

Statement of Political Movement "Group-24"

Freedom of Religion

There is no freedom of religion in Tajikistan. Since 2016, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has classified Tajikistan as a “country of particular concern” under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The latest report from the USCIRF notes that the government “continues to suppress displays of public religiosity as well as persecute minority communities.” Although 98 per cent of the population professes to be Muslim, according to the State Department, the government attempts to “maintain total control of Muslim activity” in the country.

While the state sponsors its own form of Islam, it has cracked down on believers whose practices are not under its direct control, labelling them “extremists.” A 2009 Law on Religion places restrictions on the registration of religious organizations, opening of mosques and access to religious education. The law restricts Islamic prayer to four locations including mosques, cemeteries, the home and shrines. Using the law, for example, the State Committee for Religious Affairs closed 1,938 mosques in 2017. The 2011 Law on Parental Responsibility bans under 18s from praying in mosques with the exception of funerals. Women have been banned at praying at mosques since 2004. The government has also led an informal campaign to prevent men from wearing beards and women from wearing hijabs, framing both as foreign. Many have reported being stopped by police and forced to shave or remove their headscarf in the name of counter-extremism. In January 2017, officials in Khatlon claimed to have “encouraged” 13,000 men with beards to shave, to have closed 160 shops selling hijabs, and to have convinced 1,773 women to stop wearing the hijab. 13 Over 8,000 women in hijabs were stopped in early August 2018 in the capital city Dushanbe and told to remove their headscarves.