

WORLD WATCH LIST 2024

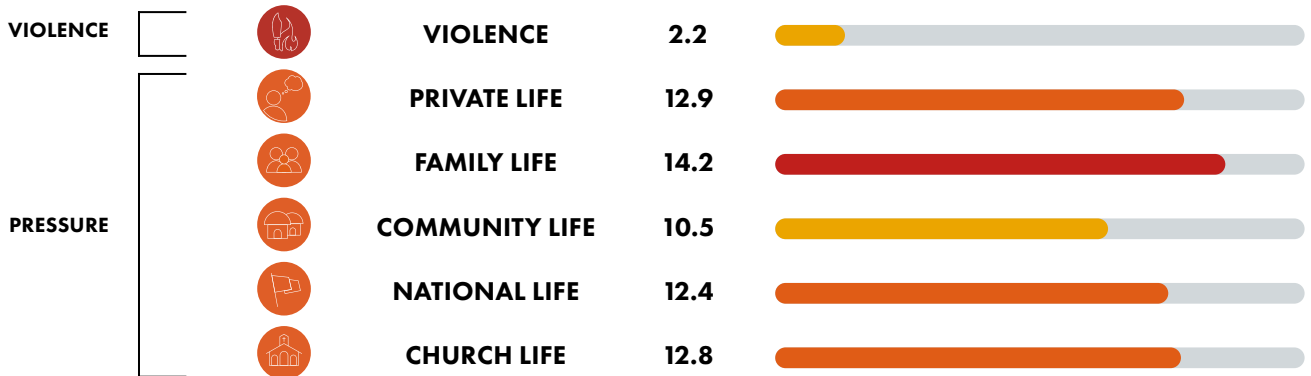
SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

JORDAN

WORLD WATCH LIST NO.
48



LEVELS OF VIOLENCE AND PRESSURE



Each of the six categories is scored out of a maximum of 16.7 points. The categories added together total 100 points (6 x 16.7 = 100).

Key findings

Most Christians belong to the Orthodox or Roman Catholic churches. Overall, they enjoy a relatively high level of religious freedom but experience discrimination in employment, monitoring of activities and restrictions against public preaching. Open testimony of faith by a Christian with a Muslim background can lead to beatings, arrest and killing. Unrecognized churches can face harassment by public authorities, particularly those that actively evangelize. Although Jordan likes to present itself as a beacon of tolerance and interfaith dialogue, radicalized Sunnis and returning jihadists from Syria and Iraq continue to pose a threat to the Christian community. Jordan has a disproportionately high number of Salafi Muslims, who are potentially a danger to Christians and other non-conforming groups living in the country.

Quick facts

LEADER

King Abdullah II

POPULATION

10,312,000

NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

170,000 (OD estimate)

MAIN RELIGION

Islam

GOVERNMENT

Parliamentary Constitutional Monarchy



Context

Religious Context	Number of adherents	Percentage
Christians	170,000	1.6
Muslims	9,807,059	95.1
Agnostics	254,198	2.5
Atheists	51,836	0.5

Source¹

There are two major political forces at play in Jordan: King Abdullah II with the royal family on the one hand, and the armed forces and secret police on the other. The king has a considerable amount of influence since he appoints governments, approves legislation and has the power to dissolve parliament. While the royal family seems keen on promoting Jordan as a modern, multi-religious country (also underlining the importance of Jordanian Christians in Jordanian society), the secret police seem to be more concerned with repressing minority Muslim factions as well as keeping Christians in line. State-recognized Christian communities can live relatively freely if they abstain from proselytization and Christians are well-represented in politics, the army and the economy. However, the state will put pressure on non-recognized groups and monitor their activities, especially if they actively evangelize.

Though generally stable in terms of security, Jordan faced four Islamist attacks between 2016 and 2019. Human rights advocates have accused Jordan's rulers

of using the threat of terrorism to restrict the rights of citizens and parliament.

Jordan hosts large numbers of refugees, mostly from Iraq and Syria. Several thousand of them are Christians.

Middle East Concern (MEC country profile) describes the legal framework governing Jordan as follows: "The constitution of Jordan establishes Islam as the State religion. It affirms the principle of non-discrimination, including on the basis of religion, and states that the free exercise of worship and religious rites are to be safeguarded, provided these are consistent with public order and morality. Under applicable Islamic law, Muslims are effectively prohibited from changing their religion, and women registered as Muslim are not permitted to marry non-Muslims."

Jordanian Christians are increasingly anxious about what they write about on social media (even concerning posts about food during Ramadan) and have reported a high level of self-censorship to avoid any possibility of insulting the Islamic majority.

How the situation varies by region

The experience of Christians in Jordan is generally the same all over the country, although social control is likely to be higher in rural areas. The south of the country is also known to be more conservatively Islamic.

¹ Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023) (Adapted according to OD-estimate)

Who is affected?

Communities of expatriate Christians

This category is not included in the WWL scoring and analysis.

Historical Christian communities

Orthodox and Roman Catholic communities are the largest categories of Christians. Overall, they enjoy a relatively high level of religious freedom but can experience discrimination, for example in the area of employment.

Converts to Christianity

Christians with a Muslim background experience the most violations for their faith. If a convert's new faith is discovered, they can face pressure and even violence from family, the community, government

officials, non-Christian religious leaders and violent religious groups. Children of converts are particularly vulnerable. Registered as Muslims, children are supposed to live Muslim lives outside their homes, including attending Islamic classes.

Non-traditional Christian communities

After converts, Christians from Evangelical, Baptist, and Pentecostal congregations face the most opposition, in particular those active in outreach. They are especially scrutinized by the intelligence service and have reportedly suffered from government pressure and job blocks. Most non-traditional Christian communities are not recognized as churches, but as societies. Attempts to obtain equivalent status as other church denominations have consistently been resisted.

Main sources of persecution and discrimination

Islamic oppression

Converts from Islam to Christianity face the highest levels of pressure and even violence from family and community, including religious and ethnic leaders. All Christians can be subject to government monitoring and are at risk of Jordanians being radicalized by Islamic State (IS) ideology. The government has imposed Islamic values and laws on society, although it still promotes tolerance and peaceful coexistence with other religions.

Clan oppression

This especially affects Christians with a Muslim background. Jordan's society is largely tribal, especially outside the major cities, and is embedded in Jordanian nationalism. After the mass influx of Palestinians into Jordan after the 1967 war with Israel, Jordan became divided into pure Jordanian "East Bankers" and Palestinian/Jordanian "West Bankers". East Bankers have a social, political and economic advantage.

Dictatorial paranoia

Jordan is increasingly being described as a hybrid system that combines procedural democracy with some forms of authoritarianism. The country is still not a full constitutional democracy and the King, together with the general intelligence service, are the main

sources of decision-making. The King has been outspoken in his support for the Christian communities of Jordan and the Middle East and the need to maintain this Christian presence. While he maintains a moderate and pro-Western stance, it is recognized that the King must strike a balance between competing interests, including Islamist currents that tend to swell in times of economic hardship or in response to regional events.

Christian denominational protectionism

The fragmentation of the Church is a typical feature of Jordanian Christianity. Tension exists between established (traditional) churches and newer churches (often including charismatic and evangelical movements). This is because evangelicals generally accept converts from Islam as well as Christians from traditional churches into their congregations. According to evangelical leaders, it is primarily Greek Orthodox (but sometimes Catholic) leaders who are exerting pressure on newer denominations.



How are men and women differently affected?

Women

Female converts from Islam are the most vulnerable to persecution, with the family typically being the greatest source of pressure. Women risk house arrest, isolation, beatings, sexual harassment, forced marriage and in extreme cases may be killed to retain the family “honor.” Female converts cannot officially marry male Christians, and face their movements being restricted by the state and by families, for instance to prevent her from leaving the country. Personal status laws facilitate house arrest and forced marriages, while apostasy laws enable annulled marriages and loss of child custody.

Female typical pressure points:

- Denied access to social community/networks
- Denied custody of children
- Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse
- Enforced religious dress code
- Forced divorce
- Forced marriage
- Incarceration by family (house arrest)
- Targeted seduction
- Travel bans/restrictions on movement
- Violence – death
- Violence – physical
- Violence – sexual
- Violence – verbal

Men

Economic discrimination affects all Christians, via unemployment, denied job progression and financial extortion. This causes familial financial issues and feelings of worthlessness for men and, alongside other pressures, can prompt men to emigrate. Marriage laws make legal marriage impossible between a non-convert Christian man and a Christian woman with a Muslim background. There are further difficulties in an honor-shame culture, where families can attack, reject and expel men from their homes due to their choice of religion. The state pressures men through intelligence services interviews, especially church leaders active in evangelism.

Male typical pressure points:

- Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse
- Economic harassment via business/job/work access
- Forced out of home – expulsion
- Forced to flee town/country
- Imprisonment by government
- Violence – physical
- Violence – psychological

WWL 5 year trend

WWL Year	Position on Open Doors World Watch List	Persecution rounded score out of 100
2024	48	65
2023	49	65
2022	39	66
2021	38	64
2020	33	64

Jordan’s overall score remained the same, although there were very slight increases in the violence score and in the pressure score for three Spheres of Life. The state exerts pressure on all Christian communities, especially through monitoring. Unrecognized churches, particularly those that actively evangelize, can face harassment from public authorities.



Examples of violence in the reporting period

Details of places and dates cannot be provided for security reasons. For the WWL 2024 reporting period:

- Christians detained: Converts and Christians involved in outreach can be called in regularly for questioning. It is unknown beforehand how long this will take. It can vary from 20 minutes to 12 days.
- Christians sexually harassed: Women who do not dress as a Muslim (i.e., who do not wear a hijab) risk harassment as it creates a profile of vulnerability. It is estimated that at least 10 Christian women were sexually harassed for this reason. Therefore, many Christian women choose not to use public transport or a taxi, especially at night.
- Several converts and Christians who are active in aiding and discipling converts have been physically or mentally abused, usually by the families of the converts.

WWL Year	Christians detained	Christians physically or mentally abused	Christians raped and/or sexually assaulted	Christians forced to flee their countries
2024	10*	10*	10*	2
2023	10*	10*	10*	0

This table includes only a few categories of faith-based violence during the reporting period - for full results see the violence section of the Full Country Dossier. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as minimum figures. In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10, 100* or 1000*) is given which in reality could be significantly higher.*

Private life

Though not criminalized, leaving Islam is not allowed. Converts whose faith is discovered can be referred to a Sharia Court, where they would be found “without religion” and have all contracts broken, including marriage. Converts are frequently targeted for monitoring and may face harassment from the secret police, be prevented from public sector employment and be ostracized within their communities. Women are especially likely to face house arrest, forced marriages and other measures intended to restore “family honor”. If Christians speak about their faith to Muslims, this can easily be understood as an attempt at evangelizing (which is forbidden in Jordan) and a threat to national security.

Family life

Children of converts from Islam, or children of a Christian mother and Muslim father, are automatically registered as Muslim, and it is not possible to change this. This means the child will be required to attend Islamic classes at school. In the case of divorce, those who have left Islam lose custody of any children according to Islamic law.

Community life

Monitoring (including phone calls and social media

usage) is especially intense for known converts from Islam or for those active in evangelism. Cases have been reported where Christians have repeatedly lost or been denied the opportunity of employment because of their conversion. Promotion in the government and armed forces has a pro-Muslim bias, although nine parliamentary seats are reserved for Christians and Christians have been selected to work as ministers on a regular basis. Since most Jordanian women wear the hijab, Christian women are more obvious in public settings and are often viewed as dressing inappropriately and can thus become subject to harassment.

National life

The Constitution of Jordan establishes Islam as the state religion and Sharia as the principal source of legislation. Officially leaving Islam to convert to another religion is illegal (as is non-Islamic evangelism). This is against Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. There is no legal mechanism for changing official religious affiliation from Islam to another (or no) religion, based on the apostasy provisions of Islamic law. In light of the current cyber-crime laws and the government’s history of arrests, freedom of speech is limited. Christians understand the need to avoid deliberately

provocative statements, especially statements that are critical of Islam, the Crown, the military or statements that could be construed as proselytizing. It is a criminal offense in Jordan to insult Islam.

Church life

There is a level of routine monitoring of church activities, ostensibly for the protection of churches.

However, this monitoring could be used against churches if provocative messages or activities were detected, or if Muslims were observed to be attending. The sale of Bibles and the distribution of Christian materials is only permitted in designated places, such as within recognized churches and adjacent church bookstores, but not in ordinary markets or bookshops.

International obligations & rights violated

Jordan has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights under 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)

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

- Christian converts are ostracized and faced with opposition by their families and threatened with loss of child custody in the case of divorce (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Children of Christian converts are automatically registered as Muslim (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Christians are falsely accused and detained because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 19)
- If arrested, Christians experience beatings and pressure to renounce their faith (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 10)
- Christian women and girls are sexually abused because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 7)



Situation of other religious minorities

In general, the authorities in Jordan tend to be “repressive” towards non-Sunni groups and communities. Shia Islam is especially prevalent among Syrian and Iraqi refugees. It is reportedly harder for a Sunni to convert to Shiite Islam than to convert to Christianity.

As an unrecognized religion, activities by Bahai can be banned, although most Bahai adherents are unofficially allowed to practice their religion. Druze experience social exclusion and live in specific areas. Like the Bahai religion, the Druze faith is also not officially recognized by the Jordanian government and as they do not have their own religious buildings they continue to worship in Sunni Muslim mosques. Non-Muslims and non-Christian migrants, mostly Buddhists and Hindus, are also not recognized as a religion. Their rituals take place without official permission and are sometimes prohibited. Finally, Muslims who decide to leave Islam to become atheists, or who have adopted other beliefs, face similar pressure from family and community as Christian believers from a Muslim background.

Open Doors in Jordan

In cooperation with local partners and churches, Open Doors is supporting the Church in Jordan through:

- Training
- Relief and rehabilitation

Open Doors also raises prayer support for Christians in Jordan.



About this brief

- This brief is a summary of the Full Country Dossier produced annually by World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. It may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © 2024 Open Doors International.
- The WWL 2024 reporting period was 01 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- All brief country profiles can be accessed under 'Advocacy resources' on the research pages of the Open Doors International website, along with the more detailed Full Country Dossiers and the latest update of [WWL Methodology](#). These are also available at the [Open Doors Analytical](#) website (password: freedom).

All photos in this dossier are for illustrative purposes.
