the highest score is in the *Church sphere of life* is a reflection of the many restrictions on Christians imposed by the state.
- The score for violence remained low (1.5 points), 0.6 of a point higher than in WWL 2024; very few violent incidents were reported.



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 2025 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 1.6: It has been risky for Christians to access Christian radio or TV, or Christian material on the Internet. (3.75 points)

Converts need to be very careful in accessing Christian broadcasts and websites in their homes, since discovery by their family will lead to harsh reactions. Accessing foreign Christian media is difficult for all Christians in Turkmenistan. Internet access goes via state Internet Server Providers and is therefore under surveillance.

Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (3.50 points)

In the case of converts, the rights violations come from their family or community if Christian materials are discovered. Christian materials are considered as hard evidence for conversion. When such materials are found they will be destroyed and the convert will be dealt with harshly. The government has a strict requirement for all religious literature (whether imported or produced in the country) to be screened by the state authorities. Otherwise it is illegal and banned. Houses and churches are regularly raided by police in search of illegal religious materials. One church leader said: “All electronic devices, computers, mobile phones, androids etc. will be confiscated and checked for content”.

Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms (including expressions in blogs etc.). (3.50 points)

Converts have a problem in this respect as openly showing their new faith will draw unwanted, negative reactions from their families, friends and the community. Muslims will also oppose Protestants from revealing their faith - they will see this as a form of evangelism. There are not many opportunities of revealing their faith and activities in written form, except on Facebook and other similar websites. Since all these sites and webpages are monitored by the state, few Turkmen Christians dare to run the risk of being caught.

Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (3.50 points)

Converts know that displaying a cross or other Christian symbols will draw unwanted attention from their family and community. (Non-convert) Protestants are also at risk because the Muslim community are likely to accuse them of attempting to evangelize. Converts and Protestant Christians will also draw unwanted attention from state agents if they openly wear Christian symbols.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.3: Christians have been hindered in celebrating a Christian wedding. (3.50 points)

The family, friends and community of converts will block Christian ceremonies and celebrations as they are against conversion. The state is against any openly religious activities, and this will inevitably lead to raids, detentions etc. But weddings inside registered churches will mostly be left undisturbed.

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

The surrounding family will try to keep the children of converts to Christianity within Islam and raise them according to traditional customs. There is no official religious education in public schools; private religious education is restricted by the government.

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

The Muslim environment (family, friends, community) will pressurize children of converts in particular into receiving Islamic teaching – sometimes even against the wishes of their parents. It is compulsory for students to participate in all activities organized by schools or other educational institutions.

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.50 points)

Children of converts and Protestants are usually isolated from having fellowship with other children. They are often humiliated and slandered at schools in front of all other children.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

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

Converts will be monitored by members of their family and community. Protestants will also be monitored by the Muslim community as they are regularly suspected of carrying out evangelism. The state constantly monitors all religious activities, even by installing informers in religious communities.

Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.75 points)

Converts will experience immense pressure from practically everyone to return to Islam. Protestant Christians will also face pressure from their local communities to convert to Islam.

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.). (3.50 points)

Converts are threatened by family, friends and community (including local Islamic leaders) in an effort to make them give up their Christian faith. Local Muslim communities will also harass Protestants whom they accuse of evangelism. (Unregistered) Protestants face harassment, threats, discrimination, obstruction etc. from the authorities.

Block 3.13: Christians have been interrogated or compelled to report to the local vigilante/police for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)

Known converts will be harassed and interrogated harshly by their family and community. The state regularly raids Christian meetings, even those of registered groups. All those present will be interrogated, many will be detained, many will be fined, and all materials found will be confiscated.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.3: Christians have been forced by law or in practice to act against their conscience, e.g. regarding military service or in certain professions. (4.00 points)

Military service is compulsory and Christians cannot refuse to serve in the army on grounds of conscience.

Block 4.16: International monitoring has been hindered when Christians had to stand trial (4.00 points)

Turkmenistan does not allow any international interference in its internal system. International monitoring (e.g., by Forum 18) is as good as impossible.

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 Law on Religion (2016) contains many restrictions on religious freedom including a ban on unregistered religious organizations (even though it is practically impossible for a church to obtain

official registration), a ban on private religious education, the requirement for religious literature to be screened by the authorities etc.

Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (3.75 points)

The state will not allow Christian organizations or political parties. Muslims would also regard Christian organizations as an attempt to convert people to Christianity and would oppose them.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching, and/or published materials have been monitored. (4.00 points)

All religious activities are strictly monitored by the state and very often this leads to raids etc.; Christian materials are no exception.

Block 5.20: It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution. (4.00 points)

When the instigators of persecution are state agents at any level, it is dangerous to speak out against them. These people can act with impunity (the order will be given by state officials). And since the judiciary in Turkmenistan is not independent, any complaints will result in detention or fine. When the instigators of persecution are Muslims from the local community (affecting mainly converts and those Protestants active in evangelism), it is useless to speak out against them since this will make the local Muslims only more determined to stop such outreach activities.

Block 5.12: Churches or Christian organizations have been hindered in printing Christian materials or owning printers. (3.75 points)

Unauthorized printing of religious literature is considered an illegal religious activity and is prohibited by the law. All printed religious materials must pass religious expertise. Printing without permission is forbidden. Everything is controlled by the state.

Block 5.13: Churches have been hindered in importing Christian materials from abroad. (3.75 points)

All imported religious materials must pass official screening by the authorities. In most cases the items are confiscated and destroyed. For that reason, Protestants do not try to bring printed materials into Turkmenistan. Muslims will report to the authorities if they discover Christians are importing religious materials illegally.

Violence

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

Turkmenistan: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2025	WWL 2024
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	10 *	0
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	0

(table continues below)

Turkmenistan: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2025	WWL 2024
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)?	500	22
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	1	0
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	1	0

In the WWL 2025 reporting period:

- **Christians arrested:** Christians were regularly interrogated by the secret police and forced to reveal details of the community's religious life.
- **Christians attacked:** Sources reported that at least 500 Christians were physically or mentally abused. The majority of reported cases involved violence within a convert's family - beatings, forced isolation etc.
- **Christian shops and businesses attacked:** Sources reported that one business of a pastor was forcibly closed because of fabricated accusations made against him.
- **Christians forced to leave the country:** Sources reported that one pastor was forced to leave the country temporarily due to the fabricated accusations made against him.

5 Year trends

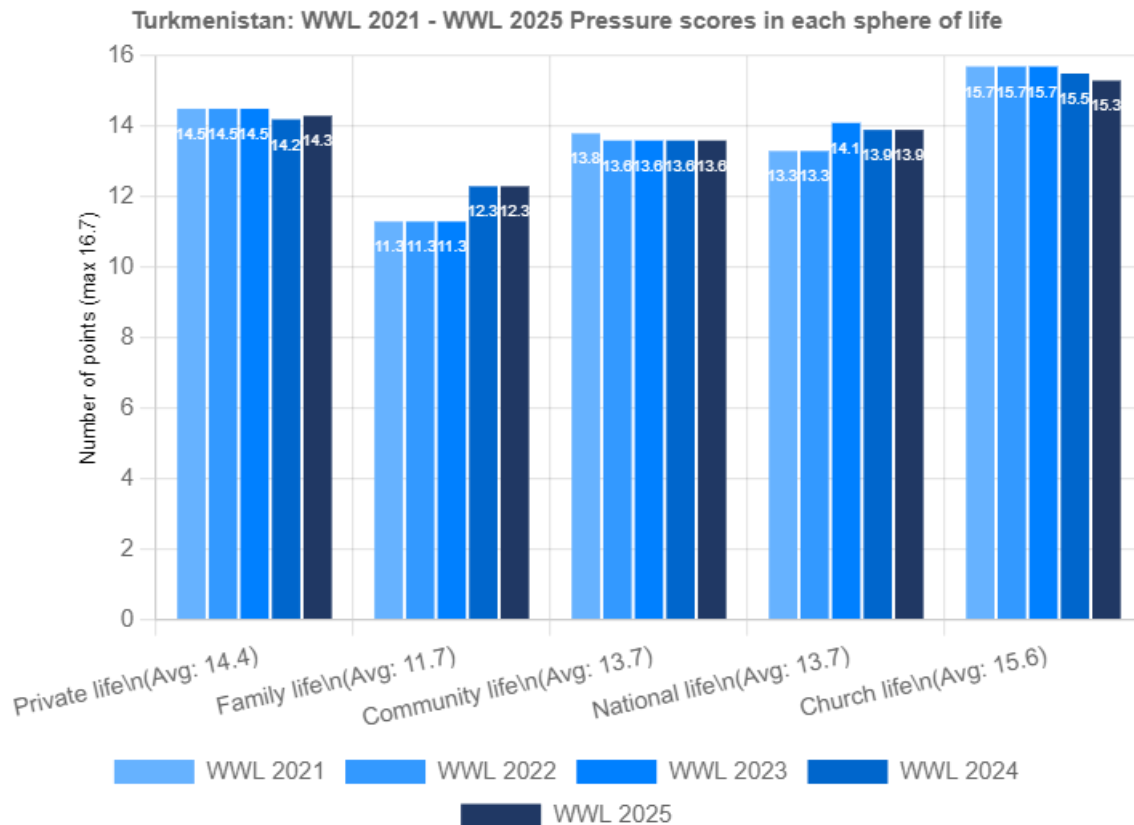
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

Turkmenistan: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2025	13.9
2024	13.9
2023	13.8
2022	13.7
2021	13.7

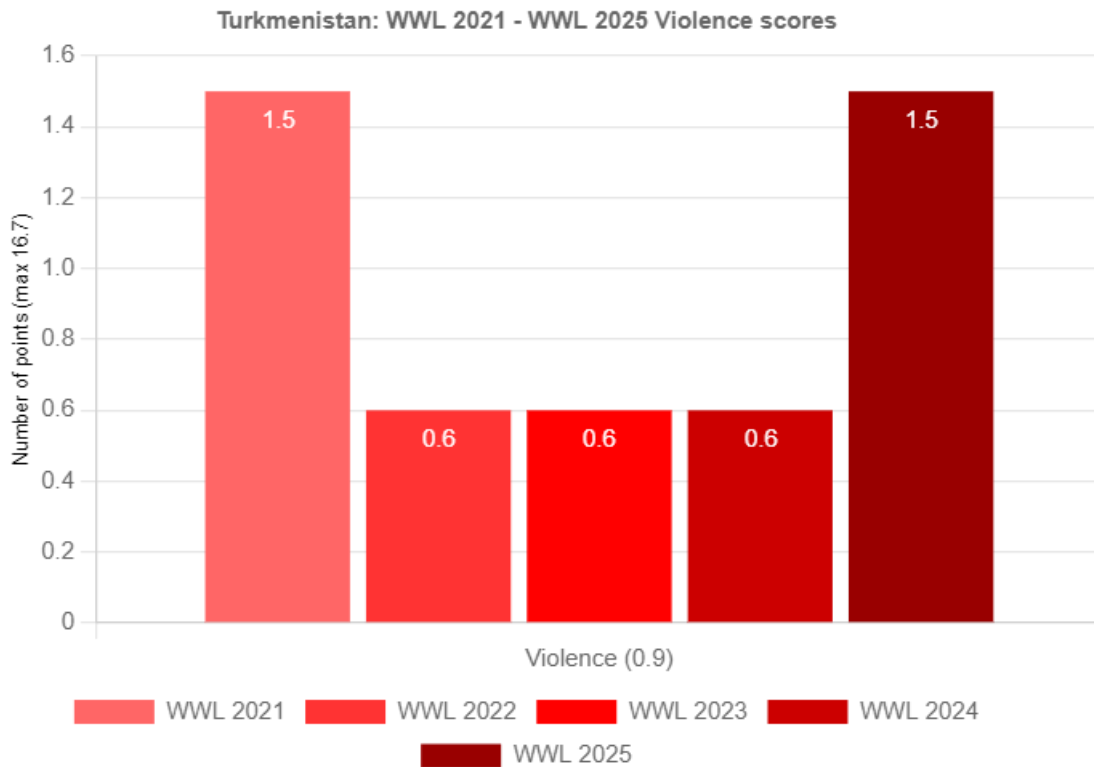
As can be seen in the table above, the average pressure over the 5 spheres of life in Turkmenistan has more or less remained stable within the range of 13.7 - 13.9 points over the past five WWL reporting periods. This is a clear indication of how little the situation for Christians in the country has changed.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



Over the five most recent WWL reporting periods, the scores in the five spheres of life have not changed dramatically. The average pressure per sphere is highest - and indeed at an extreme level - in the *Church* and *Private spheres of life*. This reflects the influence of the two dominant Persecution engines, *Dictatorial paranoia* and *Islamic oppression* (blended with *Clan oppression*). In general, the situation for Christians in Turkmenistan has been quite stable, with few changes occurring.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



Another stable element is the low/very low score for violence targeting Christians in Turkmenistan. In the last five WWL reporting periods, the score never reached 2 points - it has always moved between 0.6 points at the lowest and 1.5 points at the highest. The lack of incidents can be explained by the sheer effectiveness of state surveillance and control which force Christians to self-sensor and be very cautious. As a result, very few incidents get reported, since many Christians in Turkmenistan are very reluctant to talk about incidents that have occurred.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Turkmenistan	Female Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abduction Forced marriage Incarceration by family (house arrest) Violence – physical Violence – psychological Violence – sexual Violence – Verbal

Within Turkmenistan’s traditional, patriarchal and Islamic culture, domestic violence is the greatest threat for Christian women who live with non-Christians. Total submission is expected, both to their husbands as well as to their parents. A country expert explains that women from a Muslim background in particular are expected to live in “total obedience to husbands”.

Female converts therefore, who by turning away from Islam challenge the existing accepted social order, are particularly vulnerable to persecution. A country expert stated that “traditional culture puts women lower than men and requires obedience ... for that reason a woman cannot choose her own religion and will be persecuted if she converts to Christianity.” Female converts face harsh physical beatings, house arrest, verbal abuse, threats and rejection. They may even be sexually assaulted as a form of punishment, although such instances are rarely reported due to the attached stigma and shame, and the impunity granted to perpetrators.

Female converts in conservative regions run the risk of being kidnapped and married off to a Muslim, as a corrective measure. A country expert explains that “in some cases fathers would especially marry their daughters off to Muslim men in order to force them to return to Islam”. Converts may also be forced into marriages not due to kidnappings, but due to the obligation to follow pre-marital arrangements made by her parents prior to conversion. Considering such pressure, many women choose to live as secret believers upon their conversion out of fear.

More broadly, abusing women can be used as an instrument to intimidate and cause distress for Christian husbands and family members, thereby pressuring the wider Christian community and fostering fear and feelings of helplessness across the Turkmen Church. As a country expert summarized: “Persecuting women is an instrument for persecuting their husbands and other family members.”

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Turkmenistan	Male Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites Economic harassment via business/job/work access Economic harassment via fines Imprisonment by government Military/militia conscription/service against conscience Violence - psychological Violence - verbal

Men in Turkmenistan normally hold leadership roles within the family, as heads of the family and financial providers, and within the Church. Pressure and violence directed against them affects entire families and congregations, causing fear, anger and financial hardship. Christians feel that state agents look for any excuse to issue fines to Christian men, for instance for holding illegal gatherings, for the possession of religious literature, even for downloading Christian songs. Pressure also comes from the

community on a local level; Muslims obstruct business activities of converts and Protestants (whom they view as a sect), forcing many Christian business owners to keep their faith a secret. As men are the primary financial providers in Turkmenistan, they cannot afford to lose financial income.

Church leaders in Turkmenistan, who are generally male, are especially targeted for persecution. Muslims consider them primarily responsible for leading people away from Islam and attack those they deem to be most active evangelistically. The state authorities regard them as primary targets to control Christian activities; they expect a certain level of cooperation from those in leadership to inform them of anybody with radical or 'extremist' views. A country expert explained: “The state regards pastors and church leaders as primary targets to control Christian activities. They are used as examples for the other Christians of what may be expected.”

With this in mind, it comes as no surprise that the authorities also influence the choice of who assumes leadership positions. Church leaders also face challenges in obtaining religious training; many have been denied exit visas when going to Christian conferences and seminars. Tight restrictions exist over religious education and institutions in Turkmenistan; training can only be conducted in special, state-licensed religious institutions. There are, however, no such institutions in Turkmenistan.

Christian men also face discrimination, intolerance and bullying within the context of the armed forces; military service remains mandatory in Turkmenistan, and objection on grounds of conscience is not permitted. Those who refuse, risk imprisonment. Additionally, male converts face harassment and interrogation by their families and local communities. They may also experience threats, disinheritance, limits on travel, shaming and beatings.

Persecution of other religious minorities

The government does not focus on any specific religious group - Muslims, Christians, Jews, Bahais etc. have all experienced a high level of state surveillance and oppression over the years.

According to US State Department ([IRFR 2023 Turkmenistan](#)):

- “On September 15, the Helsinki Foundation reported that authorities detained a Muslim man from the village of Sharlavuk, Balkan province, for 15 days for teaching children the Koran. During those 15 days, the man was reportedly forbidden to pray or to receive parcels from his relatives. According to the Helsinki Foundation article, sources inside the country mentioned that Turkmen authorities labeled the man a "Wahhabi" and warned him that if he repeated the 'offence', he could face up to six years in prison as a member of a Wahhabi group.”

- “In their 2023 Religious Freedom Report, Jehovah's Witnesses reported 14 cases of police and officers from the Ministry of National Security detaining Witnesses over the year, summoning them to law enforcement agencies, at times while they were sharing their religious beliefs or in their place of work, questioning them for a few hours, and then releasing them. The report stated that the Ministry of National Security "continued to carry out preventative work among Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the country." According to the report, "In almost all cases, the authorities ask the Witnesses to state their beliefs in writing, indicate that they have had an explanatory conversation, and undertake that they will no longer engage in 'illegal activities.' In some cases, the authorities have checked mobile phones and gained access to contact lists." The report noted that interrogations were "held in a respectful manner, although in some cases the officers have been aggressive." A local representative mentioned that in October, Ministry of National Security officers detained a Jehovah's Witness, questioned him for hours, and later released him, but did not return his passport.”
- “According to the Jehovah's Witnesses 2023 report, "Since September 2022, no criminal cases have been initiated against draft-age Jehovah's Witnesses for conscientious objection to military service. No Witnesses are currently detained. However, on several occasions, law enforcement officers interviewed draft-age Witnesses and pressured them to renounce their personal religious convictions.”

According to [USCIRF 2024 Turkmenistan Chapter](#):

- “Muslim prisoners of conscience remained jailed under unsubstantiated national security pretenses for engaging in peaceful religious activities. USCIRF has identified at least nine prisoners - though this number is suspected to be greater - serving between 12 and 15 years in prison for a range of reasons connected to the exercise of their freedom of religion or belief. Concerns remained about the wellbeing of such prisoners given the notoriously inhumane living conditions of prisons in Turkmenistan, especially Ovadan-Depe Prison, where allegations of torture, medical neglect, and enforced disappearance persisted.”
- “The government has still not allowed Jehovah's Witnesses to register, nor has it provided an alternative civilian service for conscientious objectors. While authorities in the past have imprisoned Jehovah's Witnesses for refusing to serve in the military, no Jehovah's Witnesses were imprisoned in 2023. However, Jehovah's Witnesses reported nearly a dozen instances in which police briefly detained, questioned, or ordered Jehovah's Witnesses not to share their beliefs with others.”

Further information

- “Five Sunni Muslims jailed in Balkanabat for 12 years each in August 2017 for meeting to study the works of the theologian Said Nursi were transferred [in 2022] to new labor camps. The strict-regime labor camp at Bayramali in Mary Region, where four of the five are held, also holds another jailed Nursi reader, 47-year-old Begench Dadebayew. At least two among more than 60 men jailed from 2013 for participating in a Sunni Muslim group in Turkmenabat have been freed after completing their jail terms.” (Source: [Forum 18, 28 October 2022](#))

Trends Summary

There have been no major changes in Turkmenistan since the publication of WWL 2024.

1) Politics: No major changes in view

The change of leadership in 2022 (from father Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov to son Serdar Berdymukhammedov) has not brought any major changes to state politics. It is even suspected that behind the screens the father still has a significant influence on the country's government. The authoritarian government has not faced any serious challenges from any form of opposition (including demonstrations of any kind) and it has consistently imposed severe surveillance on almost every aspect of life. Thousands of people are sent to prison or labor camps every year. Turkmenistan has been called the 'North Korea' of Central Asia'. Life for Christians is unlikely to improve in the foreseeable future.

2) Economy: Hard times have arrived

The days when Turkmenistan could rely on steady income from oil and natural gas are over. This has caused much uncertainty for the Turkmen population, especially since they get very little help from the government. The regime has continued to claim that there were never any COVID-19 infections in the country.

Further useful reports

Further background information per country and 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/wwl-background/>
- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

External Links

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: IRFR 2023 Turkmenistan - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/turkmenistan/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: USCIRF 2024 Turkmenistan Chapter - <https://www.uscirf.gov/annual-reports?country=71>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Forum 18, 28 October 2022 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2786
- Trends Summary: suspected - <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Berdymukhamedov-senior-and-his-'elders'-will-hold-the-reins-of-Turkmenistan-58842.html>