



# Russia

Bible Restrictions Rank: **67**  
**MINIMAL ACCESS RESTRICTIONS**

**Bible shortage has been confirmed**



## An Overview of Bible Access in Russia

Russia's Christian population makes up over 83% of its nearly 144 million citizens—an estimated 120 million people. The vast majority of these believers are affiliated with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), which enjoys favored status in both society and government. By reported estimates, just over 60% of Christians across the country have access to a Bible. While this is higher than in many countries, it still leaves tens of millions of believers, many in rural or marginalized communities, without regular access to God's Word.

Legally, there are minimal restrictions on Bible ownership or distribution within Russia. However, this freedom applies almost exclusively to ROC members. For Christians outside of the Orthodox fold—especially Protestants, Catholics, or those affiliated with unregistered churches—significant barriers remain. These include bureaucratic hurdles, government surveillance, and restrictions under Russia's anti-missionary Yarovaya laws, which have made it increasingly difficult for non-Orthodox churches to distribute or even possess religious materials openly.

Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine has only intensified state surveillance and restrictions, particularly targeting churches or leaders who express dissent, further limiting safe spaces for Bible sharing and distribution. The situation becomes more precarious in Muslim-majority regions, where an estimated 5.8 million Christians live among 8 million Muslims. In these areas, owning or distributing Bibles is not only culturally dangerous but can be life-threatening, especially for Christians who have a Muslim background. These believers often must keep their faith entirely secret, as family and local community pressure can result in harassment, forced isolation, or even violence.

Economic barriers also play a role. Though Russia is a developed country in many respects, poverty persists, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas. Additionally, while electricity reaches the majority of the population, Russia's immense geographic size and regional disparities leave many without reliable access to the internet. This further limits options for accessing digital or audio Scripture.

Before we continue, would you take a pause to pray for Russia?

### How can I pray for Russia?

- **Protection and End of War.** Pray that the war with Ukraine would end. Pray also for Muslim background believers or MBBs in Muslim-majority regions who face persecution from family and community. Ask God to protect them and that they would find safe ways to access Scripture.
- **Access for the Marginalized.** Pray that Bibles would reach non-Orthodox believers, rural congregations, and those restricted by poverty or government oversight.
- **Freedom and Unity.** Pray for spiritual unity among believers and that Russia's restrictive policies would loosen, making it easier for all Christians to access and share the Word of God.

*After praying for Russia, continue reading on the next page to learn more.*

### Bible Access Restrictions

#### Minimal Access Restrictions

- Import restrictions for part of population
- Print restrictions for part of population
- Storage restrictions for part of population
- Ownership restrictions for part of population
- Distribution restrictions for part of population

### Other Limiting Factors

#### Some Other Factors

- Poor infrastructure

### Bible Shortages Among Believers

- Bibles are needed for believers and seekers

**Main religion:** Christianity

**Country population:** 143,957,000

**Christian population:**

120,215,000, 83.51% of total population

**World Watch List: #56**

# WHAT'S BLOCKING BIBLE ACCESS IN RUSSIA?

## Legal Restrictions and Government Surveillance

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Although the Russian Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, in practice, legislation has become increasingly restrictive, especially for non-Orthodox Christian groups. Since the introduction of the Yarovaya Law in 2016, religious activity outside officially registered church buildings has been severely curtailed.

Christians, particularly Protestants, have been fined for holding house meetings, possessing Christian literature without state-approved labeling, or engaging in what authorities deem "illegal missionary activity," including social media posts. Many church leaders have been interrogated, monitored, or fined, and churches without proper registration face legal consequences.

## Pressure from the Russian Orthodox Church

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The Russian Orthodox Church enjoys a privileged status and is seen as the guardian of Russian national identity. Protestant and Catholic groups are often viewed as foreign or Western threats. Outreach by these groups is regarded with suspicion, and the ROC frequently accuses them of "sheep-stealing."

This dynamic creates significant social resistance to Bible distribution and evangelism outside the ROC framework.

## Real Dangers to Bible Access in Muslim-Majority Regions

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In regions like Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Tatarstan, where Islam is dominant, Christians, especially MBBs, face extreme opposition. Owning a Bible in these areas can be life-threatening. MBBs are often forced to keep their faith secret, as possession of Christian materials can be seen as clear evidence of conversion and result in expulsion, violence, or even execution by community or family members. Christian activity is under constant surveillance by local authorities and communities.

## Fear, Fines, and Digital Limitations

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Christians who express their beliefs online face additional risks. The state monitors digital activity, and social media posts related to faith can result in legal action or fines. Many non-Orthodox believers, especially in high-surveillance regions, refrain from accessing Christian content online out of fear.

## The War in Ukraine and Increased Crackdowns

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Since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, religious restrictions have tightened. Churches and individuals who oppose the war, even from a faith-based perspective, have been subject to fines, arrest, and surveillance. State pressure has intensified across all Christian denominations not aligned with the Russian Orthodox Church.

In addition, the war has triggered increased censorship, heightened suspicion of foreign religious influence, and expanded the use of laws that restrict missionary activity and label religious groups as extremist or “foreign agents.” This overall climate of control and intimidation has made Bible distribution efforts significantly more difficult.

## Unmasking the Forces That Restrict Bible Access in Russia

Russia	Islamic Oppression	Religious Nationalism	Ethno-religious hostility	Clan oppression	Christian denominational oppression	Communist and post-Communist oppression	Secular intolerance	Dictatorial paranoia	Organized corruption and crime	Reference
<b>Persecution Engines →</b>										<p><b>Reference</b></p> <p>The more fully shaded the circle in orange, the stronger the level of persecution. The number of “+” signs indicates the frequency or intensity of the driving factors behind it.</p>
<b>Persecution Drivers ↓</b>	Strong	Not at all	Weak	Strong	Strong	Not at all	Not at all	Very strong	Not at all	
Government officials	++			++	++			+++++		
Ethnic group leaders	++++		++	++++						
Non-Christian religious leaders	++++			++++						
Christian religious leaders					+++					
Violent religious groups	++									
Normal citizens	+++		+	+++	+++			+++		
Extended family	++++		++	++++	++++					
Political parties					+++			+++		
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups										
Organized crime										
Multilateral org. & Embassies										

In Russia, multiple forces of persecution work simultaneously to restrict Bible access, including **dictatorial paranoia**, **Islamic oppression blended with clan oppression**, and **Christian denominational protectionism**. These are fueled by government officials, Muslim religious leaders, ethnic group leaders, and even ordinary citizens, including extended family and local political actors.

The World Watch List by Open Doors sheds light on the broader context of persecution of Christians. But now we have to ask the question: How does this affect Bible access? Furthermore, where can we pinpoint the problem so we can address the need and demand for Bibles in Russia?

## A CLOSER LOOK AT PERSECUTION ENGINES

A persecution engine is simply this: the source of persecution in the country. A persecution driver (or actor) is the one “driving” the persecution. Taking a closer look at these engines and drivers, in proper context, will give us insight on how we can solve the problems of Bible access in the country.



### War, Surveillance, and the Criminalization of Faith

Dictatorial paranoia is the most powerful engine restricting Bible access across Russia. Since the start of the Ukraine invasion in February 2022, the Russian state has significantly intensified surveillance and restrictions on religious communities, especially those outside the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). The war has been framed by Patriarch Kirill as a “holy” endeavor, creating ideological pressure on churches to support government narratives, or face consequences.

Legislation like the 2016 Yarovaya Law has long criminalized many forms of religious activity outside officially registered buildings, but under the wartime context, its enforcement has become far more aggressive. Any expression of dissent—religious or otherwise—is met with harsh penalties. Non-Orthodox churches engaging in Bible distribution, home groups, or online evangelism risk fines, raids, and interrogation. Christian leaders opposing the war—such as Archbishop Viktor Pivovarov—have faced lawsuits to demolish their churches.

Meanwhile, Christian websites and media have been increasingly censored, especially if they contain anti-war sentiments. Imported Bibles are difficult to obtain due to “foreign agent” laws, and churches with connections to international partners face even greater scrutiny and disruption. State surveillance by the FSB monitors digital communications, religious gatherings, and printed materials, further chilling Bible-related activity. In some cases, simply possessing Christian materials that are unregistered with the state can lead to prosecution.



### **Islamic Oppression and Clan Control: Converts Under Siege in Muslim Regions**

In Russia’s North Caucasus region and parts of the mid-Volga, Islamic oppression, blended with clan-based control, presents an existential threat to Christians from a Muslim background. Here, conversion to Christianity is seen not just as religious betrayal but as ethnic treason. The war in Ukraine has only worsened tensions, as Christians are increasingly viewed as aligned with “Russian occupiers” or Western ideologies.



Muslim background believers or MBBs in regions such as Dagestan, Chechnya, and Ingushetia must live in secrecy, as owning a Bible or accessing Scripture online can expose them to violent retaliation. Family members and local imams enforce strict social control, sometimes forcing believers into “re-education,” marriage, or exile. In the June 2024 attacks in Derbent and Makhachkala, Islamic militants murdered a priest during Pentecost and carried out coordinated violence against churches and synagogues—a stark reminder that religious extremism continues to endanger Bible access in these regions.

Accessing Christian materials, especially in native languages, is extremely dangerous. MBBs caught listening to audio Bibles, downloading Scripture, or participating in online fellowships risk being reported to authorities or attacked by their community. The growing presence of radical Islam and pressure from clan leaders mean Bibles must be hidden, and fellowship is often limited to whispered prayers in secret.



### **The Orthodox Monopoly on Faith**

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) holds a privileged and culturally dominant position in Russian society. It enjoys legal privileges and public support that no other Christian denomination receives. Under the protection of the Kremlin, the ROC frequently targets other churches, particularly Protestant and Evangelical groups, for “sheep-stealing” and “false teaching.”

Bible access suffers as a result. Outreach and evangelism by non-Orthodox communities are often blocked or undermined. Churches attempting to distribute Bibles or hold public events face social backlash and bureaucratic obstruction. Registration of non-Orthodox churches can take years and often fails if the group is found to have ties to Western organizations, flagged under Russia's "foreign agent" laws.

Since the war began, this protectionism has intensified. Non-Orthodox churches are pressured to conform to patriotic narratives or risk being labeled subversive. Even Catholic and Protestant youth programs have faced increased scrutiny, especially when using imported Scripture or training materials. In some cases, merely holding a Bible study that does not align with ROC-sanctioned doctrine can draw the attention of authorities. Bible access becomes collateral damage in a system where faith is conflated with political loyalty, and any expression of Christianity outside the Orthodox fold is viewed as both foreign and dangerous.

## THE NEED FOR BIBLES IN THE RUSSIA

Against the backdrop of ongoing conflict, growing persecution, and rising national and religious tension, Bible access in Russia remains low. With a Christian population exceeding 120 million, many remain without access to Scripture.

### Slow Growth But With Growing Demand

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Despite state pressure and legal barriers, the Church in Russia continues to grow slowly over the past five years. That means over 2 million new believers now need access to God's Word, not just to strengthen their personal faith, but to help them disciple others in one of the most challenging spiritual landscapes in the modern world.

### Bible Formats for Diverse Needs

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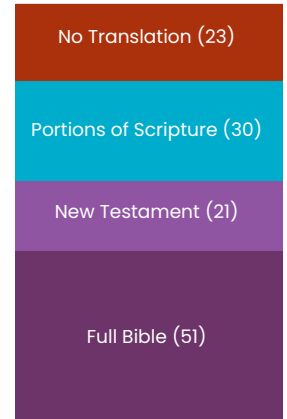
While Russia is highly urbanized and boasts high literacy rates, the vast geography and government censorship make **print Bibles the most reliable** and in-demand format across the country. **Audio Bibles** serve a crucial role among older populations, MBBs in Muslim-majority regions, and those in hiding who cannot openly read physical Scriptures. Accessing **Bibles through the internet** also appears safe for now, even if surveillance and monitoring is present.

# The Translation Gap

When it comes to Scripture translation, the gap is significant. Christians in Russia speak at least 125 different languages. Of these languages:

- Only **51** languages have a full Bible
- **21** have just the New Testament translation
- **30** have partial translations of Scripture
- **Alarmingly, 23 languages still have zero translation work**

For believers in these linguistic groups, the Bible remains inaccessible, not because of persecution alone, but simply because it hasn't yet been translated into their heart language.



Spoken Languages with Believers in Russia

## THE CLARION CALL

The need for Bibles in Russia is not just statistical; it's spiritual. It is a cry rising from deep within the soul of a nation long marked by war, persecution, and discrimination. It's the quiet prayer of a MBB hiding her faith in the Caucasus... the whisper of a pastor under surveillance in Krasnodar... the hunger of a migrant worker searching for hope in Moscow.

This is a moment for the global Church to respond—not with fear, but with bold compassion. To meet this demand, we must act urgently and creatively: prioritizing print, supporting discreet audio and digital strategies, accelerating translation work, and building trusted channels for distribution despite the risks.

The Word of God is not bound. With your prayer and support, we can break through the barriers and ensure that every believer in Russia, no matter their region, background, or language, has access to the life-transforming power of the Bible.

The time is now. Let's answer the call.



0.4%

Annual Church Growth



Bibles needed for both  
**Believers  
& Seekers**



**Printed  
Bible**  
Preferred Format



**Audio &  
Internet Bible**  
Format 2nd Priority