

World
Watch
Research

Israel: Full Country Dossier

March 2024



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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Introduction

World Watch List 2024

| Rank | Country | Private life | Family life | Community life | National life | Church life | Violence | Total Score WWL 2024 | Total Score WWL 2023 | Total Score WWL 2022 | Total Score WWL 2021 | Total Score WWL 2020 |
|------|--------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|----------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1 | North Korea | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 12.8 | 96 | 98 | 96 | 94 | 94 |
| 2 | Somalia | 16.5 | 16.7 | 16.6 | 16.6 | 16.6 | 10.6 | 93 | 92 | 91 | 92 | 92 |
| 3 | Libya | 15.9 | 16.0 | 15.9 | 16.1 | 16.4 | 10.2 | 91 | 88 | 91 | 92 | 90 |
| 4 | Eritrea | 14.6 | 14.9 | 15.5 | 15.9 | 15.7 | 12.8 | 89 | 89 | 88 | 88 | 87 |
| 5 | Yemen | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 5.9 | 89 | 89 | 88 | 87 | 85 |
| 6 | Nigeria | 13.5 | 13.9 | 14.5 | 14.9 | 14.4 | 16.7 | 88 | 88 | 87 | 85 | 80 |
| 7 | Pakistan | 13.2 | 13.9 | 15.0 | 15.1 | 13.1 | 16.7 | 87 | 86 | 87 | 88 | 88 |
| 8 | Sudan | 14.1 | 14.2 | 14.9 | 14.9 | 15.5 | 13.3 | 87 | 83 | 79 | 79 | 85 |
| 9 | Iran | 15.0 | 14.6 | 13.5 | 15.8 | 16.5 | 10.9 | 86 | 86 | 85 | 86 | 85 |
| 10 | Afghanistan | 15.7 | 15.9 | 15.2 | 16.3 | 16.6 | 4.6 | 84 | 84 | 98 | 94 | 93 |
| 11 | India | 12.2 | 12.6 | 13.3 | 14.8 | 13.2 | 16.5 | 83 | 82 | 82 | 83 | 83 |
| 12 | Syria | 13.4 | 14.3 | 13.9 | 14.3 | 14.2 | 11.1 | 81 | 80 | 78 | 81 | 82 |
| 13 | Saudi Arabia | 15.2 | 15.3 | 14.8 | 15.7 | 16.6 | 3.3 | 81 | 80 | 81 | 78 | 79 |
| 14 | Mali | 11.1 | 10.1 | 14.7 | 12.8 | 15.1 | 15.6 | 79 | 76 | 70 | 67 | 66 |
| 15 | Algeria | 14.4 | 14.1 | 11.5 | 14.0 | 15.6 | 9.8 | 79 | 73 | 71 | 70 | 73 |
| 16 | Iraq | 14.2 | 14.4 | 14.0 | 14.8 | 13.9 | 7.8 | 79 | 76 | 78 | 82 | 76 |
| 17 | Myanmar | 12.2 | 10.6 | 13.4 | 13.7 | 13.0 | 16.1 | 79 | 80 | 79 | 74 | 73 |
| 18 | Maldives | 15.6 | 15.5 | 13.6 | 16.0 | 16.4 | 0.9 | 78 | 77 | 77 | 77 | 78 |
| 19 | China | 13.0 | 10.0 | 12.8 | 14.6 | 16.0 | 11.1 | 78 | 77 | 76 | 74 | 70 |
| 20 | Burkina Faso | 11.7 | 9.7 | 13.2 | 11.5 | 13.8 | 15.6 | 75 | 71 | 68 | 67 | 66 |
| 21 | Laos | 11.6 | 10.6 | 13.2 | 14.3 | 14.0 | 11.3 | 75 | 68 | 69 | 71 | 72 |
| 22 | Cuba | 13.2 | 8.7 | 13.8 | 13.3 | 15.1 | 8.7 | 73 | 70 | 66 | 62 | 52 |
| 23 | Mauritania | 14.6 | 14.2 | 13.8 | 14.2 | 14.2 | 1.3 | 72 | 72 | 70 | 71 | 68 |
| 24 | Morocco | 13.2 | 13.8 | 11.7 | 12.8 | 14.4 | 5.4 | 71 | 69 | 69 | 67 | 66 |
| 25 | Uzbekistan | 14.6 | 12.7 | 13.9 | 12.6 | 15.5 | 1.7 | 71 | 71 | 71 | 71 | 73 |
| 26 | Bangladesh | 12.4 | 10.6 | 12.5 | 10.8 | 10.4 | 14.1 | 71 | 69 | 68 | 67 | 63 |
| 27 | Niger | 9.4 | 9.6 | 14.5 | 7.7 | 13.1 | 15.9 | 70 | 70 | 68 | 62 | 60 |
| 28 | CAR | 10.3 | 8.6 | 13.9 | 9.6 | 12.2 | 15.6 | 70 | 70 | 68 | 66 | 68 |
| 29 | Turkmenistan | 14.2 | 12.3 | 13.6 | 13.9 | 15.5 | 0.6 | 70 | 70 | 69 | 70 | 70 |
| 30 | Nicaragua | 12.1 | 7.6 | 13.2 | 13.2 | 14.1 | 9.6 | 70 | 65 | 56 | 51 | 41 |
| 31 | Oman | 14.3 | 14.0 | 10.6 | 13.3 | 14.0 | 3.1 | 69 | 65 | 66 | 63 | 62 |
| 32 | Ethiopia | 9.9 | 9.7 | 12.6 | 10.4 | 12.1 | 14.4 | 69 | 66 | 66 | 65 | 63 |
| 33 | Tunisia | 12.3 | 13.2 | 10.2 | 12.4 | 13.8 | 6.9 | 69 | 67 | 66 | 67 | 64 |
| 34 | Colombia | 11.1 | 8.6 | 12.9 | 11.3 | 10.4 | 14.1 | 68 | 71 | 68 | 67 | 62 |
| 35 | Vietnam | 11.3 | 9.4 | 12.4 | 13.8 | 14.2 | 7.2 | 68 | 70 | 71 | 72 | 72 |
| 36 | Bhutan | 13.1 | 12.1 | 12.4 | 14.1 | 14.3 | 2.2 | 68 | 66 | 67 | 64 | 61 |
| 37 | Mexico | 11.5 | 8.5 | 12.5 | 11.1 | 10.6 | 14.1 | 68 | 67 | 65 | 64 | 60 |
| 38 | Egypt | 12.5 | 13.7 | 11.4 | 11.9 | 10.9 | 7.8 | 68 | 68 | 71 | 75 | 76 |
| 39 | Mozambique | 9.3 | 8.5 | 13.9 | 8.4 | 12.5 | 15.0 | 68 | 68 | 65 | 63 | 43 |
| 40 | Qatar | 14.2 | 14.2 | 10.5 | 13.2 | 14.4 | 0.6 | 67 | 68 | 74 | 67 | 66 |
| 41 | DRC | 8.0 | 7.9 | 12.6 | 9.7 | 13.0 | 15.9 | 67 | 67 | 66 | 64 | 56 |
| 42 | Indonesia | 10.9 | 12.3 | 11.5 | 10.2 | 9.7 | 11.5 | 66 | 68 | 68 | 63 | 60 |
| 43 | Cameroon | 8.8 | 7.6 | 12.6 | 8.0 | 13.1 | 15.9 | 66 | 65 | 65 | 64 | 60 |
| 44 | Brunei | 15.0 | 14.7 | 10.0 | 10.8 | 14.1 | 1.3 | 66 | 65 | 64 | 64 | 63 |
| 45 | Comoros | 12.7 | 14.0 | 11.2 | 12.4 | 14.2 | 1.1 | 66 | 66 | 63 | 62 | 57 |
| 46 | Tajikistan | 13.8 | 12.6 | 12.3 | 12.9 | 13.4 | 0.6 | 66 | 66 | 65 | 66 | 65 |
| 47 | Kazakhstan | 13.3 | 11.8 | 12.1 | 12.8 | 14.3 | 1.1 | 65 | 65 | 64 | 64 | 64 |
| 48 | Jordan | 12.9 | 14.2 | 10.5 | 12.4 | 12.8 | 2.2 | 65 | 65 | 66 | 64 | 64 |
| 49 | Malaysia | 13.0 | 14.1 | 11.5 | 12.2 | 11.1 | 2.4 | 64 | 66 | 63 | 63 | 62 |
| 50 | Turkey | 13.0 | 11.5 | 11.6 | 13.2 | 11.4 | 3.1 | 64 | 66 | 65 | 69 | 63 |

| Rank | Country | Private life | Family life | Community life | National life | Church life | Violence | Total Score WWL 2024 | Total Score WWL 2023 | Total Score WWL 2022 | Total Score WWL 2021 | Total Score WWL 2020 |
|------|-------------------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|----------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 51 | Kenya | 10.3 | 9.2 | 11.4 | 8.0 | 11.5 | 12.4 | 63 | 64 | 63 | 62 | 61 |
| 52 | Tanzania | 9.3 | 10.8 | 10.3 | 8.6 | 8.7 | 14.4 | 62 | 63 | 61 | 58 | 55 |
| 53 | Nepal | 12.1 | 10.4 | 9.5 | 13.2 | 12.3 | 4.4 | 62 | 61 | 64 | 66 | 64 |
| 54 | Kuwait | 13.1 | 13.6 | 9.4 | 12.0 | 12.2 | 0.9 | 61 | 64 | 64 | 63 | 62 |
| 55 | Djibouti | 12.3 | 12.6 | 12.7 | 10.1 | 12.3 | 1.1 | 61 | 60 | 59 | 56 | 56 |
| 56 | Chad | 11.6 | 8.2 | 10.2 | 10.2 | 10.3 | 10.6 | 61 | 58 | 55 | 53 | 56 |
| 57 | UAE | 13.3 | 13.4 | 9.5 | 11.3 | 12.8 | 0.7 | 61 | 62 | 62 | 62 | 60 |
| 58 | Sri Lanka | 12.9 | 9.2 | 10.8 | 11.5 | 9.7 | 5.9 | 60 | 57 | 63 | 62 | 65 |
| 59 | Azerbaijan | 13.2 | 9.9 | 9.6 | 11.9 | 13.6 | 1.7 | 60 | 59 | 60 | 56 | 57 |
| 60 | Palestinian Territories | 13.1 | 13.3 | 9.7 | 10.7 | 12.1 | 0.9 | 60 | 60 | 59 | 58 | 60 |
| 61 | Kyrgyzstan | 13.2 | 10.3 | 11.3 | 10.5 | 12.2 | 1.3 | 59 | 59 | 58 | 58 | 57 |
| 62 | Russian Federation | 12.7 | 7.7 | 10.6 | 12.8 | 12.9 | 1.7 | 58 | 57 | 56 | 57 | 60 |
| 63 | Rwanda | 9.4 | 7.7 | 9.0 | 10.4 | 11.7 | 9.4 | 58 | 57 | 50 | 42 | 42 |
| 64 | Burundi | 7.6 | 7.8 | 9.4 | 9.8 | 9.7 | 12.8 | 57 | 55 | 52 | 48 | 48 |
| 65 | Bahrain | 12.0 | 13.2 | 8.6 | 11.3 | 8.5 | 1.1 | 55 | 55 | 57 | 56 | 55 |
| 66 | Honduras | 7.9 | 4.7 | 12.2 | 7.3 | 9.9 | 12.6 | 55 | 53 | 48 | 46 | 39 |
| 67 | Venezuela | 6.0 | 4.4 | 11.1 | 10.0 | 10.8 | 10.7 | 53 | 56 | 51 | 39 | 42 |
| 68 | Togo | 9.2 | 6.7 | 9.3 | 7.1 | 11.0 | 8.9 | 52 | 49 | 44 | 43 | 41 |
| 69 | Guinea | 10.3 | 7.5 | 8.3 | 8.3 | 10.5 | 7.2 | 52 | 48 | 43 | 47 | 45 |
| 70 | Uganda | 8.1 | 5.0 | 7.4 | 6.7 | 8.8 | 15.9 | 52 | 51 | 48 | 47 | 48 |
| 71 | Angola | 6.8 | 6.7 | 8.1 | 11.5 | 11.4 | 7.2 | 52 | 52 | 51 | 46 | 43 |
| 72 | Lebanon | 11.0 | 10.2 | 7.0 | 6.1 | 6.6 | 7.2 | 48 | 40 | 35 | 34 | 35 |
| 73 | Gambia | 8.3 | 8.2 | 8.9 | 8.8 | 8.9 | 3.7 | 47 | 44 | 44 | 43 | 43 |
| 74 | South Sudan | 5.7 | 4.4 | 7.0 | 6.3 | 7.6 | 15.6 | 46 | 46 | 43 | 43 | 44 |
| 75 | Belarus | 9.6 | 3.8 | 5.8 | 9.7 | 13.3 | 3.3 | 46 | 43 | 33 | 30 | 28 |
| 76 | Ivory Coast | 12.0 | 6.5 | 8.7 | 5.9 | 8.0 | 3.3 | 44 | 44 | 42 | 42 | 42 |
| 77 | Ukraine | 5.5 | 4.8 | 8.0 | 11.6 | 11.6 | 2.8 | 44 | 37 | 37 | 34 | 33 |
| 78 | Israel | 9.8 | 8.6 | 5.8 | 6.3 | 6.9 | 6.7 | 44 | 38 | 41 | 40 | 38 |

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes 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 conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2024 reporting period was 1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- 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/> and on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom): <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>.

WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Israel

Brief country details

| Israel: Population (UN estimate for 2023) | Christians | Chr% |
|---|------------|------|
| 9,055,000 | 183,000 | 2.0 |

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Map of country



| Israel: World Watch List | Points | WWL Rank |
|--------------------------|--------|----------|
| WWL 2024 | 44 | 78 |
| WWL 2023 | 38 | - |
| WWL 2022 | 41 | 76 |
| WWL 2021 | 40 | - |
| WWL 2020 | 38 | - |

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

| Israel: Main persecution engines | Main drivers |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Religious nationalism | Government officials, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs |

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

The majority of Christians in Israel are Arab Christians. Many of them have stated that they feel like second-class citizens in Israel, partly because they are ethnically Arab, and partly because they are a religious minority in a Jewish state. They also form a religious minority within an ethnic minority: As Arab Christians they experience a sense of marginalization due to the perceived increasing religiosity among Arab Muslims. Notably, they are located in a few restricted, disconnected locations in Israel and the Palestinian Territories (Nazareth, Bethlehem, and Gaza). Since church dioceses do not line up with modern day borders and demarcation zones, they cannot provide free access to their churches, schools and institutions in Israel to Palestinian Christians living in the Palestinian Territories. In practice, access for Palestinian Christians to Jerusalem, the Sea of Galilee and Nazareth is generally limited to once a year.

Vandalism of traditional church buildings used to occur from time to time, but in WWL 2024 attacks on Christian cemeteries, churches and other Christian owned property increased considerably. A small number of Arab Christians belong to non-traditional Christian communities, who experience limitations because their religious community is not officially recognized. While allowed to function, unlike recognized religious communities, they cannot administer religious courts, which prevents them from carrying out marriages, divorces and funerals of their members. Members of some unrecognized groups therefore often have their personal status documents, such as marriage licenses, processed by the authorities of a recognized religious community.

Then there is the diverse group of Messianic believers, often with a Jewish background. In a majority Ultra-Orthodox Jewish area, demonstrations were held regularly in front of a building where they gather for worship, sometimes leading to damage. Several Messianic Jews who want to immigrate to Israel have been refused residency permits, based on their faith. Messianic believers fall under non-traditional church groups and are not officially recognized by the gov-

government as “religious communities”, which gives them less basic rights in matters concerning marriage, burial and other religious issues.

Finally, there is the very small group of converts with an Islamic or Druze background. Of all the Christian groups in Israel, they generally face the most pressure, primarily from their families: In extreme cases, they may face violent reactions from family members.

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- **1 January 2023:** More than thirty graves in Jerusalem's Protestant cemetery were destroyed by two Jewish extremists. On 5 January, the police arrested two Israeli teenagers in connection with the vandalism.
- **11 January 2023:** It was discovered that Christian property had been damaged and equipment broken in a Maronite community center in Ma'alot-Tarshiha, northern Israel.
- **26 January 2023:** A group of 30 to 40 Jewish extremists attacked an Armenian restaurant in Jerusalem, cursing Jesus and causing considerable damage.
- **16 March 2023:** Two unknown assailants fired shots at the Franciscan school in Nazareth. No damage was reported.
- **23 March 2023:** Five masked men armed with clubs entered a Salesian Sisters school in Nazareth and asked the nuns to say "Ramadan Kareem" (Ramadan be generous). The nuns refused and managed to get the men out of the building.

Specific examples of positive developments

During a visit to the Stella Maris Monastery in Haifa on 9 August 2023, [Israeli President Isaac Herzog condemned the attacks on Christians](#) and on Christian places of worship and cemeteries after the Stella Maris Monastery was attacked by Jewish extremists. The President stated that this phenomenon is unacceptable and that he takes it very seriously: “I come here on behalf of the entire state and people of Israel to reinforce our commitment to the full protection of freedom of religion and worship in the State of Israel.” He also added that "This phenomenon needs to be uprooted, and I am very grateful to Israel police and the enforcement agencies for taking this issue seriously" (Catholic News Agency, 11 August 2023).

External Links - Situation in brief

- Specific examples of positive developments: Israeli President Isaac Herzog condemned the attacks on Christians - <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/255064/israeli-president-condemns-violence-against-christians>

WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Israel

Links for general background information

| Name | Quote Reference | Link | Last accessed on |
|--|----------------------------------|---|------------------|
| Amnesty International Israel report 2022 | AI Israel report 2022 | https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/israel-and-occupied-palestinian-territories/ | 11 March 2024 |
| BBC News Israel country profile updated 13 October 2023 | BBC Israel profile | https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14628835 | 11 March 2024 |
| Bertelsmann Transformation Index (Israel not listed) | BTI 2024 | https://bti-project.org/en?cb=00000 | 11 March 2024 |
| CIA World Factbook Israel updated 20 February 2024 | World Factbook Israel | https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/israel/ | 11 March 2024 |
| Economist Intelligence Unit Israel country profile | EIU Israel profile | https://country.eiu.com/israel | 11 March 2024 |
| FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 Israel | FSI 2023 Israel | https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/ | 11 March 2024 |
| Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index (Israel not listed) | | https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores | 11 March 2024 |
| Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index Israel | Global Freedom Index 2023 Israel | https://freedomhouse.org/country/israel/freedom-world/2023 | 11 March 2024 |
| Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report (Israel not listed) | | https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores | 11 March 2024 |
| Garda World Israel country report, updated 22 February 2024 | Garda World | https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/israel | 11 March 2024 |
| Human Rights Watch World Report 2024 Israel country chapter | HRW 2024 Israel country chapter | https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/israel-and-palestine | 11 March 2024 |
| Internet World Stats 2023 Israel | IWS 2023 Israel | https://www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm#il | 11 March 2024 |
| Middle East Concern country profile Israel | MEC Israel profile | https://www.meconcern.org/countries/israel/ | 11 March 2024 |
| RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index Israel | World Press Freedom 2023 Israel | https://rsf.org/en/israel | 11 March 2024 |
| Transparency International's 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index Israel | CPI 2023 Israel | https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023/index/isr | 11 March 2024 |
| UNDP Human Development Report Israel | UNDP HDR Israel | https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/ISR | 11 March 2024 |
| US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report Israel | IRFR 2022 Israel | https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/israel-west-bank-and-gaza/ | 11 March 2024 |
| USCIRF 2023 country report (Israel not listed) | | https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2024-01/AR%202023.pdf | 11 March 2024 |
| World Bank country data Israel | World Bank data Israel | https://data.worldbank.org/country/israel | 11 March 2024 |

Recent history

The State of Israel was founded in 1948 to serve as a homeland for Jewish people, many of whom were survivors of the Holocaust (in Hebrew: Shoah, 'catastrophe'). The establishment of the world's only majority Jewish country was opposed by Palestinian inhabitants and neighboring Arab countries, leading to continued conflict and a series of regional wars. Tensions continue to flare up between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli government over land rights and managing the coexistence of Israel and the Palestinian Territories. The relocation of the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in May 2018 has added to these tensions and resulted in dozens of Palestinians being killed or injured in demonstrations opposing this move, especially in Gaza. Also in 2018, the Nation State Law was passed, specifying the State of Israel as the national home of the Jewish people and with Hebrew as the official language. Civil rights groups criticized the law for allegedly failing to recognize the equality of non-Jews.

Among the political and military challenges for the industrially developed country are the threat of war from Iran and the constant danger of radical Islamic attacks from groups both within and outside the country. On the diplomatic front, a remarkable development occurred in August 2020: The United Arab Emirates became the first Gulf state to establish diplomatic relations with Israel; this move was followed by further Arab states. Unrest over forced evictions of Palestinians in East Jerusalem in May 2021 led to conflict with Hamas, including an 11-day war with Gaza's armed factions that left hundreds dead and communal violence in Israeli cities.

In December 2022, Israel's current government was formed, including right-wing, ultra-nationalist and ultra-Orthodox Jewish religious parties, making it one of the most right-wing and religiously conservative governments in Israel's history. On 7 October 2023, Hamas launched a surprise attack on Israel from the Gaza Strip, firing thousands of rockets and causing hundreds of militants to breach the border with Israel. According to Israeli authorities, as of 8 February 2024, more than 1,200 people, mostly civilians, were killed since 7 October 2023, and 136 people

taken hostage. Israel responded with thousands of airstrikes on the Gaza Strip; according to Gaza Strip authorities these killed more than 18,700 Palestinians, mostly civilians, including more than 7,800 children. The initial attack and subsequent response has led to widespread violence and destruction, with accusations of war crimes on both sides. The situation extended to the West Bank, where violence intensified, and border clashes with Hezbollah in southern Lebanon heightened the risk of a broader regional conflict.

Political and legal landscape

Israel has no formal constitution, but a Basic Law which characterizes the country as a “Jewish and democratic state”. The Economic Intelligence Unit classifies Israel as a 'flawed democracy' placing it 29th out of 167 countries in the [EIU Democracy Index 2022](#) (p.60).

The [2020 Freedom of Thought Report](#) states:

- "Due in part to the lack of agreement between secular and religious Israelis, the country never adopted a constitution after the establishment of the State. Israel's Supreme Court has repeatedly held that the Basic Law on Human Dignity and Liberty protects freedom of religion or belief, and freedom of expression. The Basic Law describes the country as a 'Jewish and democratic state' and references the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel, which promises religious freedom and full social and political equality, regardless of religious affiliation. However, a degree of legal discrimination among religious communities exists. ... Moreover, certain laws and policies (exemplified in this report) privilege Jews against non-Jews, and Orthodox Jews against non-Orthodox ones, including those identifying with secular or Humanistic Judaism."

Middle East Concern describes the legal framework governing Israel as follows (MEC country profile):

- "The Nation State Law passed by the Knesset in 2018 specifies the State of Israel to be the national home of the Jewish people and Hebrew to be the official language. This has been criticized by civil rights groups for neglecting to recognise the equality of non-Jews. However, the 1992 Basic Law on Human Dignity and Liberty has consistently been interpreted as protecting freedom of religious practice. Recognised religious communities are authorised to operate courts covering personal status matters and may alternatively seek adjudication on some matters within the civil courts. Although proselytising is not illegal, it is a legal offence to offer inducements to conversion and to seek to convert a minor to a religion not held by either of the minor's parents. Israel ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) on 3 October 1991. The ICCPR upholds the right to freedom of religion, including the right to hold a religion of one's choice and the right to manifest that religion (Article 18). It also upholds the rights of minorities and the principle of non-discrimination. In ratifying the ICCPR, Israel reserved the right to apply religious laws for personal status matters. Messianic believers of Jewish ethnicity have at times faced social prejudice and harassment. Jewish people seeking to enter Israel under the Law of Return (Aliyah) often claim they have faced obstruction or discrimination if their Messianic beliefs have become known to the authorities."

According to [World Atlas](#), accessed 12 March 2024:

- Israel is a parliamentary democracy where “top executive power is exercised by the Cabinet of Ministers, legislative power by the Knesset, and law interpretation overseen by a judicial selection committee.” The Israeli government is comprised of the president, the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. Its head is the president, who only fulfills a ceremonial role. The head of the executive branch is the prime minister who also leads a multi-party system. Israel has many political parties. These can be grouped together in five blocs: Three Zionist party blocs composed of right, left and centrist wings and two other blocs representing minority groups (i.e. the non-Zionist Ultra-Orthodox block and the anti-Zionist Arab bloc)."

Religious landscape

| Israel: Religious context | Number of adherents | % |
|---|---------------------|------|
| Christians | 183,000 | 2.0 |
| Muslim | 1,853,000 | 20.5 |
| Hindu | 470 | 0.0 |
| Buddhist | 41,500 | 0.5 |
| Ethno-religionist | 0 | 0.0 |
| Jewish | 6,436,000 | 71.1 |
| Bahai | 14,400 | 0.2 |
| Atheist | 47,800 | 0.5 |
| Agnostic | 466,000 | 5.1 |
| Other | 13,700 | 0.2 |
| <i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i> | | |

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Over 71% of the Israeli population is Jewish, more than 20% Muslim and 2% is Christian, according to World Christian Database estimates (accessed March 2023). In addition, there are 1.6% Druze, as listed in the World Factbook Israel.

According to the annual [Religion and State Index](#) conducted by religious freedom NGO Hiddush (October 2022): "The majority of the adult Jewish public does not associate itself with any religious stream [58%]. Eleven percent associate themselves with the ultra-Orthodox stream, 2% - national ultra-Orthodox, 20% - national religious, and 9% identify themselves as Reform or Conservative." A tiny minority (less than 0.2%) identify as being part of the Israeli Messianic Movement as stated in the [Caspari Center survey](#), published on 7 February 2022. Many Druze, Arab Muslim and Christian communities are concentrated in the Galilee region in the north,

while Muslim communities of Bedouin descent are mostly located in the Negev, in the south of the country.

In general there is a high level of freedom of religion in Israel, especially compared to other Middle Eastern countries. Most of the violations of religious freedom that do occur are caused by radicalized individuals or small groups of religious militants. A difficulty within the wider Church in Israel is the fact that it finds itself in a context of intractable conflict. The historical narratives surrounding the formation of the State 'collide', a source of tension between large parts of the Messianic community and the Arab Christian community.

Economic landscape

- **GDP (Purchasing Power Parity):** \$393.9 billion (2021 est. / CIA Factbook)
- **GDP per capita (Purchasing Power Parity):** \$42,100 (2021 est. / CIA Factbook)
- **National income per capita:** With its technologically advanced free market economy, Israel is a prosperous country with a high average national income per capita of the adult population (€43,495, 2021), which is higher than that of several Western European countries. Women's labor income share in Israel is 38%. This corresponds to the level in the USA; while it is somewhat lower than in many Western European countries, it is significantly higher than in neighboring Middle East countries (15%) ([World Inequality Report 2022](#)).
- **Income inequality:** According to the [World Inequality Report 2022](#), there is a high degree of income inequality. The lowest 50% of the population earn an average of \$11,200, while the top 10% earns 19 times more: \$211,900. These inequality levels are comparable to those in the USA.
- **Employment rate:** The total employment rate is relatively low at 61%. A concern for many Israeli citizens are longer-term structural problems such as prices for houses and basic consumer goods, low employment rates of minorities (such as the fastest-growing social segments - the ultra-Orthodox Jewish and Arab-Israeli populations).

Economically, Christians most often belong to the middle class and are generally well educated. However the number of Arab Christians is declining, leaving them with less economic and political influence than before and increasingly vulnerable to unemployment. As a result, several Christians - especially young people - want to leave the country to find work elsewhere. That said, the Christian Arab community has an income which is above average for Israel and achieves a proportionally higher number of university degrees at all levels. However, this can also provide an extra incentive to leave the country and find work abroad. The economic situation of Messianic believers is often good, they are generally known for being motivated and have a strong work ethic. An increasing number are rising in the ranks of the armed forces, academia, business and health sectors. At the same time, several of them indicate that they fear for their jobs if their faith becomes publicly known.

Social and cultural landscape

According to UNDP HDR Israel and the World Factbook Israel:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Jewish 73.5% (of which Israel-born 79.7%, Europe/America/Oceania-born 14.3%, Africa-born 3.9%, Asia-born 2.1%), Arab 21.1%, other 5.4% (2022 est.)

- **Main languages:** Hebrew (official), Arabic (special status under Israeli law), English (most commonly used foreign language)
- **Urban population:** 92.9% of total population (2023)
- **Literacy rate:** 97.8% of the population age 15 and over can read and write.
- **HDI score and ranking:** With a score of 0.919, Israel ranks 22nd out of 191 countries and falls in the 'very high human development' category.
- **Life expectancy:** 82,3 at birth, a figure that has increased by 5.1 years since 1990 and is among the highest in the world.
- **Education:** Mean years of schooling is 13,3, an average that increased by 3.4 years since 1990.
- **Unemployment:** 5.05% of Israel's labor force is without official employment (est. 2021).

Israeli society is pluriform with many different ethnicities, religious and cultural backgrounds. Whereas 73.5% of the population is of Jewish ethnicity, the second largest ethnic group are the Arabs, amounting to over 21% of the population.

There is an identifiable growth of secularism and atheism within the Arab community, especially among the younger generation. There has also been an increase in crime within the Arab community in Israel, with a large majority of those killed in Israel in the past year being Arabs. According to a country expert, emigration remains a preferred option for at least some of the Arab-Christian population; the reasons for this are the growing unrest in Arab society coupled with the long-term political uncertainty.

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2023) Israel:

- **Internet usage:** 89.8% penetration (Jan. 2022)
- **Facebook usage:** 78.2% penetration (Jan. 2022)

According to World Bank Israel data:

- **Mobile phone:** 140 subscriptions per 100 people (2021 est.)

Israel is recognized around the world as being a major hub for technology. According to the World Factbook Israel:

- "Israel's developed economy largely revolves around high technology products and services, primarily used in the medical, biotechnology, agricultural, materials, and military industries; the country also attracts investment in its cyber-security industry, and has established itself as a hub for thousands of start-up companies; to underpin these developments, Israel has developed a robust telecoms sector; household broadband subscriptions is high, with a focus on fiber-network deployment; LTE services are almost universally available, while the August 2020 multi-frequency bands also enabled the MNOs to provide services based on 5G; 5G will be supported by moves to close down GSM and 3G networks in stages through to the end of 2025, with the physical assets and frequencies to be repurposed for LTE and 5G use (2023)."

Since data are a core asset in many technological enterprises, data protection is especially relevant in Israel. It is precisely in the Privacy Protection Act of January 2022 that the Israeli government has made its largest and most comprehensive update in decades, probably making 2022 a turning point for Israel in this area, experts say. According to a leading authority in Cyber Law practice in Israel: "At the heart of the new amendment are new procedures and regulatory powers that portend a dramatic increase in risks associated with information security and purposeful processing violations" ([iapp](#), 26 January 2022).

The COVID-19 crisis also brought with it threats to the data privacy of citizens. For tracing contacts for the purpose of fighting COVID-19 infection, Israel chose to rely on its domestic security agency, something the head of Democracy in the Information Age Program at the Israel Democracy Institute described as "an extreme approach that is at odds with other democracies" and which "presents an unprecedented breach of privacy and lays the foundation for invasive surveillance tools that can be used in applications beyond public health" ([Brookings Institute](#), 6 July 2020).

Christians have also experienced the far-reaching control of the Israeli government - despite freedom of expression, belief and conscience being protected in the country. For example, the foreign Christian wife of an Israeli Jewish citizen did not initially receive Israeli citizenship because she had liked and shared Facebook posts relating to a Jewish-Messianic community. On this basis, the Ministry of Interior suspected her of being a missionary. After much delay and a pending appeal, the Ministry of Interior finally granted the Christian citizenship.

Security situation

The security situation in Israel is one of the most complex in the world. As an isolated state in a hostile environment with no neighboring allies, Israel has to deal with a great variety of security issues, with serious threats both from within and from outside the country. Internally, Israel is dealing with the problems surrounding the Palestinian claim for setting up their own state. As long as there is no prospect of lasting peace, it is inevitable that confrontations with Palestinians living either in the West Bank or Gaza will continue. Provocations from both sides will lead to more hostilities and thus to more casualties, with the most recent tragic low point being Hamas' deadly attack on Israel on 7 October 2023, which led to a major military response from Israel. In this context, Global risk management firm [Crisis24](#) identifies tensions with Syria, Lebanon and Iran:

- "Escalating tensions with Iran threaten to devolve into violence that would mostly take place in Syria, although there is a risk of rocket attacks on the Golan Heights by Syria-based Iranian forces. Israel has been increasingly staging attacks against Iran-linked groups in Iraq, threatening tensions with Baghdad. Terrorism is a concern in Israel. Palestinian militants stage attacks, often involving knives, firearms, and vehicle-ramming tactics, against security forces. Israeli civilians have been killed or wounded in such militant attacks. Various militant groups classify the destruction of Israel as their primary objective. Stringent counterterrorism efforts mitigate the terrorist threat."

Trends analysis

1) Sharp increase in crime rates among Arab-Israelis

There has been a sharp increase in crime rates among the Arab community in Israel. According to the New York Times ([NYT](#), 2 October 2021), the criminal motivated murders "account for about 70 percent of all Israeli homicides, though Arabs represent just over 20 percent of the population. The surging violence has shocked the country and put a spotlight on what the government acknowledges to have been decades of neglect of crime in Arab communities." A total of 244 Arab civilians were killed in crime-related violence in 2023; the highest level in seven years ([Reuters](#), [Atlantic Council](#)). This development is a strong motivation for young Christian Arabs to consider emigrating to Western countries.

2) As their numbers dwindle, the economic influence of Christians diminishes

The percentage of Christians in Israel's Arab community is declining, causing more and more Muslim-run businesses to gain influence. As a result, more Christians lose their jobs. Although the percentage of academics among Christians is higher than among Muslims, this can also make it easier for Christians to leave the country and find work in the West. In addition, the COVID-19 restrictions resulted in many young people losing their jobs and others having to close their businesses. Christians were also affected by this situation.

3) Growth of secularization and atheism

There is a growth of secularism and atheism, especially among the young generation. Particularly in universities, the influence of atheism and secularism can be considerable. Both pose a challenge to religions in general, although they are generally more critical of Islam than of Christianity. While Christians generally support 'secularism' - in the sense of separation between state and religion - atheism can also pull young Christians away from their faith. The tendency among young Muslims to turn to atheism because of the violence caused by radical Islam, on the other hand, could create an atmosphere less hostile to Christians.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Political and legal landscape: EIU Democracy Index 2022 - https://www.eiu.com/n/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Democracy-Index-2022_FV2.pdf?li_fat_id=f1fbad7e-a282-4b9e-9f8f-6a6d5a9fe6b8
- Political and legal landscape: 2020 Freedom of Thought Report - <https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-western-asia/israel/>
- Political and legal landscape: World Atlas - <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-type-of-government-does-israel-have.html>
- Religious landscape description: Religion and State Index - https://hiddush.org/article-23582-0-2022_Israel_Religion_State_Index.aspx
- Religious landscape description: Caspari Center survey - <https://www.caspari.com/2022/02/07/the-caspari-center-survey-released-the-israeli-messianic-movement-has-more-than-tripled-in-the-last-20-years/>
- Economic landscape: World Inequality Report 2022 - <https://wid.world/document/world-inequality-report-2022/>
- Economic landscape: World Inequality Report 2022 - <https://wid.world/document/world-inequality-report-2022/>
- Technological landscape: iapp - <https://iapp.org/news/a/a-turning-point-for-privacy-laws-in-israel/>

- Technological landscape: Brookings Institute - <https://www.brookings.edu/techstream/how-israels-covid-19-mass-surveillance-operation-works/>
- Security situation: Crisis24 - <https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/israel>
- Trends analysis: NYT - <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/02/world/middleeast/israel-arab-crime-killings-police.html>
- Trends analysis: Reuters - <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/arab-family-five-shot-dead-crime-rates-israel-soar-2023-09-27/>
- Trends analysis: Atlantic Council). - <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/arab-israelis-crisis/#>

WWL 2024: Church information / Israel

Christian origins

Jesus Christ's ministry, death and resurrection all occurred in the context of the first century Roman occupation of Israel/Palestine and Christians have been living in Israel ever since. According to the website '[Israel and You](#)' (5 September 2017):

- “Christianity grew from a 1st century Jewish sect to a religion across the entire Greco-Roman world. ... There was intense periodic persecution of Christians. The persecution of Christians by the Roman Empire ended in 324 CE when Constantine the Great decreed tolerance for Christianity.” Israel was transformed into a Christian holy land and Christianity would dominate the region until the 7th century, when Arab armies invaded.

In the 11th century, Latin crusader armies landed and the ensuing crusades brought with them the Roman Catholic Church. Several groups of Eastern Christians entered into communion with Rome during and after the crusader period. Crusader rule lasted until the end of the 13th century when Muslim forces recaptured large parts of the land. For the next centuries Israel/Palestine would be under a variety of Islamic rulers. The Islamic Ottoman Turks ruled from the sixteenth century to World War I, when they were defeated by the French/British allied powers.

According to historical [experts \(JMECA\)](#), the Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch split in the early eighteenth century:

- “Western Churches of reformed tradition came into the Middle East in the nineteenth century. American Presbyterian missionaries worked in Egypt, Lebanon and other parts of the region. The Church of England and the Prussian Lutheran Church jointly set up a bishopric in Jerusalem in 1841. It came to an end in the early 1880s, and separate Anglican and Lutheran bishoprics were set up towards the end of the decade. The original purpose was to convert Jews to Christianity. In that aim it largely failed, but attracted a small number of existing Christians, mostly Orthodox or Greek Catholic, in what is now Israel, the Occupied Territories and Jordan.”

When the State of Israel was established in 1948, a small group of 'Jewish Christians' was still present in the land. Those who evangelized were treated with hostility, especially as the Holocaust was generally perceived as being committed by Christians. The number of Messianic believers grew particularly after two waves of revivals, in the 1970s and the 1990s. The Christian population in Israel further increased over the years through the immigration of foreign workers and accompanying non-Jewish spouses in mixed marriages.

Church spectrum today

| Israel: Church networks | Christians | % |
|--|----------------|-------------|
| Orthodox | 39,400 | 21.5 |
| Catholic | 110,000 | 60.1 |
| Protestant | 13,000 | 7.1 |
| Independent | 33,600 | 18.4 |
| Unaffiliated | 6,400 | 3.5 |
| Doubly-affiliated Christians | -20,000 | -10.9 |
| Total | 182,400 | 99.7 |
| <i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i> | | |
| Evangelical movement | 30,800 | 16.8 |
| Renewalist movement | 37,200 | 20.3 |

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Renewalist movement:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Christians with an Islamic background experience most pressure in remote rural villages, such as the Bedouin communities in the south and in the also predominantly Muslim north (Galilee). The north is also where the majority of the Druze population is located and where Christians with a Druze background can experience opposition due to their faith. The pressure they face in these areas tends to be more moderate than in the rest of the Middle East. Furthermore, hostility is generally at a lower level in more cosmopolitan/mixed cities like Haifa and Tel Aviv, and higher in isolated, rural areas and the Negev desert. Converts from a Jewish background usually experience most opposition in ultra-Orthodox majority Jewish areas such as parts of Jerusalem, especially in the form of harassment and vandalism. Even for Christians without any other religious background, religious tensions can easily arise in politically and religiously sensitive Jerusalem. The Christian community can also at times experience pressure and intermittent violence from neighboring mosques - e.g. in Nazareth.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians

Expatriate Christians have not been counted as a separate category in WWL analysis as they do not function as an involuntarily isolated group in Israel.

Historical Christian communities

Most Christians in Israel are Arabs and belong to the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions that have existed in the country for centuries. There are also small Syrian, Coptic and Anglican communities. The majority of Historical Christian communities are found in the north of the country (Galilee and Haifa district), the rest live near Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. A large number of these denominations are officially registered, such as the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox and Protestant traditions. Their members are generally not heavily persecuted, but they do face politically and ethnically motivated restrictions and societal pressures, including from the government and ultra-Orthodox groups or radical Israeli settlers. The latter have carried out campaigns of vandalism against church buildings in what are known as 'price tag' attacks, particularly in Jerusalem and the Galilee.

Leaders of Historical Christian churches have also experienced difficulties in their relations with the Israeli government, sometimes due to the alleged pro-Palestinian stance of some churches. Property conflicts regularly cause tensions between the authorities and historical churches. In Jerusalem, church staff have occasionally been cursed or spat at by Orthodox Jews, often youths. In addition, Christians from the historical communities (as well as non-traditional Christians) experience social and economic pressure in predominantly Muslim villages, for example in the form of an unofficial economic boycott of Christian businesses by local Muslims.

Converts

Christian converts may be of Muslim, Druze, Historical Christian, or Jewish background. Converts may be frowned upon by society as a whole, but most of the pressure usually comes from the family and varies in intensity depending on how religious or conservative their families are. Typically, as members of a minority group they are all exposed to "resentment, fear, suspicion, bitterness, and a downward spiral of indignity" (Kai Kjer-Hansen quoted by Peter Lawrence in [Fellow Travellers](#), World Evangelical Alliance, p. 32, 2020).

Most of the known incidents of persecution are experienced by Messianic Jews and especially those engaged in evangelistic activities. In rare cases, radical Jewish religious groups may attack them or their meetings. Converts with a Jewish background usually do not think that they have left the Jewish faith, several of them indicate that they consider themselves [more Jewish than before](#) since they found their Messiah. After 2000 years of surviving Christian persecution, Jewish antipathy has been reinforced by the fact that Jews now have their own country and Messianic Jews, in their view, betray the history of their people by 'conversion' to that hated Christianity. The degree of opposition they experience from their family depends, among other things, on how religious this family is. Messianic Jews from secular families usually experience little or no resistance, contrary to those who come from religious families. Apart from hostility

from Orthodox Jews, which can range from harassment to vandalism, Messianic Jews may face resistance from Israeli society in general, although this has become less over time. Finally, Messianic Jewish congregations are not officially recognized as a religious community by the government and Messianic believers have experienced difficulties in obtaining Israeli citizenship due to no longer being seen as Jewish.

The change of faith of believers with a Muslim background is often experienced as a break with their native community from which they can become isolated. Several Christians from non-religious but traditionally Muslim families indicate that their families have accepted their choice of faith, even if not wholeheartedly or openly. Christians from conservative Islamic families face the most resistance, which in extreme cases can also be violent. However, Israeli law provides legal means to prosecute violators of religious freedom and this greatly affects the way people interact with one another. There will be legal consequences for religiously motivated violence or discrimination (for example, honor killings resulting from conversion to other religions). Some of them join an Evangelical or Messianic congregation while most are not affiliated. This is partly because several of the churches do not welcome converts, which makes their position even more difficult; others keep their faith secret out of fear.

Christians who have changed churches are mainly Arab believers who first belonged to a historic Christian community and who have switched to a non-traditional Christian community. For them, too, most of the pressure comes from their family. In general this pressure is verbal and not physical. The family and community around them will do their best to convince them to return to their 'mother church' and some can be shunned by family members. In some cases, parents prevent their children from attending Evangelical meetings. Others, in addition to attending evangelical services, will also participate in traditional church activities so as not to arouse suspicion from their families.

Non-traditional Christian communities

Most non-traditional Christians are Arab Evangelicals or Pentecostals (henceforth referred to as Evangelicals) and therefore form a minority (Evangelicals) of a minority (Christians) within a minority group (Arabs) in Israel. Over twenty percent of Israelis are Arab and only ten percent of them are Christian (less than two percent of the Israeli population). Arab Evangelical Christians are mainly divided between the Baptists, the Brethren, the Nazarene Church and the Assemblies of God and have reported pressure from the Jewish government, the Muslim community and traditional churches. Evangelical churches are not officially recognized by the government as 'religious communities', which makes it hard if not impossible for them to carry out marriages, burials and other religious rites. The state of Israel has meanwhile made some concessions, for example allowing marriage to be conducted by evangelical congregations, but has not wanted to recognize Evangelicals as a distinct church group.

Non-traditional Christian groups are often known for their evangelistic activities. Although not illegal, missionary work needs to be done in a discrete way in Israel. It is legally prohibited to evangelize youth younger than 18 years old. Also, in majority Jewish or Islamic areas, evangelism will not be accepted by its inhabitants. Foreign non-traditional Protestants have been refused entry into Israel because of involvement in missionary activities in the country. In addition, several Historical Christian communities may take offence of evangelicals for their conviction that all Christians must also be 'born again' and as a result accuse them of stealing their members. Another reason is the perceived link between Evangelical Christians and Western Christian Zionism.

External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: Israel and You - <http://www.israelandyou.com/christianity/>
- Christian origins: experts (JMECA) - <https://jmecca.org.uk/christianity-middle-east/history-christianity-middle-east-north-africa>
- Christian communities and how they are affected: Fellow Travellers, - https://www.bucer.de/fileadmin/dateien/Dokumente/Buecher/WoT_15_Lawrence-Fellow_Travellers.pdf
- Christian communities and how they are affected: more Jewish than before - https://www.bucer.de/fileadmin/dateien/Dokumente/Buecher/WoT_15_Lawrence-Fellow_Travellers.pdf

WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Israel

Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

Position on the World Watch List

| Israel: World Watch List | Points | WWL Rank |
|--------------------------|--------|----------|
| WWL 2024 | 44 | 78 |
| WWL 2023 | 38 | - |
| WWL 2022 | 41 | 76 |
| WWL 2021 | 40 | - |
| WWL 2020 | 38 | - |

With 44 points, Israel has entered the list of Persecution Watch Countries for the second time in recent years. The increase of no less than six points in WWL 2024 compared to WWL 2023 is unprecedented in Israel's WWL history. The increase in points is mainly due to a higher score for violent incidents, especially attacks on Christians, churches and other Christian targets. In addition, the average pressure on Christians in Israel increased slightly.

Persecution engines

| Israel: Persecution engines | Abbreviation | Level of influence |
|---|--------------|--------------------|
| Islamic oppression | IO | Weak |
| Religious nationalism | RN | Strong |
| Ethno-religious hostility | ERH | Weak |
| Clan oppression | CO | Weak |
| Christian denominational protectionism | CDP | Weak |
| Communist and post-Communist oppression | CPCO | Not at all |
| Secular intolerance | SI | Very weak |
| Dictatorial paranoia | DPA | Not at all |
| Organized corruption and crime | OCC | Very weak |

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.

Religious nationalism - Jewish (Strong):

Religious nationalism can prevail in all predominantly Jewish areas of the country, especially in areas where ultra-Orthodox Jews live. Messianic believers and Christians active in evangelism can be subject to mob attacks and social harassment of all degrees. Messianic Jews are typically banned from the Orthodox community and it is this group that feels the resistance of the religious establishment most acutely. Also Arab Christians have indicated that, under the influence of this persecution engine, they feel treated as second-class citizens especially since they constitute a religious minority within an ethnic minority. This is reinforced by the government's efforts in recent years to emphasize the Jewish character of the State of Israel. A clear example was the July 2018 amendment to the Jewish nation-state law, which enshrines Israel as "the national home of the Jewish people." Israel's minority groups are concerned since this law is solely aimed at protecting primarily Jewish interests, values and customs and was passed as part of a 'de facto constitution'.

Since the formation of Israel's current government in December 2022, ultra-Orthodox Judaism has regained significant political influence. In January 2023, ultra-Orthodox Jewish ministers introduced a bill that would make evangelizing adults punishable by one year in prison and efforts to convert minors punishable by two years in prison. The proposal, which caused an uproar among evangelical Christians worldwide, was blocked by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Also, partly due to the role of Ultra-Orthodox parties in previous governments, Messianic believers have experienced problems obtaining residence permits.

Drivers of persecution

| Israel: Drivers of persecution | IO | RN | ERH | CO | CDP | CPCO | SI | DPA | OCC |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------|-----------|------|-----------|-----|-----------|
| | WEAK | STRONG | WEAK | WEAK | WEAK | - | VERY WEAK | - | VERY WEAK |
| Government officials | - | Medium | Weak | Medium | Weak | - | Very weak | - | Very weak |
| Ethnic group leaders | - | Very weak | Very weak | Weak | - | - | - | - | - |
| Non-Christian religious leaders | Very weak | Weak | - | Weak | - | - | - | - | - |
| Religious leaders of other churches | - | - | - | - | Medium | - | - | - | - |
| Violent religious groups | - | Weak | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Ideological pressure groups | Very weak | Weak | - | - | - | - | Very weak | - | - |
| Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs | Weak | Medium | Weak | Weak | Very weak | - | Very weak | - | - |
| One's own (extended) family | Medium | Weak | - | Medium | Weak | - | - | - | - |
| Political parties | - | Weak | Very weak | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Organized crime cartels or networks | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | Very weak |
| 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 Religious nationalism

- Government officials (Medium):** Messianic Jews may encounter difficulties from government officials or institutions if:
 - they want to immigrate and settle in Israel;
 - they set up as a non-profit organization or need building permits;
 - they intend to preach on television.

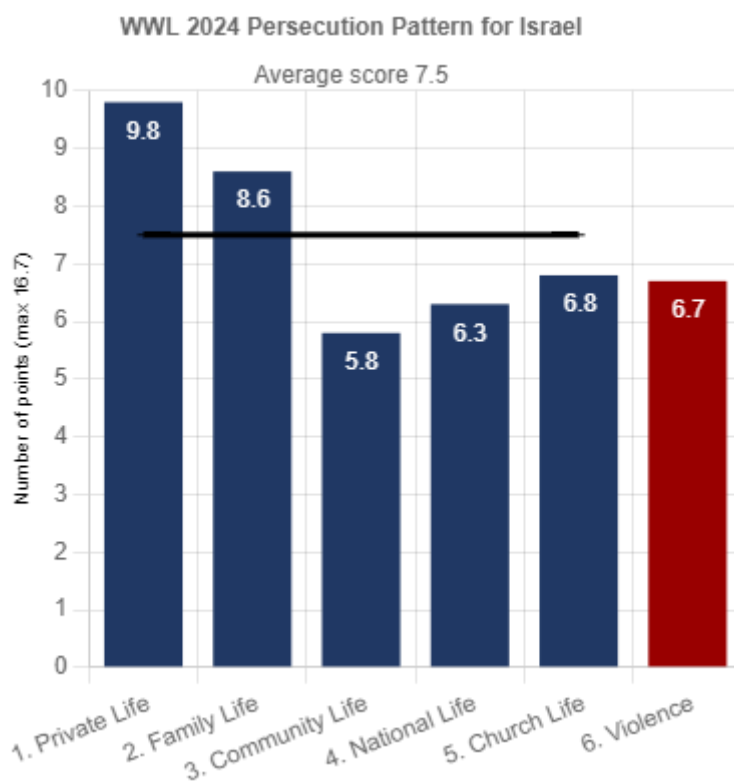
While government officials and agencies at all levels (from local to national) are known to have contributed to an environment that allows for harassment, especially of Messianic Jews, they rarely become directly involved. This environment provides space for non-governmental organizations to operate, including ultra-Orthodox Jewish organizations. Also, when there is a conflict between Messianic Jews and radical Orthodox Jews, the authorities will generally try to remove the Messianic group from the scene and appease the Orthodox. Several Messianic Jews seeking to make *Aliyah* — a term referring to Jews coming to live in Israel — have been denied residency permits because of their faith. Many lawsuits have been fought (and won) to overturn these illegal measures. In some cases, their citizenship was revoked after immigration.

In addition, many denominations, mostly non-traditional (Protestant) churches - Messianic Jewish or Evangelical - are not officially recognized by the government as 'religious communities', leaving them with fewer basic rights in marriage, funeral and other religious matters. Also, Messianic and Evangelical Christian organizations indicate that it is very difficult for them to buy land, and if they do, to get permits to build on it. Most planning committees and land tenants are made up of elected representatives, Orthodox Jews and those influenced by them can more often than not block applications. Court intervention is often required to proceed. About 80% of the land is owned by the state, which rents it out to the general public for more than 50 years. There are only a few instances where Messianic or Evangelical Christians have been granted leases.

Finally, civil servants are known to have blocked Evangelical and Jewish Messianic public activities. For example, the chairman of the Council for Cable and Satellite Broadcasting revoked the license of the Messianic Jewish Shelanu TV as the broadcasting company would target Jews and not Christians in Israel. Shelanu's CEO denied this but decided not to appeal the decision and to continue broadcasting on the Internet. This case in 2020 made it clear that a civil servant could stop Christians preaching through Israeli TV giant HOT, which serves 700,000 households.

- ***Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs (Medium):*** In WWL 2024 there was an increase in the number of Christian churches and other Christian locations that became targets of vandalism, often by young, ultra-Orthodox Jews. There were also a few attacks on churches or other Christian buildings by radical Muslims. In addition, there was an increase in the number of spitting and verbal harassment by religiously Orthodox Jews of all ages, including entire families, toward Christian clergy and pilgrims and Christian places of worship. Occasionally, ultra-Orthodox religious groups attack Messianic congregations and their members. This has happened in two cities in recent years. These groups shout and abuse people entering or leaving the congregation and encourage their children to harass Messianic children at school. The reason this is not more widespread is largely because most Messianic congregations are located in industrial zones, beyond the boundaries where religious Jews can go on Shabbat.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2024 Persecution pattern for Israel shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Israel is 7.5 points, which is fairly high and only slightly higher than in WWL 2023 when this was 7.3 points.
- Pressure is currently strongest in the *Private* and *Family spheres of life*, which is characteristic for the persecution of converts (both from a Jewish or Muslim background).
- The score for *Church life* increased considerably from 6.1 points in WWL 2023 to 6.8 in WWL 2024. This is partly due to obstacles or disruptions Christians have experienced when organizing Christian activities.
- The score for violence went up from very low (1.3 points) in WWL 2023 to the very high score of 6.7 points in WWL 2024, due to attacks and acts of vandalism on Christian churches and property.

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 2024 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 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (2.75 points)

Christians belonging to traditional Christian communities increasingly report hostile or violent reactions as a result of, for example, wearing a cross or other Christian symbols, especially in Jerusalem. Showing Christian images or symbols is also sensitive for converts from Judaism or Islam and the most pressure they may experience in this regard comes from their immediate environment, such as their family.

Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (2.50 points)

On the one hand, official registration of conversion from one faith to another is possible in Israel. On the other hand, the government has rejected immigration applications from Messianic Jews based on their faith. Messianic Jews from secular families usually do not experience much pressure from their families, while the resistance is usually greater with those from religious Jewish families and mostly consists of social pressure. This also applies to Christians from Muslim, Druze or historic Christian families. In exceptional cases, opposition from Islamic families can turn violent.

Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (2.50 points)

Most Christians are free to publicly reveal, share and write about their faith, including on social media. However, this is not the case for Christians of Muslim or Druze background, for whom it can be very risky to reveal their faith publicly. While it is not usually risky for Messianic Jews today, quite a few prefer to remain covert for a wide variety of trust/fear related reasons. In the past, Messianic believers who engaged in social media evangelism had been threatened and harassed, but there have been no actual violent incidents against them for this recently. This is a particular risk in remote/very rural locations and much less so in major cities.

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (2.50 points)

In general, Christians enjoy the freedom to talk about their faith with others including non-Christians. There may be verbal resistance and new Christians may be intimidated by it, but in principle it is not risky. When Messianic Jews speak to Orthodox Jews and give the impression that they want to convert them - rather than talk about their personal faith - violent reactions can follow. For Christians of Muslim or Druze background, it can be risky to share their faith with others, especially their wider family or community. In such a case, wider family members may react more fanatically than immediate relatives.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.5: Burials of Christians have been hindered or coercively performed with non-Christian rites. (3.00 points)

Usually this is not a problem for traditional Christians. Families of converts from Islam will most likely have their funerals performed with Islamic rites. If they are aware of their choice of faith, Orthodox Jews are likely to oppose the burial of Messianic Jews in Jewish cemeteries. There is also a lack of non-traditional Christian and public cemeteries. Some villages offer public cemeteries, but burials are expensive in those locations. Another problem is that some places offer cemeteries only for their own citizens. The few congregations where Christians are allowed to bury their dead are often far away.

Block 2.6: Christian couples have been hindered in adopting children or serving as foster parents because of their faith. (3.00 points)

Under Israeli law (as in other countries), the default position is to associate a child with an adoptive or foster family of the same religion as the child's biological parents (if the parents' religion is known to the agency). As Messianic Jews are not recognized as part of any religion, the authorities will not usually allow them to adopt a Jewish or a Muslim child. They would usually only allow them to adopt children from families registered under 'no religion', and sometimes those registered as 'Christian', but that would be an exception. In Israel, however, it is illegal to restrict adoption for such reasons, so if a couple decided to take their case to the Supreme Court, they would have a fighting chance. As far as is known, this has not happened yet.

Block 2.2: Registering the birth, wedding, death, etc. of Christians has been hindered or made impossible. (2.75 points)

Israel inherited its marriage registration system from the Ottoman Empire through the British. Under this system, only recognized religious authorities - the Orthodox-controlled Chief Rabbinate, mosques and historic churches - have the authority to perform marriages. Israel therefore has no civil but only religious marriages. Since evangelical churches are not recognized, registering a marriage can be difficult for Christians who belong to these churches. On the one hand, the government allows their marriages, but in fact, this marriage is not officially recognized by the authorities. So anyone who is not Jewish and not registered with any recognized religion or denomination must marry outside of Israel. This also affects the marriages of Jewish believers with non-Jewish husbands as Jews are only allowed to marry Jews. Moreover, if their faith is known, Messianic Jews will not always be able to find a rabbi who is willing to perform their marriage.

Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (2.75 points)

Christians of Jewish, Islamic or historical church backgrounds may experience resistance when they are baptized. Particularly Jews and Muslims generally consider baptism as the defining act of conversion. The resistance does not usually come from the authorities, but mainly from the family or community, who in some cases would exert a lot of pressure to prevent baptism.

Baptizing people under the age of 17 without their parents' consent is illegal and parents can stop the baptism. Historic churches are known to preach and teach against evangelical adultbaptism. Baptism can even be risky for a Muslim convert. For the authorities, the baptism of a Messianic Jew may be a decisive factor for whether or not they will be allowed to immigrate (because it means that they are no longer Jews as such and thus have no automatic right to live in Israel). Despite the fact that during public baptisms there has been outrage and threats from members of the Orthodox Jewish community, baptisms regularly take place in Israel, often in public places without any hindrance.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.8: Christians have had less access to health care because of their faith. (2.50 points)

Generally, Christians like other citizens have free access to health care in Israel since every resident is part of the public health system. This is different for some Messianic Jewish immigrants and/or their spouses who can be denied residence or citizenship for a long time, which excludes them from social security (incl. health insurance). Depending on their financial situation, this can affect their access to healthcare as they will have to pay for all medical treatment themselves.

Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (2.50 points)

The public sector is likely to employ people who match the dominant ethno-religious group in the area; and likewise private sector employers will have a tendency to hire people from the same ethno-religious group. Against this background, in particular people who are known to have changed their faith will be disadvantaged by those who have not, especially in conservative religious areas. A strengthening factor in this are the 'anti-missionary organizations' (e.g. Yad L'Achim) that seek to convince employers not to hire Jewish Messianic workers. Other issues, such as political, social and ethnic factors, also play a role for Arab Christians. Local experts say that in Muslim-majority villages, job opportunities for Christians are limited or that Muslims are the first priority. For example, the percentage of Christian employees in public jobs in such places is much lower than their percentage in that village. In the past, there have been regular reports of this happening, but since the adoption of various anti-discrimination laws, this is not done overtly but covertly, as it would be considered illegal. On the other hand, both Messianic Jews and Evangelical Arabs are rapidly rising up the socio-economic ladder as they tend to be motivated and have a strong work ethic.

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.). (2.25 points)

Christian clergy who can be identified by their dress (priests, monks, and nuns) have reported harassment in public by Orthodox Jews. The harassment usually involves swearing and spitting but can be violent as well. Also, some Christian women with a Muslim background will choose to continue wearing a veil to avoid harassment and hide their new faith. Christian women of both historical and non-traditional churches living in Muslim-majority villages can be subject to

pressure, especially in response to the way they dress. As a result, they do not always feel free to wear whatever they want. Messianic Jews in some predominantly Orthodox Jewish areas may be subjected to harassment from time to time. Usually this concerns mocking or threats but not actual violence. Messianic congregations can also experience problems when they want to rent a building for their gatherings, as the landlord can be put under pressure by Ultra-Orthodox Jews to stop renting.

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.). (2.25 points)

Christians from Orthodox Jewish and Muslim backgrounds have sometimes faced monitoring, especially in predominantly Orthodox Jewish and Muslim environments. The anti-missionary orthodox organization Yad L'Achim uses cameras, among other things, but also monitors Messianic believers and others active in evangelism via the Internet. According to press reports in Israel, Yad L'Achim and similar groups have connections with the Ministry of Interior where their information is used for assessing immigration applications. Converts from Islam can experience monitoring especially from their family.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.5: Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (local administration, government, army, etc.) for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)

Officially, Christians are treated in the same way as for any other religion. In practice, all categories of Christians can experience discrimination in contact with the authorities. Members of historic churches are mostly Israeli Arab and claim to be discriminated against mainly for ethnic and political reasons. In particular, property disputes regularly cause tensions between the State of Israel and traditional churches, especially in religiously sensitive areas such as Jerusalem and Nazareth. Christian associations (including Messianic Jewish congregations) and charities, among others, may experience difficulties in obtaining permits and tax exemptions. In addition, evangelical churches are not recognized by the state and may face extensive bureaucratic obstacles. Messianic Jews and/or their spouses may also experience discrimination when applying for immigration or citizenship and attempts are sometimes made to revoke an existing citizenship. There have been court cases against these decisions and in most cases they have turned out beneficially for the Messianic Jews involved. Finally, foreign Christians have been denied entry or forced to leave Israel because of their alleged involvement in missionary or political activities.

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. (2.50 points)

Israel has no constitution, but constitutional law is framed in basic laws. The Declaration of Independence guarantees religious freedom and the Basic Law further strengthens it. The state guarantees freedom of religion and by law every citizen can convert to any religion they wish. Christians have the freedom to express their faith and gather for meetings. The only restrictions are that minors (under the age of 18) are not allowed to be evangelized without parental consent

and known Messianic Jews are not allowed to immigrate to Israel under the Law of Return. However, this is against Jewish law, which assumes that a Jew born as a Jew will always remain a Jew and there have been successful lawsuits against immigration applications (by Messianic Jews) being rejected. Finally, the nation state law that defines Israel primarily as a nation of the Jewish people could have an effect on Arabs in general, as well as on non-Jewish ethnicities and on Christian and other non-Jewish religions.

Block 4.10: Media reporting has been incorrect or biased against Christians. (2.50 points)

This strongly depends on which media is involved. Whereas most Israeli media's reporting is, in principle, not hostile to Christians, journalists can from time to time give a distorted picture of the Christian faith, especially when it comes to Evangelical Christians or Messianic Jews and partly as a result of a lack of knowledge of the Christian faith. This allows prejudice against Messianic Jews, with authors of articles appearing to support the idea that Jews who profess Jesus as Messiah cannot call themselves Jews. In particular, local press managed by Orthodox Jews, for example in the Negev region, tend to arouse antipathy towards Messianic Jews and their congregations. In recent years, however, with a growing number of Messianic Jews, the coverage of quality newspapers seems to be shifting from hostile or biased to a more understanding and positive portrayal of who Messianic Jews are and what they stand for.

Block 4.11: Christians have been subjected to smear campaigns or hate speech. (2.50 points)

Local press controlled by Orthodox Jews has sparked antipathy towards Messianic Jews and their congregations, especially in the Negev region. Also, radical anti-missionary groups such as Yad L'Achim have waged hate campaigns against Messianic Jews and Evangelical Christians, accusing them of evangelism and thereby undermining or even destroying the Jewish people. Monasteries and churches have suffered from vandalism, especially in areas dominated by Ultra-Orthodox Jews. This vandalism includes the spraying of hate speech and anti-Christian and blasphemous slogans. In addition, in some cases imams have spoken against Christian beliefs (not necessarily directly against Christians) during their Friday sermons or during their teaching in small groups.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.2: It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government. (3.00 points)

After years of requests, Evangelical and Messianic congregations are still not officially recognized by the government, meaning they officially have fewer basic rights in marriage, funeral and other religious matters. They are registered as not-for-profit entities and operate as such like any other charitable organization. In October 2016, it was reported that the marriage problem had been largely resolved by allowing individual church groups to issue valid certificates. There are reportedly still problems with the validity of marriage certificates requiring members of non-traditional churches seeking to get a divorce to first join an historic church.

Block 5.18: Churches have been hindered in establishing, managing, maintaining and conducting schools, or charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural organizations, institutions and associations. (3.00 points)

There are many Christian institutions in Israel that function without experiencing problems. However, they can face hinderances if there are suspicions of involvement in evangelizing Jews. For this reason, the charitable status of several Christian organizations has been questioned and in some cases denied. For example, Messianic Jewish NGO Yachad Ramat Hasharon (YRH) was denied the status of a public institution. After a legal battle they were vindicated. A foreign organization usually has to sign a contract stating that it is not active in missionary work. In recent years, the Israeli Ministry of Education has significantly reduced financial support to schools owned by Christian churches. Church-run schools perceive this as pressure to become state schools which would mean losing their Christian identity. Furthermore, the first Messianic school was registered only recently. Messianic schools were previously unrecognized, but the courts ordered them to be recognized if they met all necessary criteria. Finally, in what appears to be a new development targeting historic Christian schools, shots were fired at Franciscan school in Nazareth in WWL 2024, while five masked men armed with clubs forced the nuns of the Salesian Sisters School in the same city to say "Ramadan be generous".

Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (2.75 points)

In general, churches can carry out their activities, including evangelism, without hindrance. However, anti-missionary groups closely monitor Messianic Jewish congregations and seek to hinder their activities, especially in predominantly ultra-Orthodox Jewish areas. What stood out in WWL 2024 was that a historic church in Jerusalem was disrupted during a religious service when two radical Israeli men violently entered and attacked a bishop and two priests. Finally, dozens of migrant churches (both evangelical and historic) in Tel Aviv have been under pressure for several years to close their doors due to alleged inappropriate zoning plans, despite their many years of presence. Incidentally the municipality reportedly urged property owners not to rent to church groups.

Block 5.3: Christian communities have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings or in claiming historical religious premises and places of worship which had been taken from them earlier. (2.75 points)

Renovation of historic churches usually proceeds without problems from the authorities. Messianic congregations have been prevented from using buildings for their services, both due to mass protests from the Orthodox Jewish community members and the refusal of state officials to grant permission. For this reason, many of them congregate in buildings in industrial areas.

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.

| Israel: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire | WWL 2024 | WWL 2023 |
|---|----------|----------|
| 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? | 18 | 2 |
| 6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons? | 1 | 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 |

| Israel: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire | WWL 2024 | WWL 2023 |
|---|----------|----------|
| 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)? | 6 | 1 |
| 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? | 1 | 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? | 2 | 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? | 0 | 0 |

For details concerning violent incidents, see above: *Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period.*

5 Year trends

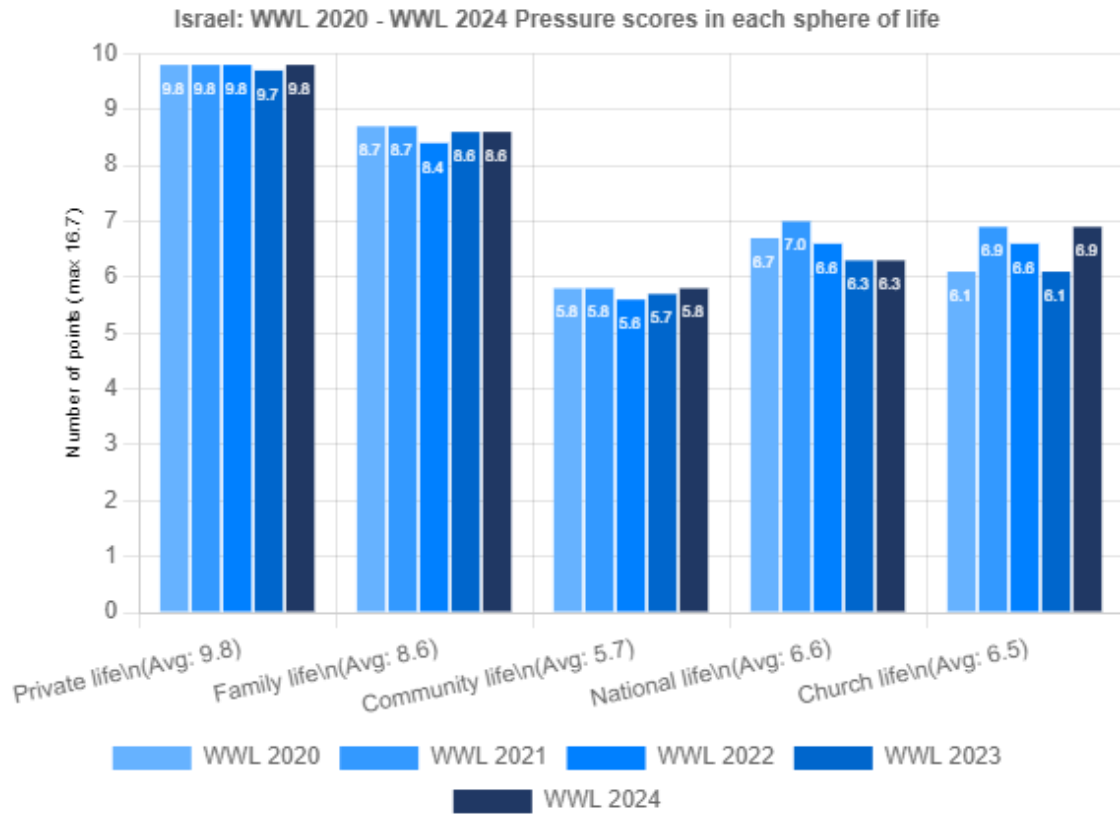
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

| Israel: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024 | Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 2024 | 7.5 |
| 2023 | 7.3 |
| 2022 | 7.4 |
| 2021 | 7.6 |
| 2020 | 7.5 |

The table above shows how the overall score for pressure on Christians has remained stable in the last five reporting periods at a fairly high level of 7.3 - 7.6 points.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



In the past five WWL reporting periods, pressure in the *Private* and *Family spheres of life* continues to score the highest of all five spheres, which is typical of a situation where opposition mainly affects converts. Pressure scores in the *Community* and *National spheres of life* ranged from low to fairly high, while pressure in the *Church sphere of life* continues to score quite high, indicating a situation where the Church is restricted in some respects but relatively free in others. In WWL 2024, it is notable that after a predominantly downward trend, the score for Church Life rose considerably from 6.1 points in WWL 2023 to a score of 6.8, reflecting increasing pressure on Christians and church activities in Israel.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

Violence scores have fluctuated in recent years, as can be seen in the chart below. The trend of rising scores was only interrupted in WWL 2023 with a relatively lower score and continued unabated in WWL 2024 with a score of 6.7 points, unmatched in recent years and mainly caused by the high number of attacks on church buildings and properties.



Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

| Group | Female Pressure Points |
|---------------------|--|
| Economic | - |
| Political and Legal | - |
| Security | Incarceration by family (house arrest) |
| Social and Cultural | Violence – Verbal |
| Technological | - |

Female converts from a Muslim or Jewish background typically face the greatest difficulties for their faith, but 'conversion' from one Christian denomination to another is also met with hostility. In some instances families resign themselves to their choice of religion, but converts are made to understand that they are not allowed to talk openly about their new faith. While relatively rare, others have been placed under house arrest and denied contact with other Christians. Women are more vulnerable to this pressure, as they have less freedom of movement than men. Traditional cultural norms also places them in a subservient role within the family structure, under the authority of men.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

| Group | Male Pressure Points |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| Economic | - |
| Political and Legal | - |
| Security | Violence – physical |
| Social and Cultural | - |
| Technological | - |

Christian men and boys experience relatively little gender-specific religious persecution. As they are more exposed to the public sphere than women and girls, they are more likely to be affected by physical persecution or social pressures. Church leaders may be particularly vulnerable, in part as they are easily identifiable by their religious clothing. Attacks are, however, very rare, although there was an increase in the WWL 2024 reporting period.

Persecution of other religious minorities

In general, forms of inequality and discrimination exist among non-Jews in society. Muslims are the largest religious minority in Israel and report being discriminated against as Arabs and Muslims by the wider Jewish community and government. Many Arab Sunni Muslim communities in Israel are marginalized and have high crime rates, gun violence and are underdeveloped. There were several 'price tag' attacks directed at Arab (mostly Muslim) goals or communities. 'Price tag' attacks are a mixture of politically and religiously-motivated vandalism carried out by Ultra-Orthodox Jews in protest against Islamic terrorist attacks or the destruction of Jewish settlers' homes in the West Bank. Some Druze, especially those living in the Golan area, also report experiencing discrimination.

Progressive streams within Judaism (such as Reform Judaism) can face marginalization for reasons of faith as well. Chief Rabbis, for example, speak out against this movement, which they refer to as "falsified Judaism". The US State Department (IRFR 2022 Israel) reported on this topic as follows:

- "The Chief Rabbinate continued not to recognize as Jewish some Israeli citizens who self-identified as Jewish, including Reform and Conservative converts to Judaism and others who could not prove Jewish matrilineage to the satisfaction of the Chief Rabbinate. As a result, the government prohibited those individuals from accessing official Jewish marriage, divorce, and burial services in the country."
- "According to NGOs, there were Jewish couples who married unofficially in the country, outside of the rabbinate's authority, in unofficial Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and secular ceremonies which did not register at the MOI [Ministry of Interior]."

Examples of violent incidents (IRFR 2022 Israel):

- **7 February 2022:** "Unknown persons punctured the tires of 20 cars in Kfar Qasim, and sprayed graffiti with the Star of David and the phrase, 'Jewish wake up. Fight the enemy'."
- **9 March 2022:** "30 individuals vandalized 30 cars in Jaljulia and sprayed graffiti warning Arab/Palestinian men not to become involved romantically with Jewish women."

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Religious nationalism (Strong)

As one of the most right-wing and religiously conservative governments in Israel's history is in power and Prime Minister Netanyahu is fighting for his survival against allegations of corruption which make him willing to go to any lengths to survive, the country is in political crisis where a growing number of Israelis fear the erosion of its democratic institutions. The government passed a law in 2023 that would subject the Supreme Court, which has served as a bastion for defending the rights of minority groups, to the cabinet through reforms. This put the freedoms and rights of Christian communities, especially Messianic Jewish and evangelical groups, at risk of being threatened. However, in January 2024, Israel's Supreme Court overturned the controversial judicial reform, after months of internal unrest and demonstrations. The government's current first priority is the war against Hamas, which could have decisive consequences for its survival according to the EIU Israel profile: "The intelligence and other failings of his government in the run-up to the [7 October 2023] attack are likely to precipitate his downfall within months."

Clan oppression (currently 'Weak')

Secularism and atheism are growing among young people, challenging all religions. This could lead to conservative religious families becoming even more strict which could cause more pressure on converts (from Muslim, Jewish and inner-Christian backgrounds). However, for converts belonging to more moderate religious families this could lead to more acceptance. Simultaneously, crises and external threats - for instance, the Hamas-Israel war since 7 October 2023 - generally tend to increase solidarity for one's own group and increase prejudice against other groups. This may mean that the pressure on converts - who consciously choose to leave their own identity group - will further increase from within their own group.

Islamic oppression (currently 'Weak')

Although most Muslim Israelis generally hold moderate or even secular convictions, local Christians observe a radicalization among smaller sections of society. Christians feel vulnerable and threatened by this, which is why many consider leaving the country if they can. As a result of migration, the percentage of Christians within the Arab community in Israel is declining. This means that more and more businesses are run by Muslims, who are becoming increasingly influential. As a result, many Christians are losing their jobs. This trend is expected to develop further as the emigration of Arab Christians continues.

Further useful reports

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/>.

As in earlier years, these are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Israel>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>.