
World Watch Research

Ukraine: Persecution Dynamics

January 2025



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

January 2025

© Open Doors International

research@od.org

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
Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period	7
Specific examples of positive developments	8
Christian communities and how they are affected.....	9
Areas where Christians face most difficulties.....	9
Position on the World Watch List	10
Persecution engines.....	10
Drivers of persecution.....	11
The Persecution pattern	12
Pressure in the 5 spheres of life.....	13
Violence	15
5 Year trends.....	17
Gender-specific religious persecution / Female	19
Gender-specific religious persecution / Male.....	20
Persecution of other religious minorities	20
Trends Summary	21
Further useful reports.....	21
External Links	21

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/February).

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

Reporting period

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

Brief country details

Ukraine: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
37,938,000	33,834,000	89.2

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

Ukraine: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	33,834,000	89.2
Muslim	611,000	1.6
Hindu	4,500	0.0
Buddhist	17,200	0.0
Ethnic religionist	9,000	0.0
Jewish	32,500	0.1
Bahai	210	0.0
Atheist	620,000	1.6
Agnostic	2,800,000	7.4
Other	8,342	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



Luhansk and Donetsk provinces are often referred to as the Donbas Region.

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Ukraine: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials, Religious leaders of other churches, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups
Christian denominational protectionism	Government officials, Religious leaders of other churches

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

In the Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has a preferred position and all other denominations are under restrictions. In mainland Ukraine, the dispute between the two rival Orthodox churches has led to tensions: The Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) cut ties with Moscow in May 2022 in protest over Russia's invasion on 24 February 2022 and the government of Ukraine imposed a total ban on the ROC in mainland Ukraine in September 2024.

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

The current war has increased the internal tensions in the Orthodox community. In mainland Ukraine, members of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), which is linked to the Moscow Patriarchate, are regarded as traitors because the leaders of the Moscow Patriarchate openly support the Russian invasion. This had led to violence, damage to churches and confiscation of properties. In Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine exactly the opposite has occurred: Here members of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) have been attacked, and properties damaged, closed or confiscated.

The list of incidents below is divided into two sections: One section lists a selection of incidents that occurred in Ukraine-controlled territory; the other section lists a selection of incidents that occurred in Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine where Russian troops were responsible for the violence.

Ukraine

- November 2023:** 45-year-old Seventh-day Adventist Dmytro Zelinsky is serving his 3-year jail term for refusing mobilization on grounds of conscience, and is due to arrive soon in a Kolomyia prison. On 28 August, Ternopil Appeal Court acceded to Prosecutor Roman Harmatiuk's request to overturn his June acquittal. (Source: [Forum 18, 1 November 2023](#))
- January 2024:** The rector of a church in the Vinnytsia diocese of the Moscow Patriarchate was sentenced to two years in prison, the press service of Ukraine's SBU security service reported on 30 January 2024. The priest called Russia's armed aggression a "civil war" in Ukraine and praised "DPR" terrorists Alexander Zakharchenko, Givi, and Motorola. (Source: [The New Voice of Ukraine, 30 January 2024](#))
- February 2024:** The abbot of the Dnipropetrovsk Diocese of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP), who supported Russia's invasion of Ukraine, has been sentenced to 5 years in prison. (Source: [Yahoo News, 13 February 2024](#))

Russian-occupied areas in Ukraine

- **October 2023:** On 8 October 2023, armed and masked men in military uniform raided the Sunday meeting for worship of the Council of Churches Baptist congregation in Melitopol, which has close ties with the Rainivka congregation. Officials later interrogated Pastor Dmitry Malakhov. (Source: [Forum 18, 24 October 2023](#))
- **November 2023:** Anatoly Prokopchuk, a Pentecostal deacon, and his 19-year-old son son Aleksandr, were kidnapped, mutilated, and shot in Kherson in November 2023. (Source: [Christian Today: 25 March 2024](#))
- **February 2024:** Unknown men from the Russian occupation forces seized 59-year-old Fr Stepan Podolchak of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine on 13 February 2024 in the Ukrainian village of Kalanchak in the Russian-occupied part of Kherson Region. They took him away barefoot with a bag over his head, insisting he needed to come for questioning. His bruised corpse - possibly with a bullet-wound to the head - was found on the street in the village on 15 February and taken to the morgue. (Source: [Forum 18, 20 February 2024](#))
- **March 2024:** Russian occupation forces in Ukraine continue to crack down on Catholics, with one militant group sealing off Ukrainian Greek Catholic churches in Ukraine's Donetsk region. The Kyiv-based Institute for Religious Freedom reported on 23 March 2024 that since the beginning of the year, Russian militants calling themselves "Cossacks" had seized UGCC churches and adjacent property, barring believers of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church from entering the churches for prayer and worship". (Source: [UCAN, 28 March 2024](#))
- **June 2024:** After a year in Russian detention, the "espionage" criminal trial of Ukrainian Orthodox priest Kostiantyn Maksimov closed at the Russian-controlled Crimean Supreme Court in Simferopol on 2 August 2024. Zaporizhzhia Regional Court jailed 41-year-old Maksimov in a strict regime labour camp for 14 years on "espionage" charges. (Source: [ECOI, accessed 23 September 2024](#)) A Protestant in her fifties also faces criminal trial in occupied Zaporizhzhia Region. Eighteen months after Russian occupiers abducted two Greek Catholic priests - Ivan Levytsky and Bohdan Heleta - they appear to be interned in a labor camp in Horlivka. (Source: [Forum 18, 4 June 2024](#))
- **2 August 2024:** At a hearing at the Russian-controlled Crimean Supreme Court in Simferopol on 2 August 2024, Zaporizhzhia Regional Court sentenced 41-year-old Ukrainian Orthodox priest Kostiantyn Maksimov to 14 years hard labor in a prison labor camp on charges of "espionage". (Source: [Forum 18, 5 August 2024](#))

Specific examples of positive developments

- **June 2024:** Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) announced the release of two Ukrainian Greek Catholic priests who had been captured in November 2022 by the Russian National Guard. The freed priests had been accused of having committed "subversive" and "guerrilla" activities. (Source: [Catholic News Agency, 1 July 2024](#))

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: There are no communities of expatriate Christians in Ukraine to be considered for WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities: This category consists mainly of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), which is linked to the Moscow Patriarchate, the autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), and the Roman Catholic Church. There are also several denominations of Old Believers churches, and Catholics in Ukraine belonging to two main denominations: Ukrainian Greek Catholic church and Roman Catholic Church. In Russian-controlled areas, only the UOC MP is recognized and the rest are restricted. In mainland Ukraine the growing polarization inside the Orthodox community has resulted in several incidents where churches and monasteries have been damaged and Christians beaten.

Converts: This category consists of 'denominational converts' from Orthodoxy to Protestantism. They experience pressure from society and the UOC. These Christians are also actively persecuted in Russian-controlled areas.

Non-traditional Christian communities: There are many non-traditional denominations in Ukraine: Baptists, Pentecostals, Charismatics and Adventists. In Mainland Ukraine these denominations can mostly function without any serious problems. But in the Donbas and other Russian-controlled areas these church communities are strongly persecuted. In Luhansk province all unregistered religious organizations are banned from holding worship. Since 2019, all Baptist publications have been banned in this province as well. Since the start of the war in February 2022, Pentecostals, Baptists, Adventists and Charismatics, etc. have all been particularly affected. Russian soldiers are known to regard non-traditional church groups as 'American spies', 'sectarians' and 'enemies of the Russian Orthodox people'.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

On 23 September 2024 a law became active which banned all activities of the Russian Orthodox Church in mainland Ukraine as well as those of Ukrainian religious organizations affiliated with the ROC. But well before this law was introduced, there had been growing division within the Orthodox community. This became particularly evident in 2018 when Constantinople Patriarch Bartholomew gave official recognition to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU). In mainland Ukraine, most Orthodox Christians are part of the OCU and consider Orthodox believers who wish to remain loyal to the Moscow Patriarchate as traitors.

The situation is also problematic in the Russian occupied areas of Ukraine. Here all denominations except the ROC Moscow Patriarchate are under close surveillance.

Position on the World Watch List

Ukraine: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2025	53	69
WWL 2024	44	77
WWL 2023	37	-
WWL 2022	37	-
WWL 2021	34	-

Ukraine scored 53 points in WWL 2025, nine points higher than in WWL 2024. The main reason for the higher score of Ukraine was the rise in the violence score from 2.8 points in WWL 2024 to 7.2 points in WWL 2025. The scores in *Private and Church spheres of life* also increased markedly, while those in *Family and National spheres of life* went up slightly. The highest score is at an extreme level in the *Church sphere of life*: 14.2 points; all other spheres of life scored very high. In mainland Ukraine the main religious issue has been the growing division inside the Orthodox community which led to several incidents. This escalated with the total banning of the ROC in mainland Ukraine as of 23 September 2024. But religious persecution in Ukraine is also to be found in the Russian-controlled areas where local authorities are increasingly restricting non-Russian Orthodox Christian church activities.

Persecution engines

Ukraine: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Not at all
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Not at all
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Strong
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)

In the Russian-controlled areas of eastern Ukraine the local regimes are increasingly restricting non-Russian Orthodox churches. In September 2024 the Ukrainian government took a serious step in imposing restrictions on religious freedom by banning the Russian Orthodox Church.

Christian denominational protectionism (Strong)

Since the 2018 recognition of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) by the Constantinople Patriarch Bartholomew, the Orthodox community in Ukraine has been deeply divided. In mainland Ukraine, most Orthodox Christians are part of the OCU and consider Orthodox believers who side with the Moscow Patriarchate as traitors. Exactly the opposite is occurring in Russian-controlled Ukraine where the influence of the ROC is growing and repression of other denominations (not only the OCU) is increasing also with the support of ROC-leaders.

Drivers of persecution

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

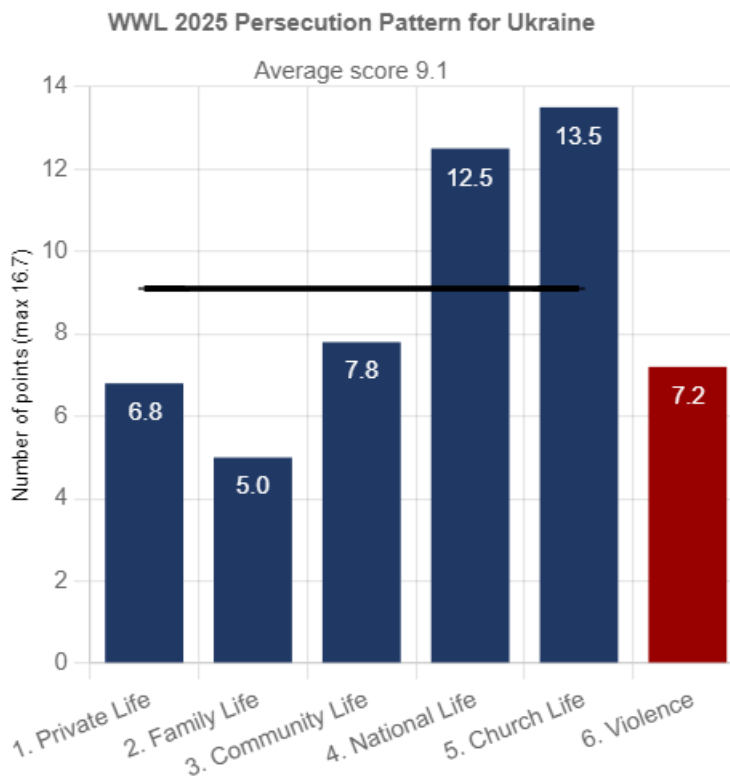
Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Strong):** The authorities in the Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine have imposed many restrictions (comparable to the restrictions employed in Russia).
- **Christian religious leaders (Strong):** In the Russian-controlled areas, ROC leaders will tend to support Russia.
- **Revolutionaries (Medium):** Rebels cooperate with the Russian forces. Non-ROC Christians are targeted.

Drivers of Christian denominational protectionism

- **Government officials (Strong):** Government officials in the Russian-controlled areas will always side with the ROC.
- **Christian religious leaders (Strong):** ROC leaders will be strongly supportive of Russia, while the Ukrainian Orthodox will be loyal to Ukraine. Both groups do not tolerate each other.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2025 Persecution pattern for Ukraine shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a high level (9.1 points). Oppression of non-Russian Orthodox Christians in Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine is present at all levels of society, ranging from the personal level all the way up to the national and church levels. Since 23 September 2024, the ROC in mainland Ukraine has been banned.
- While all other spheres of life show low or fairly high levels of pressure, pressure is very high in the *Church and National spheres* of life. Non-Russian Orthodox churches in the Russian-controlled

areas are experiencing increasing restrictions and local governments there are becoming increasingly intolerant towards them. And as stated earlier, the Ukrainian government has even banned the Russian Orthodox Church.

- The score for faith-related violence jumped from 2.8 points in WWL 2024 to 7.2 in WWL 2025.

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://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>.

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.00 points): In the Russian-controlled areas speaking about any form of faith other than ROC-Moscow Patriarchate faith is interpreted as 'extremist activity'.

Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable. (2.75 points): This goes for the people who convert away from Orthodoxy. It is much more problematic in Russian-controlled areas than in mainland Ukraine.

Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (2.75 points): It can be dangerous in the Russian-controlled areas in Ukraine as the authorities approve and support only one church (ROC-Moscow Patriarchate). All other Christians run the risk of their houses being searched and books confiscated. In the rest of Ukraine this is no problem.

Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (2.75 points): In the Russian-controlled areas meeting with other non-ROC MP and unregistered believers could have serious consequences. Also, in mainland Ukraine, the ROC has been banned since September 2024.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (3.00 points): In the Russian-controlled areas, non-ROC MP baptism ceremonies are prohibited.

Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.00 points): In the Russian-controlled areas raising children as non-ROC MP is risky.

Block 2.3: Christians have been hindered in celebrating a Christian wedding for faith-related reasons. (2.50 points): There are big problems in celebrating Protestant weddings in the Russian-controlled areas.

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (2.50 points): In the Russian-controlled areas children from Protestant and Catholic families are pressured into attending lessons in Orthodox Ethics or Basics of Orthodox Culture.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.13: Christians have been interrogated or compelled to report to the local vigilante/police for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points): In mainland Ukraine the ROC-MP is under very strict control. In the Russian-controlled areas all religious denominations with exception of ROC-MP face interrogations.

Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points): Protestants can occasionally experience pressure and hostility from Orthodox believers. This is evident in mainland Ukraine, but is particularly problematic in the Russian-controlled areas.

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.). (3.00 points): In mainland Ukraine the ROC-MP is under very strict control. In the Russian-controlled areas all non-ROC MP Christians - especially Protestants - are considered undesirable (political) elements.

Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.00 points): There is pressure in the Russian-controlled areas on non-ROC MP Christians, and on Ukrainian Orthodox Christians to join the Moscow Patriarchate Orthodox Church again.

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): In mainland Ukraine the Russian Orthodox Church has been banned since 23 September 2024; there are other forms of restrictions in the Russian-controlled areas.

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. (3.75 points): The law allows alternative nonmilitary service for conscientious objectors. The law also allows government officials to deny a conscript's application for alternative service due to missing the application deadline. The law does not exempt the clergy from military mobilization. The law allows no exemption from military reserve service during the "special period" (i.e., while hostilities with Russia's forces continue), even for conscientious objectors. (Source: US State Department [IRFR 2023 Ukraine](#)). Military service is obligatory in the Russian-controlled areas.

Block 4.11: Christians been subject to smear campaigns or hate speech. (3.75 points): In mainland Ukraine ROC-MP are portrayed as traitors, while in the Russian-controlled areas all non-ROC MP Christians - especially Baptists and Evangelicals - are subjected to smear complains or hate speech.

Block 4.13: Christians have been accused of blasphemy or insulting the majority religion, either by state authorities or by pressure groups. (3.50 points): In the Russian-controlled areas, not making the sign of the cross in the Russian Orthodox style is considered as an insult. Orthodox icons are almost everywhere, in public buildings, in the offices of local authorities etc. Entering a room with Orthodox icons and not making the sign of the cross is considered as insult, which is a problem for Protestant

Christians since icons are not used in their tradition. In addition, in the last several years Russian Orthodox church has introduced various politically inspired icons: e.g., the last Russian emperor and some non-official icons that resemble Putin or some deceased separatists leaders. Protestants cannot recognize these icons, but they are widely accepted in the popular Russian Orthodoxy. In mainland Ukraine, the ROC-MP is banned and seen as a threat to the country.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (3.75 points): Activity of all non-ROC MP Christians is monitored, hindered, disturbed, and obstructed in the Russian-controlled areas. Since September 2024 the Russian Orthodox Church has been banned in mainland Ukraine.

Block 5.2: It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government. (3.75 points): In the Russian-controlled areas it is not possible to register a religious organization other than the ROC-Moscow Patriarchate. Since September 2024 the ROC has been banned in mainland Ukraine.

Block 5.4: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities inside their place of worship. (3.75 points): In mainland Ukraine, the ROC-MP has been banned and cannot meet. In the Russian-controlled areas non-ROC MP churches are hindered in organizing any activity, also inside the church building.

Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (3.75 points): In mainland Ukraine the ROC-MP has been banned. All their activities are no longer permitted. In the Russian-controlled areas, Protestant, Catholics and Orthodox Church of Ukraine are not permitted to organize any outside religious activities. Doing so, could involve direct physical threats.

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 rea-*

- sons (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.

Ukraine: 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?	47	3
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	5	3
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?	2	1
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	3	5
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)?	2	0
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

(table continues below)

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

For the WWL 2025 reporting period:

- **Churches and religious properties attacked/closed:** At least 47 Christian churches/properties were damaged/confiscated/destroyed. This number will be much higher in reality as in mainland Ukraine all ROC churches were forced to close.
- **Christians detained:** At least 5 Christians were detained for faith-related reasons.
- **Christians sentenced:** Sources reported that 2 Christians were given prison sentences.
- **Christians kidnapped:** At least 3 Christians are known to have been kidnapped.
- **Christians physically attacked:** Sources reported that at least 2 Christians were attacked.
- **Christians forced to leave the country:** 1 case was reported in which Russian occupation forces expelled a Ukrainian Greek Catholic priest from Melitopol to Ukrainian government-held territory.

5 Year trends

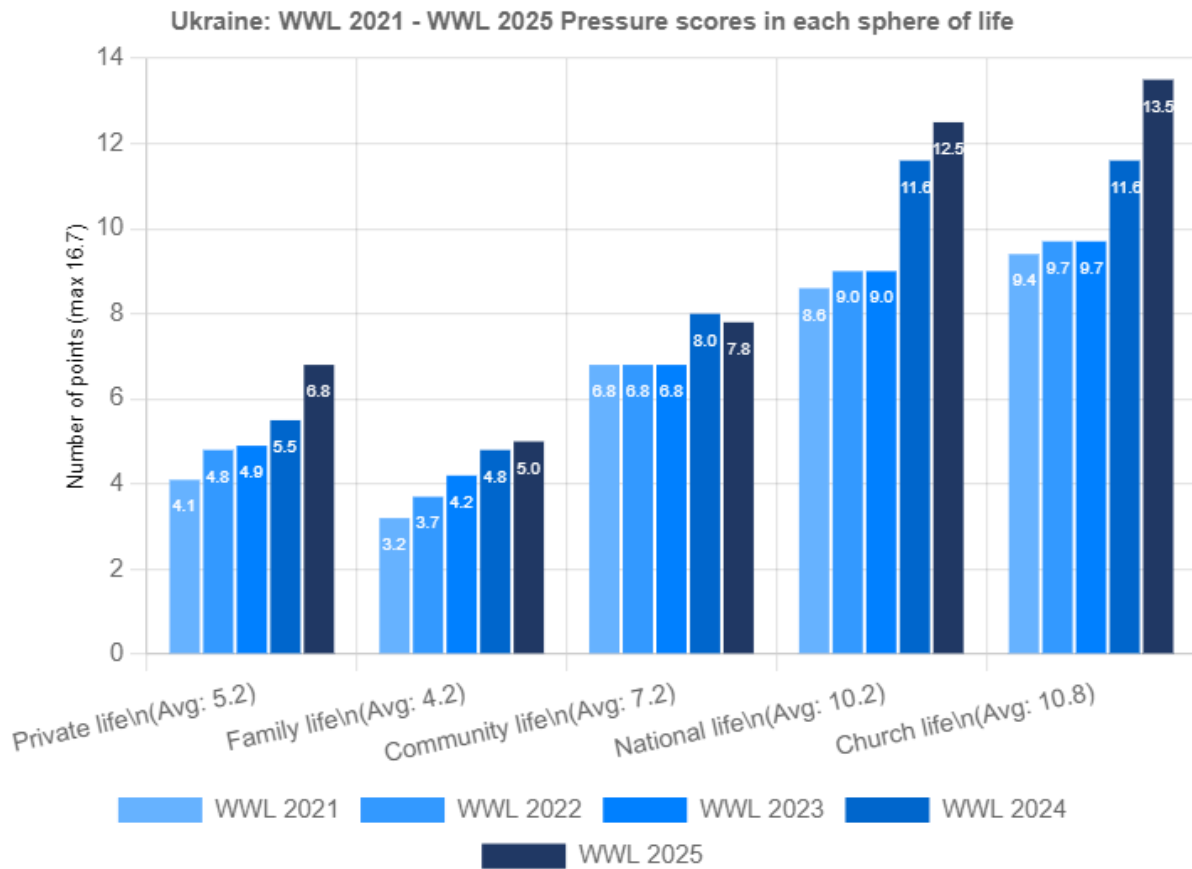
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

Ukraine: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2025	9.1
2024	8.3
2023	6.9
2022	6.8
2021	6.4

As can be seen in the table above, the level of average pressure on Christians has increased in each WWL reporting period, especially since the Russian invasion began in February 2022. WWL 2025 marks the highest ever level of average pressure (9.1 points).

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



Over the past five years there has been a trend of rising pressure in virtually all spheres of life. The situation for Christians is most precarious in the *National and Church spheres of life*. The restrictions on Christians in the Russian-controlled areas have increased – and the expectations for the future are not bright. And in mainland Ukraine the ROC has been banned since 23 September 2024.

- Pressure in *National sphere of life* has increased to a very high level (12.5 points in WWL 2025) having been significantly lower until WWL 2024. The very high score mainly reflects the growing pressure exerted by local authorities in the Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine on non-ROC churches, and on ROC churches in mainland Ukraine.
- Pressure in *Church sphere of life* had always been the highest of all 5 spheres of life until WWL 2024 when it was caught up by the level of pressure in the *National sphere of life*. But in WWL 2025 it went to the top again due to a score of 13.5 points. This very high score is an indication of the growing pressure exerted by local authorities in the Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine and the increasing influence of the ROC; the score also reflects the pressure caused by the ban of the ROC in mainland Ukraine.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The growing division between the two Orthodox communities in Ukraine and the Russian-controlled areas has resulted in a sharp rise in the number of violent incidents in WWL 2025. The authorities in the Russian-controlled areas are also responsible for more and more restrictions being imposed on non-ROC church groups. The government of Ukraine imposed a total ban on the ROC in mainland Ukraine. These scores do not include war-related damage. The Russian-Ukraine war is not primarily religious (Russia's basic aim is to restore its former empire), but religion does play a role in the background. Russia claims it is trying to restore Christian values, but most Christians would agree that war is not the right method to achieve this.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

While no gender-specific forms of religious persecution were found for Christian women in Ukraine in recent reporting periods, there are broader gender dynamics at play for women in the country.

Throughout 2023, it was reported that Russian and Russian-affiliated forces committed numerous grave abuses against civilians in occupied parts of Zaporizka, Khersonska, Donetska, and Luhanska regions. They carried out enforced disappearances, summary executions of civilians, and unlawful detention and torture, especially targeting those presumed to oppose the occupation. There were also widespread reports of sexual violence throughout that period. In an [OHCHR Press Release](#) published on 25 September 2023, the UN reported that Russian soldiers had been raping Ukrainian women. At this time, Ukrainian authorities documented 231 cases of conflict-related sexual violence perpetrated by Russian forces in occupied areas of Ukraine and in Russian detention facilities ([HRW 2024, Ukraine country chapter](#)). The true figures are likely much higher, as stigma, shame and fear of reprisals prevent

survivors from seeking help. In addition, survivors have faced significant challenges in accessing medical, psychosocial and legal assistance.

Furthermore, in August 2023, data from the Ukrainian National Police revealed that during the first five months of 2023, registered cases of domestic violence increased by 51% compared to the same period the previous year ([Gwara Media, 5 August 2023](#)). Experts say that the increase in domestic violence is a byproduct of war, and they fear that numbers will continue to climb as the war continues. Stress, economic hardship, unemployment, and conflict-related trauma are fueling this increase, and the vast majority of victims of GBV are women ([Divoche Media, 4 August 2023](#)).

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Men and boys are particularly subject to torture, beatings, imprisonment and killings in Russian-controlled areas. Church leaders are mainly men and face higher risks. A country expert states that church leaders, who are mostly male, "... are often interrogated, jailed, expelled, and fined in occupied territories". In Luhansk and Donetsk, Protestant church leaders and their family members have been monitored and threatened. The psychological and verbal violence that Christian men are facing is a direct result of Russian occupation.

Persecution of other religious minorities

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

- "A 2021 law defines antisemitism and reaffirms punishment for crimes motivated by antisemitism. The law also reaffirms punishment for making false or stereotypical statements about persons of Jewish origin, producing or disseminating materials containing antisemitic statements or content, and denying the facts of the persecution and mass killing of Jews during the Holocaust. Individuals violating the law are subject to civil, administrative, and criminal liability. Victims may also receive compensation for "material and moral damages." A bill the parliament adopted in 2022, but that has yet to be signed into law, would increase penalties for incitement to antisemitic acts, with prison sentences of five to eight years."
- "Some Jewish leaders and human rights activists continued to state concerns regarding what they considered impunity for hate crimes, including acts of antisemitism, and regarding the government's long delays in completing investigations of these crimes. Some Jewish leaders said law enforcement authorities at times charged those committing antisemitic acts, if apprehended, with hooliganism or vandalism instead of a hate crime in what they assessed was an attempt to downplay the criminal behavior. Human rights and religious activists continued to express concern over the lack of proper punishment for hate crimes and stated that police and prosecutors at times avoided using the charge since it was difficult to prove."
- "Jehovah's Witnesses continued to report unpunished assaults by private individuals on their followers, and they called on the government to ensure effective investigation of hate crimes committed against their members and places of worship. Jehovah's Witnesses also continued to call on the government to exempt conscientious objectors from military service during mobilization and martial law. Authorities arrested and prosecuted some Jehovah's Witnesses and Protestant conscientious objectors for draft refusal, although in most cases, courts suspended sentences."

There have been no further incidents reported about other religious minorities in either Ukraine or the Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine. However, it is good to remember that, like all citizens, those belonging to any religious minority will be suffering from the war that has been raging since February 2022.

Trends Summary

1) The war in Ukraine looks set to continue in 2025

Since Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022 the war has been going on unabated. Neither of the two sides is willing to compromise and a negotiated peace deal is not likely in early 2025 ([Reuters, 15 January 2025](#)). Meanwhile, no changes are to be expected in the governments of Ukraine and the Russian-controlled areas. This also means the position of the Orthodox community will remain divided.

2) Christians will continue to experience restrictions in the Russian-controlled areas

After annexing the Crimea in 2014, Russia imposed the same restrictions on religious freedom there as it did in Russia itself. In the Donbas region in eastern Ukraine similar restrictions have been imposed, and it can be expected that the same will happen in other areas occupied by Russian forces. It would appear that Russia is intent on annexing more and more areas of Ukraine, thus negatively affecting an increasing number of non-ROC Christians.

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

- Copyright, sources and definitions: Background country information - <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/>
- Copyright, sources and definitions: Persecution Dynamics - <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/country-dossiers/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Forum 18, 1 November 2023 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2871
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: The New Voice of Ukraine, 30 January 2024 - <https://www.yahoo.com/news/moscow-patriarchate-church-priest-jailed-142500931.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Yahoo News, 13 February 2024 - <https://www.yahoo.com/news/archpriest-moscow-linked-church-sentenced-111603510.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Forum 18, 24 October 2023 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2869
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Christian Today: 25 March 2024 - <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/christian.leaders.killed.tortured.and.disappeared.in.occupied.ukraine/141547.htm>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Forum 18, 20 February 2024 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2893
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: UCAN, 28 March 2024 - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/russian-forces-close-more-catholic-churches-in-ukraine/104598>

- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: ECOI, accessed 23 September 2024 - <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2114414.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Forum 18, 4 June 2024 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2912
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Forum 18, 5 August 2024 - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2924
- Specific examples of positive developments: Catholic News Agency, 1 July 2024 - <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/258162/russian-forces-release-two-ukrainian-catholic-priests-captured-in-2022>
- Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere: IRFR 2023 Ukraine - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/ukraine/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: OHCHR Press Release - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/09/un-commission-inquiry-ukraine-finds-continued-systematic-and-widespread-use>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: (HRW 2024, Ukraine country chapter) - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/ukraine#:~:text=The%20human%20rights%20impacts%20of,invasion%20began%20in%20February%202022.>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: (Gwara Media, 5 August 2023) - <https://gwaramedia.com/czogorich-zrosla-kilkist-vypadkiv-domashnogo-nasilstva-v-ukraini/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: (Divoche Media, 4 August 2023). - <https://divoche.media/2023/08/04/v-ukraini-cherez-viynu-rizko-zbilshyvsia-riven-domashnoho-nasylstva-eksperty-poboiiuitsia-shcho-kilkist-vypadkiv-lyshe-zrostatyme/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: IRFR 2023 Ukraine - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/ukraine/>
- Trends Summary: Reuters, 15 January 2025 - <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/trump-advisers-concede-ukraine-peace-deal-is-months-away-2025-01-15/>