

World  
Watch  
Research

## Jordan: Full Country Dossier

January 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	11	-	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 / Jordan

## Brief country details

In the table below, the number of Christians shown is an Open Doors (OD) estimate.

Jordan: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
10,312,000	170,000	1.6% (OD estimate)

## Map of country



Jordan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	65	48
WWL 2023	65	49
WWL 2022	66	39
WWL 2021	64	38
WWL 2020	64	33

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Jordan:	
Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Clan oppression	Ethnic group leaders, One's own (extended) family
Islamic oppression	Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders, One's own (extended) family, Government officials, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials
Christian denominational protectionism	Religious leaders of other churches, Government officials

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

## Brief description of the persecution situation

Most Christians in Jordan belong to Orthodox or Roman Catholic churches. Overall, they enjoy a significant level of religious freedom but experience discrimination in employment and restrictions against public preaching. However, an open testimony of faith by a Christian with Muslim background can lead to beatings, arrest and killing. Christians active in evangelism and/or helping converts can face threats and obstruction in daily life.

Compared to Christians living in other Middle Eastern countries, Christians in Jordan can expect to live in relative security. King Abdallah's leadership and government appear to tolerate and - to a certain degree - support recognized churches. However, the state does exert pressure on all Christian communities, especially through monitoring. Unrecognized churches, particularly those that actively evangelize, can face harassment from public authorities. Although Jordan likes to present itself as a beacon of tolerance and interfaith dialogue, radicalized Sunnis and returning jihadists from Syria and Iraq continue to pose a threat to the Christian community.

Jordan has a disproportionately high number of Salafi Muslims who are potentially a danger to Christians and other 'non-conforming' groups living in the country. The state continues to control the preaching in mosques and - in an attempt to rein in radicalism - requires preachers to abstain from talking about politics to avoid social and political unrest.

## Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Jordan has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights in the following international treaties:

1. [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR)
2. [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR)
3. [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) (CAT)
4. [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW)
5. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

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

- Christian converts are ostracized and faced with opposition by their families, and threatened with loss of child custody in the case of divorce (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Children of Christian converts are automatically registered as Muslim (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Christians face workplace discrimination because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 26)
- Christian female converts are forced to marry non-Christian men and pressured to renounce their faith (ICCPR Art. 23; CEDAW Art. 16 and ICESCR Art. 10)

## Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

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

- **Christians detained:** Converts and other Christians involved in mission work were called in regularly for questioning. The length of questioning varied from 20 minutes to 12 days.
- **Christians sexually harassed:** Women who do not dress as a Muslim - i.e., who do not wear a hijab - risk harassment. It is estimated that at least 10 Christian women were sexually harassed for this reason. Therefore, many Christian women choose not to use public transport or taxis especially at night.
- **Christians physically or mentally abused:** Several converts and other Christians active in aiding and discipling converts were physically or mentally abused, most often by the families of the converts.

## Specific examples of positive developments

**May 2023:** The Councils of Christian Denominations (CCD) in Jordan approved a bill that will work to grant equal inheritance rights to Christian men and women. The draft law needs to be approved by the government and parliament, after which a royal decree should follow ([Al-Monitor](#), 20 May 2023). Currently, Christians in Jordan are subject to Islamic Sharia law regarding inheritance, with men receiving twice as much inheritance as women. In addition, part of the legacy is given to a male member of the family if the direct heirs are all female.



**December 2022:** King Abdullah actively promotes interfaith dialogue and tolerance and has often emphasized the importance of preserving the Christian presence in the Middle East. In an [Abouna.org article published on 29 December 2022](#) he stated: "If we don't have any Christians in the region, I think that is a disaster for all of us. They are part of our past, they are part of our present, and they must be part of our future." He also highlighted Jordan's efforts and dedication to protect Muslim and Christian holy places.

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Jordan):

- Throughout 2022, the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies (RIIFS), which was "established under the patronage of Prince Hassan bin Talal, continued to organize and host periodic discussions and sponsored initiatives with religious leaders and social activists to promote political pluralism, cultural diversity, religious tolerance, and civic responsibility in the country and throughout the region. It also held comparative religion seminars on Muslim and Christian doctrinal teachings."
- "In October [2022], the Catholic Center for Studies and Media and the American University in Madaba hosted dozens of students from various Jordanian universities for a workshop on using social media to promote interfaith harmony. The training focused on promoting dialogue to counter religiously based hate speech and promote respect and human dignity."
- "Some social media users defended interfaith tolerance, with posts condemning content that criticized Christianity or tried to discourage interfaith dialogue."

## External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Al-Monitor - <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2023/05/christians-jordan-welcome-progress-inheritance-law>
- Specific examples of positive developments: article published on 29 December 2022 - <https://en.abouna.org/content/king-abdullah-ii-if-we-don%E2%80%99t-have-any-christians-region-i-think-disaster-all-us>

# WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Jordan

## Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/23 Jordan report	AI Jordan 2022	<a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/jordan/report-jordan/">https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/jordan/report-jordan/</a>	11 July 2023
BBC News Jordan profile - updated 19 April 2023	BBC Jordan profile	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14631981">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14631981</a>	11 July 2023
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI Jordan Report 2022	<a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/JOR">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/JOR</a>	11 July 2023
CIA World Factbook Jordan - updated 3 July 2023	World Factbook Jordan	<a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/jordan/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/jordan/</a>	11 July 2023
Crisis24 Jordan report (Garda World)	Crisis24 Jordan report	<a href="https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/jordan">https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/jordan</a>	11 July 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2022 – covering 167 countries	EIU Democracy Index 2022 - MENA pp.60-63	<a href="https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/DI-final-version-report.pdf">https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/DI-final-version-report.pdf</a>	11 July 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2023 Jordan	<a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>	11 July 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Jordan not included	Democracy Index 2023	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores</a>	
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2023 Jordan	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/jordan/freedom-world/2023">https://freedomhouse.org/country/jordan/freedom-world/2023</a>	11 July 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report – covering 70 countries	Freedom on the Net 2023 Jordan	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/jordan/freedom-net/2023">https://freedomhouse.org/country/jordan/freedom-net/2023</a>	4 January 2024
Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 – covering 170 countries	GIWPS 2021 Jordan profile	<a href="https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/jordan/">https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/jordan/</a>	11 July 2023
Girls Not Brides Jordan report	Girls Not Brides Jordan	<a href="https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/jordan/">https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/jordan/</a>	11 July 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 - Jordan country chapter	HRW 2023 Jordan country chapter	<a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/jordan">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/jordan</a>	11 July 2023
Internet World Stats available in 2023	IWS 2023 Jordan	<a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm#jo">https://www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm#jo</a>	11 July 2023
Middle East Concern Jordan report – MEC covers 24 countries	MEC Jordan report	<a href="https://meconcern.org/countries/jordan/">https://meconcern.org/countries/jordan/</a>	4 January 2024
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2023 Jordan	<a href="https://rsf.org/en/jordan">https://rsf.org/en/jordan</a>	11 July 2023
Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2022 Jordan	<a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/jordan">https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/jordan</a>	11 July 2023
UNDP Human Development Report Jordan 2021	UNDP HDR Jordan	<a href="https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#countries/JOR">https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#countries/JOR</a>	11 July 2023
US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report Jordan	IRFR 2022 Jordan	<a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/jordan/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/jordan/</a>	11 July 2023
USCIRF 2023 country reports – covering 17 CPC / 11 SWL, Jordan not included	USCIRF 2023	<a href="https://www.uscirf.gov/countries">https://www.uscirf.gov/countries</a>	
World Bank Jordan data 2021	World Bank Jordan data	<a href="https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=J OR">https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=J OR</a>	11 July 2023
World Bank Jordan overview – updated 9 January 2023	World Bank Jordan overview	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/jordan/overview">https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/jordan/overview</a>	11 July 2023
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook Jordan - April 2023	Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Jordan	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/macro-poverty-outlook">https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/macro-poverty-outlook</a>	11 July 2023

## Recent history

After the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I, the League of Nations mandated Britain to take responsibility for large parts of the Middle East. In the early 1920s, Britain separated a semi-autonomous region from Palestine, with the name Transjordan. The region became independent in 1946 and the Hashemite Kingdom was established. From 1953 King Hussein governed the kingdom for most of the 20th century. In 1967 Jordan lost the West Bank to Israel in the Six Day War. King Hussein permanently relinquished claims to the West Bank in 1988 and signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994. After Hussein's death in 1999, his eldest son King Abdullah II succeeded him.

Compared to other countries in the region, Jordan is one of the last islands of relative calm for Christians. The government narrative is inclusive of Christians, the king himself promotes interfaith dialogue and tolerance, and for their small number Christians are well-represented in politics, the army and the economy. State-recognized Christian communities can live relatively freely if they abstain from proselytization. However, the state will put pressure on non-recognized groups and monitor their activities, especially if they actively evangelize.

Affected by the Arab Spring in 2011, Jordan implemented political reforms including the passage of a new electoral law and devolution of authority. The country has served as a safe haven for refugees from Lebanon, Iraq and Syria but has experienced added strain on its economy and society as a result. Additionally, it has become a transit country for Islamic militants, increasing

the threat of Islamist attacks. Jordan faced attacks by Islamists from 2016 to 2019, leading to concerns about restrictions on citizens' rights under the guise of combating terrorism. During the COVID-19 the government used the crisis to silence dissent and violate freedom of association and expression. Parliamentary elections in November 2020 showed voter apathy and resulted in a majority of pro-government candidates. Protests against the economic impact of lockdowns and austerity measures, as well as demonstrations expressing solidarity with Palestinian issues, regularly occur, sometimes resulting in detentions. The country experienced a royal feud between King Abdullah and Crown Prince Hamza, which threatened stability in 2021 and 2022. Constitutional amendments passed in January 2022 increased the king's power according to critics, which seems to be in stark contrast to his earlier statements about democratic aspirations.

In December 2022, escalating protests over high fuel prices, stemming from IMF-imposed austerity measures, reached a critical point when a [Jordanian officer](#) was shot in the head in Maan (Al-Monitor, 16 December 2022), reflecting the intensification of demonstrations sparked by a prolonged strike against fuel price increases and government taxes across various regions of the country. The regime's proposal for long-term political reforms aiming to lead to parliamentary rule within a decade, has met with popular indifference and skepticism.

The war between Hamas and Israel that erupted on 7 October 2023, has led to heightened geopolitical tensions in the region. With more than 2.3 million Palestinians in the country with a history of unrest and violence, Jordan fears that domestic unrest resulting from the conflict will escalate into a real threat to the status quo within the kingdom. Jordan strongly condemned Israel's counteractions in Gaza and on 5 November 2023, recalled its ambassador and suspended further cooperation.

## Political and legal landscape

The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index (EIU 2022) classifies Jordan as an authoritarian regime. FFP's Fragile States Index (FSI 2023 Jordan) puts Jordan in the elevated warning category with a score of 75.7 points (ranking 68/179).

There are two major political forces at play in Jordan: King Abdullah II with the royal family on the one hand, and the armed forces and secret police on the other. The king has a considerable amount of influence since he appoints governments, approves legislation and has the power to dissolve parliament. While the royal family seems keen on promoting Jordan as a modern, multi-religious country (also underlining the importance of Jordanian Christians in Jordanian society), the secret police seem to be more concerned with repressing minority Muslim factions as well as keeping Christians in line.

In the elections for Jordan's Lower House of Parliament in September 2016, the [Islamic Action Front \(IAF\)](#) participated for the first time since nearly a decade of boycotting elections; they won 15 out of 130 seats (Agenzia Fides, 24 September 2016). The IAF is the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood. Nine Christians - the minimum quota guaranteed to the Christian community as a religious minority – were also elected to the Lower House. Although IAF's return is not likely to have any great effect in the short run, the country's well-organized opposition should not be underestimated. In July 2020, the original association of the Muslim Brotherhood

was disbanded after it had failed to gain legal status. Now only the IAF remains, which is currently the largest opposition party and is allegedly controlled by moderate elements close to the Crown and the so-called [Zamzam initiative](#) (Wilson Center, 13 September 2017). This has been welcomed by some Christians considering it to be a positive step in the development of a civil state in Jordan.

In October 2021, Jordanian Prime Minister Bisher al-Khasawneh carried out a cabinet reshuffle. This was the fourth time since taking office one year earlier. A new Ministry of Investment was created and the government is said to have more room to tackle social and economic problems. In January 2022, the Jordanian Upper and Lower Houses approved a number of controversial constitutional amendments. Critics say these reforms enhance the power of the monarchy at the expense of the government. One part of these amendments was the establishment of a new governing body, the National Security Council, made up of the Prime Minister, the Foreign and Interior Ministers, the heads of the King's security apparatus and others appointed by the King. It has extensive powers and can bypass the Council of Ministers or Parliament. According to [European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity](#): (EDFS, 4 March 2022):

- "Even more controversial is that King Abdullah receives the power to bypass the Council of Ministers in the appointment of powerful political appointments, such as the Chief Justice or Grand Mufti. King Abdullah already has an extensive set of powers in the Jordanian political landscape. These amendments clearly are a setback in creating a system of checks and balances, a feature needed for a well-functioning Jordanian democracy. On the other hand, the constitution now gives more support for people prosecuted for party membership. In Jordan, most parliamentarians run on family or tribal platform. It is a long-standing desire in Jordan that political parties gain the possibility to form a majority government, with the goal of re-energizing political trust and legitimacy. In the last legislative elections, only thirty percent of Jordanians casted their vote. The apathy in the country towards its political institution is high."

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

- "The constitution of Jordan establishes Islam as the State religion. It affirms the principle of non-discrimination, including on the basis of religion, and states that the free exercise of worship and religious rites are to be safeguarded, provided these are consistent with public order and morality. Recognised non-Muslim communities are given freedom to govern most personal status issues according to their own rites through a religious court system (though some communities, including many Evangelical denominations, do not currently have the level of legal status required to operate their own courts). Under applicable Islamic law, Muslims are effectively prohibited from changing their religion, and women registered as Muslim are not permitted to marry non-Muslims."

### **Gender perspective**

As stated above (in: *Specific examples of positive developments*), a new a draft law has been approved which will "work toward granting [equal inheritance rights](#) for men and women" (Al-Monitor, 20 May 2023). It is hoped this could bring positive change for Christians since it would

allow Christian women to get equal treatment in inheritance matters and would remove the influence of Islamic law in this field when Christians are involved. However, the bill still needs to be endorsed and accredited by the government and parliament, after which a royal decree will follow.

The Jordanian legal landscape has long been restrictive towards women and girls. Whilst it ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1992, it maintained a reservation to Article 16, which provides for the elimination of discrimination against women as they enter or exit a marriage. 10% of girls are married before the age of 18, with Syrian and Palestinian refugee girls at heightened risk (Girls Not Brides Jordan). The legal minimum age for marriage is 18, although exemptions can be made with judicial consent. A woman must obtain consent from her male guardian before marrying and must file for divorce through the courts, unlike her husband who has the right to divorce her unilaterally (under Articles 80 and 97 of the Personal Status Law). Representing a positive development, Article 308 of the Penal Code was removed in 2017, which previously exonerated a man in cases of rape or sexual assault upon marriage to the victim.

## Religious landscape

Jordan: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	170,000	1.6
Muslim	9,807,059	95.1
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethno-religionist	0	0.0
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	24,722	0.2
Atheist	51,836	0.5
Agnostic	254,198	2.5
Other	4,984	0.0
<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) Adapted according to OD-estimate.

Around 95% of the population are Muslim of which the majority are Sunni, and Open Doors estimates that approximately 1.6% of the population are Christian. Jordan hosts large numbers of refugees, mostly from Iraq and Syria, of whom several thousand are Christians. The table above shows that, for a Middle Eastern country, there are relatively large numbers of Agnostics and Atheists in Jordan.

Tension has increased between moderate and radical Islamic elements in Jordanian society. Meanwhile, King Abdullah II wants to reform society and has been implementing measures that are beneficial to religious minorities including Christians, such as changes in university curriculum literature (which took place at the beginning of the 2017 academic year). This involved deleting passages discriminating against non-Muslim religions which could encourage Salafi-Islamist views. However, such measures are causing unrest - especially among conservative Muslims - and are thus dividing society.

In September 2016 there was the extra-judicial killing of a prominent author (an atheist from an Orthodox Christian family) for posting a cartoon mocking "the god of Daesh" (i.e. the Islamic State group). This killing shows how freedom of expression is being suppressed by radical Islamic elements and has resulted in increased pressure on Christians and others with views not in line with radical Islam. (NB: This killing was not scored in the WWL 2017 analysis as it was not a specifically anti-Christian attack.).

On the occasion of Jordan's National Day in 2021, the local Bible Society had placed verses from a Psalm on banners in several places in Amman. Some Jordanians recognized these verses as being taken from the Jewish holy book and (apparently unaware that these are also part of the Christian Bible) they put pressure on the governor of Amman to have them removed. As a result, the banners were removed, tensions rose, and there were attacks on Christians on social media. Hate-speech and threats against Jordanian Christians on social media have clearly increased since the COVID-19 crisis due to the increase in Christian online activity as a result of lockdowns. In addition, there was an increase in online accusations against Christians - for example, by some Jordanian Sunni preachers - blaming Christians for the recent economic challenges.

## Economic landscape

The World Bank classifies Jordan as an upper-middle-income economy. However, the Kingdom is faced with economic problems such as high levels of poverty, unemployment and underemployment, budget deficits and current account deficits and government debt. Without any oil supplies and few natural resources of its own, Jordan is highly dependent on foreign aid. The main donor countries are the Gulf States (e.g. Saudi Arabia) as well as the USA and Europe. This makes Jordan relatively vulnerable to influence from these countries. Jordan has been invited to join the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a political, economic and military partnership between all Gulf states (except Yemen).

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has renewed its support for the Kingdom, but the Jordanian economy suffered greatly from measures imposed to contain the spread of COVID-19, which particularly hit the service sector and tourism - both important growth sectors for the Jordanian economy. Meanwhile a slight economic recovery has started according to the World Bank Jordan overview:

- "Jordan has begun its recovery from the COVID-19 shock — real GDP grew by 2.2% in 2021 following a 1.6% contraction in 2020. Growth rebounded to 2.5 percent in Q1-2022, supported by the reopening of the economy and the recovery of contact-intensive services notably tourism. However, higher global commodity prices led to an acceleration in headline inflation and labor market conditions remain challenging. The unemployment rate

is still above pre-pandemic levels (22.6% in Q2-2022), especially among women (29.4%) and youth (46.1% among those under 25 years old). Labor force participation is also low, (33.5% in Q2-2022), particularly for women (14.2%), one of the lowest rates in the world."

Economists warn that Jordan's middle class is [facing extinction](#) due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the wave of inflation resulting from the Russian-Ukrainian crisis, causing it to lose its foothold within the social, economic, and cultural fabric of Jordanian society. The political stability of the country depends on its economic prosperity and the success of involving the population in economic progress. Instability due to the economic situation may have negative consequences for Christians in the country. While the economic situation is not generally a factor leading to the persecution of Christians, it is a very important factor for those considering the possibility of emigration.

### Gender perspective

Women are among the most economically vulnerable in Jordan, primarily due to restricted employment opportunities as well as patrilineal inheritance laws. Despite having achieved gender parity in relation to access to education, female labor force participation rate is below 15%, compared to a 62.5% participation rate for men within the same age demography (World Bank Jordan data). This, however, is not reflective of women's aspirations. According to [Georgetown WPS Index report 2019/20](#), 60% of women agreed with the statement: "Having a job is the best way for a woman to be an independent person." As part of its 2021 [Gender Mainstreaming Strategy](#), the Jordanian government proposed to increase female participation in its armed forces; for instance, the Jordanian Special Forces (JAF) and to increase female participation in combat roles from 3% to 5% (Middle East Institute, 28 March 2023).

## Social and cultural landscape

According to the World Factbook Jordan and UNDP HDR Jordan:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Jordanian 69.3%, Syrian 13.3%, Palestinian 6.7%, Egyptian 6.7%, Iraqi 1.4%, other 2.6% (2015 est.)
- **Main languages:** Arabic (official), English (widely understood among upper and middle classes)
- **Urban population:** 92% of total population (2023)
- **Literacy rate:** 98.4% of the population age 15 and over can read and write.
- **HDI score and ranking:** With a score of 0.720 Jordan ranks 102nd out of 191 countries and falls in the 'High Human Development' category. From 1990 to 2021, Jordan's HDI value rose 15.8%.
- **Life expectancy:** 76.3 at birth.
- **Education:** Mean years of schooling is 10.4, an average that increased by 5.4 years since 1990.
- **Unemployment:** 21.9% of Jordan's labor force was without official employment first quarter of 2023, according to the [Jordanian Department of Statistics](#). The youth unemployment rate fell to the still very high percentage of 46.1% (from 52.1% in the fourth quarter of 2021, ages 15 - 24) (42.1% for males against 64.1% for females).



[According to Middle East Monitor reporting on 16 May 2023](#), World Bank warned that Jordan's economy is at risk of shocks and rising poverty rates, surpassing pre-pandemic levels. The bank's report highlighted the suppressed real income rates of Jordanians, predicting a rapid reduction in poverty due to weak economic growth, limited job opportunities, labor market division, low productivity, and weak household income growth. The report attributed the slowdown in growth rates to regional and global pressures on Jordan's social and economic landscape in the past decade

Jordanian culture is largely shaped by tension between native Jordanians and a variety of newer refugees, who are estimated to make up over 6% of the total population. The majority of the population consists of Palestinians, most of whom fled as a result of the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948 and 1967. Most of these received citizenship in the early 1950s. Palestinian Jordanians (“West Bankers”) are not treated equally compared to most other nationals who are from Bedouin descent (“East Bankers”) and have been living in the area for centuries. Discrimination of West Bankers is especially felt in the area of employment in the army, government and public sector (which is limited to East Bankers only), leaving just the private sector for Palestinians. Moreover, Palestinian Jordanians are discriminated against in health and economic sectors and in state-provided education. Priority is given to East Bankers and, in general, these are loyal to the king. As a result of widespread discrimination and disempowerment of non-nationals, social cohesion in Jordan is under pressure.

### Gender perspective

In Jordan's predominately Islamic context, men and women are expected to assume traditional roles; women remain typically restricted to roles that are subordinate to men ([IREX, 9 March 2021](#)). Domestic violence reportedly increased during COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. Many victims remain fearful of reporting crimes due to high impunity for perpetrators and the widespread societal tolerance for violence against women. Studies indicate that killings of women and children increased by [94%](#) in 2022 compared to the previous year (New Arab, 10 January 2023).

Particularly affecting female converts, marriages between women from a Muslim background and non-Muslims are not recognized (HRW 2023 Jordan country chapter).

### Technological landscape

- **Internet usage:** 88% penetration – survey date: early 2023 ([Datareportal](#))
- **Facebook usage:** 92.3% penetration – survey date: May 2023 ([Statcounter](#), last accessed on 23 June 2023)

According to World Bank Jordan data:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 69 per 100 inhabitants (7.6 million subscribers, first quarter of 2023, [Telecommunications Regulatory Commission](#)).



Freedom House made the following assessment (Freedom on the Net 2023):

- "Internet freedom in Jordan remains restricted. Access to the internet has improved significantly in recent years, although concerns about state surveillance of online activity persist. The government annually blocks access to online communications platforms during high school exams, and TikTok was separately blocked during the coverage period. Online journalists, activists, and social media users can be prosecuted for their criticism of the government, based on several laws that penalize legitimate expression online. Journalists are pressured to remove online content, and authorities frequently issue gag orders to limit media coverage of politically sensitive topics. During the coverage period, a 10-day internet shutdown was issued in the south of Jordan amid protests. In August 2023, after the coverage period, the king approved a new Cybercrime Law, which, among other things, includes criminal penalties for broadly defined online speech and introduces additional punishments for the use of circumvention tools."
- "According to Article 11 of the 2015 Cybercrime Law, internet users face at least three months in jail and a maximum fine of \$2,800 if they are found guilty of defamation on social media or in online media outlets. In practical terms, this means that journalists face harsher penalties for defamation online than in print publications, since the PPL prohibits the jailing of journalists for press offenses. In 2015, the Law Interpretation Bureau ruled that Article 11 of the Cybercrime Law supersedes other legislation, rendering journalists' immunity under the PPL largely irrelevant as they can be jailed for any defamatory articles that appear online. Under the 2023 Cybercrime Law, which was passed after the coverage period and replaces the 2015 Cybercrime Law, internet users can face up to six months in prison and a fine for any content deemed to promote, instigate, or insight immorality."
- "The PPL bans the publication of "material that is inconsistent with the principles of freedom, national obligation, human rights, and Arab-Islamic values. "Article 38 of the law prohibits any "contempt, slander, or defamation of or abuse of" religions or prophets."

Jordanian Christians are increasingly anxious about what they can write about on social media (even concerning posts about food during Ramadan) and have reported a high level of self-censorship to avoid any possibility of insulting the Islamic majority. Social media mobbing is the main reason for such fear. If relatives observe a Christian from an Islamic background or a Muslim accessing Christian media, it is likely they will put pressure on them to give up their interest in Christianity. Also, the authorities are known to have monitored the mobile phones of Christians involved in ministry to converts from Islam to Christianity.

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Jordan):

- "Religious leaders reported continued online hate speech directed towards religious minorities and moderates, frequently through social media. Some social media users defended interfaith tolerance, with posts condemning content that criticized Christianity or tried to discourage interfaith dialogue."
- "Criticism online and in social media continued to target converts from Islam to other religions."
- "Religious minorities expressed concerns that some Muslim leaders preached intolerance. Christians reported they self-segregated into Christian enclaves in Amman and its outskirts"

to escape social pressure and threats. Although Christians clustered in specific neighborhoods and sought life abroad for safety and community support, Christian leaders stated it was difficult to categorize the desire to relocate solely based on religious identity, saying Christians relocated to the cities and moved abroad seeking economic opportunities as well."

## Security situation

Despite overall security stability, Jordan has faced four Islamist attacks in recent years, spanning cross-border incidents, a castle shoot-out in Karak (2016), a bombing at a Christian music festival in Fuheis (2018), and a stabbing targeting Western tourists in Jerash (2019). In 2020, Jordan's intelligence service claimed to have thwart an Islamist attack on a church and an alcohol-licensed shop, arresting individuals with alleged links to the Islamic State group. Human rights advocates criticize Jordan's rulers for leveraging terrorism threats to curtail citizens' and parliament's rights, and the country grapples with a disproportionately high per capita presence of Islamist thinkers and fighters, partly fueled by the repatriation concerns of those who fought in Syria and Iraq. The Hamas-Israel war had led to increased tensions in the region, raising concerns in Jordan about potential domestic unrest and threats to the kingdom's stability due to its significant Palestinian population and an increased risk of militant attacks.

According to Crisis24's Jordan report, Jordan's country risk level is categorized as 'medium' and the following explanation is given:

- "The security environment in Jordan is relatively stable by regional standards and thousands of international business travelers and tourists visit the country each month without issue. Petty theft poses the primary threat to visitors, particularly in urban centers and tourist sites. Violent crime is rare. Civil unrest occurs frequently over various socio-economic and political issues and can escalate into violence. Tribal and inter-clan tensions occasionally escalate into communal violence. Conflict spillover from Syria is a threat in the northeastern border areas, and Jordanian security forces periodically clash with border infiltrators. Parts of the northeast at the border with Syria have been declared a closed military zone. The Islamic State group has been linked to a number of attacks against security and military forces, however Jordan's capable counter-terrorism forces help to mitigate this threat."

## Gender perspective

Christian refugees who fled to Jordan in recent years - e.g. from Syria - are vulnerable in the context of their displacement. Studies have shown that women are disproportionately affected by conflict and protracted crises ([UN OCHA](#), 14 June 2023; [Action Aid](#), 19 March 2020).

The rate of early marriages among the Syrian refugee community in Jordan is high, and the threat of sexual and gender-based violence remains an ongoing issue. This largely affects women and girls, but instances of sexual assaults against men and boys are believed to be underreported ([SGBV sub-working group](#), UNHCR, 2015; [DRC et al](#), 22 February 2021). According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, [49.5%](#) of all registered people of concern in Jordan are women and girls (UN OCHA, 31 May 2023).

## Trends analysis

### 1) Jordanian society is becoming increasingly polarized

The increasing polarization of Jordanian society is encouraging liberals and Christians to speak out against radical Islamic developments in the country. This has had serious consequences as can be seen in the extra-judicial killing of a prominent author in 2016 (see above: *Religious landscape*) and shows how freedom of expression is being suppressed by radical Islamic elements. This is leading to increasing pressure on Christians and others with views not in line with radical Islam, a development which is not expected to diminish in the short term. Contrary to efforts made by the King, the government is reportedly pursuing an agenda to promote the growth of Islamic influence at the expense of other religions, such as Christianity. The police sometimes arrest people when their activities are perceived as going against Islamic values (such as a swimming pool party) to please the masses. The social environment has also become less tolerant over time, and there are reportedly increasingly negative attitudes in public opinion emerging about the existence of Christians in the country. There has been increased Christian activity on social media, including that of evangelists and preachers, creating more possibilities for online church services and preaching, and reaching many more people.

### 2) Jordan's economic difficulties could lead to serious social and political unrest

According to the Economist Intelligence Unit ([EIU Jordan profile 2023](#)), King Abdullah II is expected to "remain in power for the next few years supported by his loyal armed forces". Economic growth will remain sluggish over the forecast period, although Jordan's economic performance will remain comparatively strong in 2024 as inflation cools and parts of the services sector expand, such as tourism. The rate of unemployment will fall but remain high in 2024-28, maintaining the elevated risk of social unrest throughout the forecast period."

The country's political stability depends on its economic prosperity and its success in involving the population in economic progress. Jordan's economic difficulties could lead to more social and political unrest that could negatively affect Christians and other minorities. In the short-term, mass demonstrations are less likely to occur due to the arrest of leading activists, although in May 2023, Jordan [ended the emergency laws](#) that had been stifling public freedom (Reuters, 8 May 2023).

### 3) Jordan's king wants the country portrayed as one that protects religious minorities

In general, many Christians in Jordan strongly believe that their security depends on the Hashemite king who has reiterated his desire to "protect the existence and identity of Arab Christians" in the kingdom. It is important for Jordan to portray the country as one that wants to modernize society step by step and is trying to implement measures that are beneficial to religious minorities including the monitoring of Islamic preaching and the general activities of Salafists, who are a significant threat to future stability.

## External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: Jordanian officer - <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/12/top-jordan-police-officer-shot-dead-fuel-price-protests>
- Political and legal landscape: Islamic Action Front (IAF) - [http://www.fides.org/en/news/60829-ASIA\\_JORDAN\\_Elections\\_Archbishop\\_Lahham\\_all\\_Christian\\_candidates\\_in\\_Islamist\\_lists\\_rejected](http://www.fides.org/en/news/60829-ASIA_JORDAN_Elections_Archbishop_Lahham_all_Christian_candidates_in_Islamist_lists_rejected)
- Political and legal landscape: Zamzam initiative - <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/the-islamist-spectrum-jordans-mosaic>
- Political and legal landscape: European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity - <https://www.europeanforum.net/headlines/jordan-approves-controversial-constitutional-amendments>
- Political and legal landscape: equal inheritance rights - <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2023/05/christians-jordan-welcome-progress-inheritance-law>
- Economic landscape: facing extinction - <https://www.zawya.com/en/economy/levant/deepening-income-inequality-signals-end-of-jordans-middle-class-say-economists-pfnu91xi>
- Economic landscape: Georgetown WPS Index report 2019/20 - <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WPS-Index-2019-20-Report.pdf>
- Economic landscape: Gender Mainstreaming Strategy - <https://www.mei.edu/blog/arab-women-break-boundaries-and-stereotypes-middle-eastern-militaries#:~:text=superiors%20back%20home.,Jordan,-Lebanon%20is%20not>
- Social and cultural landscape: Jordanian Department of Statistics - <https://www.jordannews.jo/Section-109/News/Unemployment-rates-in-Kingdom-decreased-by-1-during-first-quarter-of-2023-28963>
- Social and cultural landscape: According to Middle East Monitor reporting on 16 May 2023 - <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20230516-world-bank-jordan-could-face-shocks-due-to-high-poverty-rates/>
- Social and cultural landscape: IREX, 9 March 2021 - <https://www.irex.org/insight/localizing-gender-discussions-jordan-lessons-learned-usaid-takamol-gender-resource-manual>
- Social and cultural landscape: 94% - <https://www.newarab.com/news/familial-homicide-jordan-94-2022-report>
- Technological landscape: Datareportal - <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-jordan>
- Technological landscape: Statcounter - <https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/jordan>
- Technological landscape: Telecommunications Regulatory Commission - <https://www.jordannews.jo/Section-109/News/Mobile-phone-subscribers-in-Jordan-reach-7-6-million-29015>
- Security situation: UN OCHA - <https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/clinging-life-palestine-refugees-syria-jordan-faces-endless-hardships-enar>
- Security situation: Action Aid - <https://actionaid.org/stories/2020/how-safe-spaces-women-and-girls-are-strengthening-resilience-communities-jordan>
- Security situation: SGBV sub-working group - [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/BriefingNoteSGBV\\_2015\\_FinalJune30.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/BriefingNoteSGBV_2015_FinalJune30.pdf)
- Security situation: DRC et al - <https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/gender-based-violence-risk-assessment-azraq-camp>
- Security situation: 49.5% - <https://reliefweb.int/map/jordan/jordan-gender-age-situation-map-31-may-2023>
- Trends analysis: EIU Jordan profile 2023 - <https://country.eiu.com/jordan>
- Trends analysis: ended the emergency laws - <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/jordan-ends-emergency-laws-that-stifled-public-freedoms-2023-05-07/>

## WWL 2024: Church information / Jordan

### Christian origins

Christians have been living in Jordan since the earliest days of Christianity. The country was a center of refuge for Christians who fled persecution in Jerusalem and Rome during the first century AD. Christianity became the accepted religion of the area in the 4th century and churches and chapels were built throughout the entire country. This changed with the coming of Islam, when - according to Islamic tradition - Muslim armies overran the area in 636 AD.

According to [JMECA](#) historical experts (accessed 9 January 2023):

- “After the Arab Muslim conquest of the Middle East and North Africa in the seventh century, Christianity slowly declined in those regions. By the tenth century Christians constituted some ten percent of the population of the Islamic Empire. Into this situation at the end of the eleventh century came the Crusades, which brought with them the Roman Catholic Church. ... During the crusader period, in the thirteenth century and afterwards, several groups of Eastern Christians, entered into communion with Rome. ... In the early eighteenth century the Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch split. ... 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.”

### Church spectrum today

Jordan: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox		62.9
Catholic		21.0
Protestant		8.3
Independent		7.5
Unaffiliated		1.4
Doubly-affiliated Christians		-1.4
<b>Total</b> <i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		<b>99.7</b>

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.

Jordan: Church movements	Christians	%
Evangelical movement		6.4
Renewalist movement		8.4

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

**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.

According to Middle East Concern (MEC Jordan profile): Officially recognized churches include the Greek Orthodox church, the Syriac Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic and Coptic Orthodox Churches, the Greek, Maronite, and Roman Catholic Churches, the Syriac Church of the East, and the Anglican, Pentecostal, Lutheran and Seventh Day Adventist Churches. Other denominations have lesser legal status (mostly as 'societies'), including the Baptist, Free Evangelical, Nazarene, Assemblies of God and Alliance churches.

## Areas where Christians face most difficulties

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

## Christian communities and how they are affected

### Communities of expatriate Christians

Expatriate Christians are present in Jordan, but not as a group involuntarily isolated from other categories of Christian communities. This category is therefore not included in WWL scoring and analysis.

### Historical Christian communities

This category makes up the largest group of Christians in Jordan, most of whom belong to Orthodox and Roman Catholic denominations. Overall, they enjoy a significant level of religious freedom but can experience discrimination, e.g. in the area of employment. Some pressure persists, especially from radical Islamic elements though these are kept reasonably well in check by intelligence and security forces. Long-standing marginalization provides a sense within these communities of being 'second class citizens', and emigration is a continuing issue.

### Converts to Christianity

Of all Christians in Jordan, those with a Muslim background are persecuted the most for their faith. If a convert's new faith is discovered, he/she can face oppression from a whole variety of sources, namely government officials, ethnic group leaders, non-Christian religious leaders, violent religious groups, ordinary people and (extended) family. Converts are vulnerable primarily to pressure from family or community for whom restoration of family/tribal/community honor is an imperative that often drives ostracism and sometimes leads to violent responses or initiation of effective legal incapacitation through personal status courts. State authorities are sometimes complicit, either actively through legal processes or through intelli-

gence agents alerting families, or passively through enabling the perpetration of violence with effective impunity. Children of parents who are converts are additionally vulnerable: Registered as Muslims they are supposed to live as Muslims outside of their homes, including attending Islamic classes - but live as Christians at home, which can lead to identity conflicts and emotional stress. In general, the situation for converts – whose small numbers have been growing – has worsened during the past few years, mostly due to pressure from their families and to the increasing activity of radical Islamic groups.

### Non-traditional Christian communities

After converts, Christians from Evangelical, Baptist and Pentecostal congregations face most opposition, in particular those active in missionary work. They are especially scrutinized by the intelligence service and have reportedly suffered from government pressure and hindrances in gaining employment. Violence against these Christians is mostly met with impunity. Most non-traditional Christian communities are not recognized as churches but as societies and as such have legal status, but are not listed in the appendix to the ecclesiastical courts legislation which specifies the churches that can operate personal status courts. Attempts to obtain equivalent status as other church denominations have consistently been resisted, particularly by traditional churches who have accused these churches of "sheep stealing" and of disrupting interreligious stability.

### External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: JMECA - <https://www.jmecca.org.uk/christianity-middle-east/history>

## WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Jordan

### Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

### Position on the World Watch List

Jordan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	65	48
WWL 2023	65	49
WWL 2022	66	39
WWL 2021	64	38
WWL 2020	64	33

In WWL 2024 Jordan scored the same as in WWL 2023: 65 points. Jordan nevertheless rose one position on the list - from rank 49 to 48 - which is due to the effect of other countries' scores. Although Jordan's overall score remained the same, there were very slight increases in the violence score and in the pressure score for three Spheres of Life. Some converts had to leave their homes and/or the country after their Christian faith became known to their families, which



created great risks for their safety. Pressure was exerted by the state on all Christian communities, especially through monitoring. Unrecognized churches, particularly those actively involved in mission work, faced harassment from public authorities. A recent example of slightly increased pressure was the [removal of a statue](#) of Jesus Christ from the predominantly Christian town of Fuheis in January 2023, due to objections from Muslim residents. This sparked controversy and discussions on social media, highlighting the tensions and differing views in the community (ICC, 17 February 2023).

## Persecution engines

Jordan: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Strong
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Medium
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Medium
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.*

### Clan oppression (Strong)

This Persecution engine describes how the continuing influence of age-old norms and values shaped in a tribal context are enforced and can come in the form of traditional religion. In the case of Jordan this is Islam and it especially affects Christians with a Muslim background. Jordan's society is basically tribal - especially outside the major cities - and is embedded in Jordanian nationalism. As explained above (see: *Social and cultural landscape*), Jordan is basically divided between native Jordanians ('East Bankers') and Palestinian Jordanians ('West Bankers'). Tribalism has made this ethnic division more apparent and acts as a socio-economic safety-net. Family, clan and tribal connections continue to allow Easterners to successfully navigate government, economic and social spheres, naturally including employment but also including political and social standing. Because of this social advantage for native Jordanians, tribalism has become even more integrated into the Jordanian concept of nationalism. Thus, Christians coming from a Palestinian background may not have as many advantages as a Christian of native Jordanian stock. This issue requires more detailed research.



### **Islamic oppression (Strong)**

*Islamic oppression* is one of the main Persecution engines in Jordan, but works mostly in non-violent ways. Despite promoting tolerance and peaceful coexistence with non-Muslim religions, the government has increasingly imposed Islamic values and laws on society. In terms of personal life, converts from Islam to Christianity face the highest levels of pressure. Their families and community may ostracize them or even commit acts of violence against them. Christians from all categories of Christian community can be subject to government monitoring - and even subject to Sharia law if a Christian is married to a Muslim or is in a court dispute with a Muslim. *Islamic oppression* also works through violent actions carried out by Islamic militants. Oppression by radical Muslims is much more severe than any government oppression. More and more Jordanians are being radicalized by IS ideology, which puts Christians at greater risk.

*Islamic oppression* is also blended with *Dictatorial paranoia*. In several countries in the Middle East, the king or president plays the 'Islam card' in political crises to stay in power. Thus, to gain the approval or acceptance of the community, they turn to the religious authority to gain power and popularity. This also applies to Jordan. However, this allows Islamic political movements to gain more influence in the communities, which can often lead to the spread of Islamist ideologies and the persecution of Christian minorities.

### **Dictatorial paranoia (Medium)**

Jordan is increasingly being described as a hybrid system that combines procedural democracy with some forms of authoritarianism. The country is still not a full constitutional democracy and the King, together with the general intelligence service, are the main sources of decision-making. Apart from the royal family, the biggest political actors are the government and the tribal chiefs who maintain their (perceived) power, position and privileges. Jordan's stability faces numerous threats; this creates the impression that the King is one of the few factors holding the country together. As head of government, the Jordanian king exercises considerable executive power. While he has been outspoken in his support for the Christian communities of Jordan and the Middle East and the need to maintain this Christian presence, and while he maintains a moderate and pro-Western stance, it is recognized that the King must strike a balance between competing interests, including Islamist currents that tend to swell in times of economic hardship or in response to regional events. In previous years, there were times when the King found it necessary to show his Islamic credentials by imposing stricter restrictions on Christians (e.g. expelling foreign Christians). Internally, therefore, maintaining peace and meeting the interests of the Muslim majority appears to be the top priority.

### **Christian denominational protectionism (Medium)**

The fragmentation of the Church is a typical feature of Jordanian Christianity. Tension exists between established Historical church communities and newer church groups (which are often influenced by international charismatic and evangelical movements). This is because evangelicals generally accept converts from Islam as well as Christians from traditional churches into their congregations. According to evangelical leaders, it is primarily Greek Orthodox (but sometimes Catholic) leaders who are exerting pressure on newer denominations. They use their channels of political influence to assert their historical traditions as the only true expression of

Jordanian Christianity, while labeling evangelicals or other 'newcomers' as inappropriate due to their Western influence. Applications made by church groups for official recognition are discussed by the prime minister with the Department of the Interior (MOI) and the CCL (Council of Church Leaders), which mainly includes representatives of recognized historical churches. Thus the latter have a major influence on the official recognition or - more often - rejection of newer denominations.

## Drivers of persecution

Jordan: Drivers of persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG	-	-	STRONG	MEDIUM	-	-	MEDIUM	VERY WEAK
Government officials	Medium	-	-	Weak	Medium	-	-	Medium	-
Ethnic group leaders	Strong	-	-	Very strong	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong	-	-	Weak	-	-	-	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	-	Strong	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	Weak	-	-	-	-	-	-	Weak	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Medium	-	-	Weak	-	-	-	-	Weak
One's own (extended) family	Strong	-	-	Very strong	Weak	-	-	-	-
Political parties	Weak	-	-	-	-	-	-	Weak	-
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Organized crime cartels or networks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies	Weak	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

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 Clan oppression

- **Extended family and ethnic group leaders (Very strong):** Clan oppression involves the imposition of age-old norms and values shaped in 'tribal' context and is often blended with *Islamic oppression*. In this case, the drivers are particularly families of converts and tribal leaders. Most pressure comes from the family, which can even lead to serious violence and

killing. Tribalism is strong in Jordan and ethnic group leaders are also likely to attempt to influence converts into renouncing their new faith, in order to protect the honor of the tribe. The same is true for Islamic leaders, who consider converts still to be Muslims.

### Drivers of Islamic oppression

- **Ethnic group leaders (Strong):** Tribal leaders are likely to put pressure on members of their tribe who are known to have converted and can act as a judge to save the tribe's honor.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Converts also fear hostile pronouncements or actions by Islamic leaders. This fear contributes to the sense of oppression and marginalization felt by indigenous Christians and also to the high degree of caution converts from Islam feel compelled to exercise. Attacks on targets deemed un-Islamic such as churches and shops where alcohol is sold are reportedly encouraged by local and regional radical Islamic teachers. In this respect, independent Salafi and Wahhabi individuals pose a threat to Christians within Jordan: These are not necessarily leaders, but are influential either in person or on social media. Mainstream Islamic leaders contribute to alienation between Muslims and Christians in practice and dress code (e.g. hijab clothing, no co-educational gatherings or swimming etc.).
- **Extended family (Strong):** Family hostility is commonly understood to be the major form of pressure faced by Christians from a Muslim background. A significant aspect of this pressure is the fear of provoking violent reactions from immediate or extended family. Muslim converts to Christianity are likely to face ostracism and discrimination from their families - and perhaps even violence, including killing. In some cases, converts' families informed government officials who then put pressure on converts to return to Islam.
- **Government officials (Medium):** The government seems to be genuine in its affirmation of Jordan's Historical church communities and in seeking to ensure the security of all churches to avoid social unrest. Nevertheless, government policies and staff are the cause of much pressure on Christians from all categories of Christian community, but in particular on converts from Islam and those involved in ministry among them. This pressure is exerted formally through the personal status court system. In the government's monitoring of Christians and their activities the intelligence service plays an important role as well as local governors and airport police (for instance, in denying exit for known converts).
- **Citizens (Medium):** Ordinary citizens can act to suppress Christian witness to non-Christians (affecting converts from Islam in particular), especially in more conservative Islamic areas such as in the south. Social media offers an additional platform for targeting Christians with hate-speech.

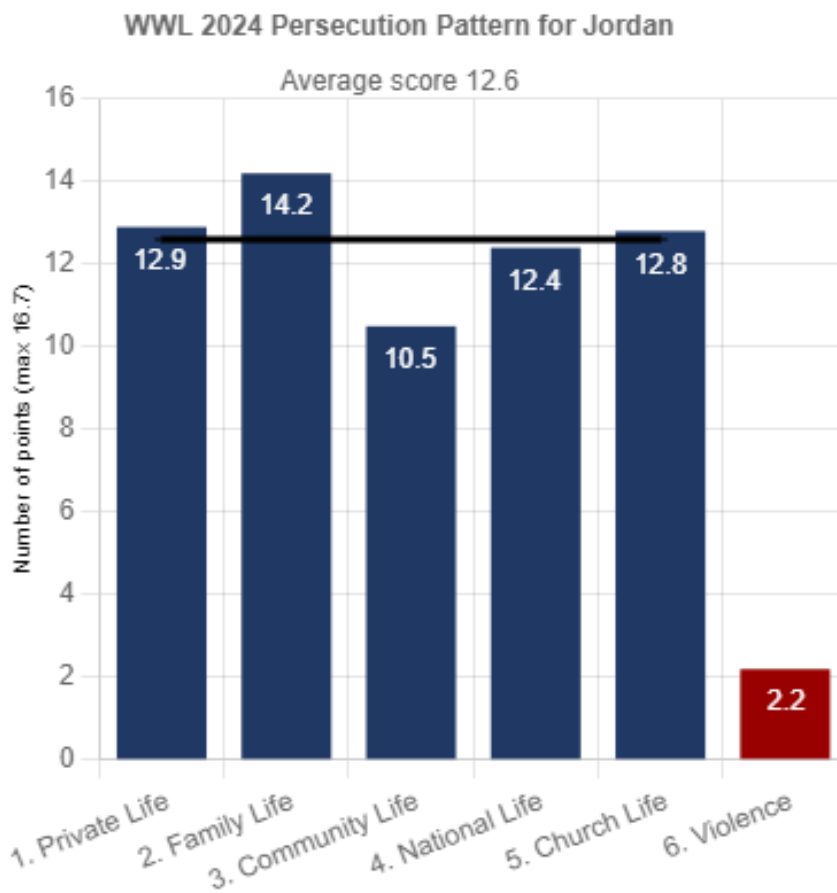
### Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Medium):** While genuine in its affirmation of Jordan's Historical church communities and in seeking to ensure the security of all established churches, government policies and personnel nevertheless underpin much pressure against Christians - including against those churches that have secondary status, and - in particular - against Christians from a Muslim background. This pressure is often carried out in collaboration with families, and more formally through the personal status court system.

### Christian denominational protectionism

- **Religious leaders of other churches (Strong):** As explained above, Evangelicals cite this as a significant source of pressure - primarily Greek Orthodox (but also at times Catholic) leaders using their political influence to assert their church tradition as the only genuine expression of Jordanian Christianity. In January 2021, the Greek Orthodox Archbishop Christoforos Atallah wrote a formal letter to Jordan's Judicial Council denouncing Evangelical Christians as a "danger" to Jordanian society with "strange ideas that depart from our Christian faith and the national identity of our local church." This pressure campaign succeeded in preventing Evangelical Christians being recognized as an approved denomination by the Jordanian state. This action put at risk the Jordanian government's recognition of marriage, birth, and other personal status issues for 10,000 Evangelical Christians, the vast majority of whom are Jordanian citizens.
- **Government officials (Medium):** The government is used in *Christian denominational protectionism* as a tool by traditional churches to prevent the recognition of non-traditional churches. Also, Eastern Rite churches have strong ties to the Jordanian security services, and according to a country expert there were anecdotal reports of "intelligence sharing" concerning Evangelical Christians between Eastern Rite clergy and the Jordanian security services.

### The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2024 persecution pattern for Jordan shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Jordan – mainly on converts from Islam - is at a very high level (12.6 points), very slightly higher (0.1 point) than in WWL 2023.
- Pressure is at very high levels in all *spheres of life* with the exception of *Family* and *Community Life*, where it respectively reached an extreme and high level, especially affecting converts to Christianity. Apart from *Family Life*, scores are highest in the *Private* and *Church spheres of life*. This is typical for a situation in which *Clan oppression* is the main persecution engine combined with *Islamic oppression*.
- The score for violence slightly increased from 2.0 points in WWL 2023 to 2.2 points in WWL 2024 due mainly to cases of converts having to leave their home and or country for faith related reasons.

## 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 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.50 points)**

Though not criminalized, leaving Islam is not acceptable. Anyone who converts and is vocal about this can be referred to the Islamic Sharia Court where he/she would be found "without religion" and considered incapacitated. All his/her contracts would then be broken (including marriage) and he/she would be worse off than someone who is cognitively incapacitated. Converts are frequently targeted for monitoring and may face harassment from the secret police and be blacklisted. They are then prevented from taking up employment in the armed forces or posts in the government or in building companies, for instance. On a societal level, converts are likely to be ostracized and face hostility from family or tribe members; they might also face violence and police interrogation. Particularly women are likely to face house-arrest, forced marriages and other measures intended to restore "family honor". Also, Christians who change from attending a Historical church community to join a non-traditional Evangelical church are also likely to face significant pressure from family and community.

**Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.50 points)**

This would particularly represent a risk for Christians from a Muslim background. Since their main source of pressure is from family and community, most converts exercise extreme caution when discussing issues of faith with family and community members as this can lead to violent reactions. Also, if non-convert Christians speak about Christian faith to Muslims or adherents of other religions, this can easily be understood as an attempt at evangelizing (which is forbidden in Jordan) and a threat to national security. They may be reported to the intelligence service and

blacklisted.

**Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (3.25 points)**

This primarily applies to Christians from a Muslim background where they belong to families who limit their interaction with others due to suspicion or disapproval. Such interaction with other Christians would be seen as betrayal of their ancestral faith, and betrayal of family and tribe.

**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.). (3.00 points)**

If, for instance, a Christian from a Muslim background was caught accessing Christian online content by a disapproving member of the family or community, this could lead to negative repercussions. Such a reaction is especially likely if converts mention their decision to become a Christian. This would effectively be self-incrimination, providing evidence of their own apostasy. Their conversion could also be used as evidence against them by family, society and officials.

## Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

**Block 2.6: Christian couples have been hindered in adopting children or serving as foster parents because of their faith. (3.75 points)**

Adoption remains illegal for all Jordanians as per Islamic doctrine. Foster care is complicated and it is close to impossible for Christians to foster a Muslim child. Several years ago, a Christian ministry tried to open a Christian orphanage and they were denied a license on similar grounds.

**Block 2.1: Babies and children of Christians have automatically been registered under the state or majority religion. (3.50 points)**

Children of converts from Islam are automatically registered as Muslim. Also, children born to a Christian mother and a Muslim father are considered Muslim by birth. Since the parents cannot change their recorded faith on official documents, their children will be registered as Muslim. This brings with it a whole range of difficulties for the child in daily life (including participation in Islamic classes at school etc.). This forces these children to live a double life - an Islamic one in the public sphere and a Christian one at home. This can lead to identity conflicts and emotional stress, which is detrimental to their development. It also puts a lot of pressure on their parents.

**Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (3.50 points)**

For a Christian from a Muslim background, baptism would usually be conducted in secret to avoid exposure and potential backlash.

**Block 2.12: Christian spouses of non-Christians have been excluded from the right or opportunity to claim custody of the children in divorce cases. (3.50 points)**

This pressure is not uncommon among Christians from a Muslim background who have a non-Christian spouse and/or whose wider family members exercise significant control. Since – ac-

ording to Islamic law - those who leave Islam lose custody of any children, some have had their right of custody forcibly removed by the Sharia personal status courts.

## Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

**Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (3.75 points)**

Monitoring is especially intense for known converts from Islam. For non-convert Christians, informal monitoring is routinely undertaken (often using community informers), particularly affecting those active in evangelism. However, Jordan's General Intelligence Department carries out surveillance operations with a broad range of objectives which means that monitoring is by no means exclusively applied to Christian communities. Monitoring includes phone-calls and social media usage.

**Block 3.6: Christians have been hindered in participating in communal institutions, forums, etc., for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)**

Despite the fact that nine out of 130 seats in the Chamber of Deputies are reserved for Christians and they also routinely serve as ministers and are well represented in the higher ranks of the military, Christians are a minority with less visible presence in daily life than they used to have. Tribal culture is very strong in Jordan and there are unwritten rules about what Christians can and cannot do or say, which severely limit their freedom of expression. This is even more true for Jordanians of Palestinian descent. Converts to Christianity cannot participate at all in community institutions and forums if their faith is known. It is highly unlikely that a convert would want to be actively involved, and Christian viewpoints have no place in these forums anyway.

**Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.50 points)**

Pressure can be expected on converts from Islam whose Christian faith has become known, especially where the local community is made up of conservative Muslim families. This is in keeping with provisions in Islamic law relating to apostasy which hold that an apostate must be offered the opportunity to recant. For other Christians, there is also a 'well intended' invitation to become a Muslim.

**Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)**

This primarily applies to converts from Islam whose Christian faith has become known. Cases have been reported in which Christians have repeatedly lost or been denied the opportunity of employment because of their conversion. In some sectors this pressure can also apply to non-convert Christians, especially in relation to obtaining promotion to senior positions. Security clearance can also be problematic. There were accounts of Christians getting denied internships, employment, and even medical school placements in military hospitals. Promotion in the administration and armed forces has a pro-Muslim bias, although nine parliamentary seats



are reserved for Christians and Christians have been selected to work as ministers on a regular basis.

## Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

### **Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (3.75 points)**

The Constitution of Jordan establishes Islam as the state religion and Sharia as the principal source of legislation. In that context, it is not officially possible to leave Islam to convert to another religion (or carry out non-Islamic evangelism). This goes against Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. While the Constitution affirms the principle of non-discrimination (including discrimination on the basis of religion) and states that the free exercise of worship and religious rites are to be safeguarded, these must be consistent with 'public order and morality'. Recognized non-Muslim communities are given freedom to govern most personal status issues according to their own rites through a religious tribunal system, although some communities, many of them non-traditional church groups, do not currently have the level of legal status required to operate their own tribunals.

### **Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.75 points)**

In light of the current cyber crime laws and government history of arrests, freedom of speech is very limited. Christians understand the need to avoid deliberately provocative statements, especially statements that are critical of Islam, the Crown, the army or which could be construed as proselytizing. It is a criminal offense in Jordan to insult Islam. Additionally, converts from Islam to Christianity must be careful about openly expressing their opinions due to potential backlash from the community and possibly becoming ostracized. As such, self-censorship is quite frequent which limits the expression of Christian viewpoints.

### **Block 4.2: Officials have refused to recognize an individual's conversion as recorded in government administration systems, identify cards (etc.). (3.50 points)**

There is no legal mechanism for changing official religious affiliation from Islam to another (or no) religion, based on the apostasy provisions of Islamic law. Although apostasy is not criminalized, personal status courts can impose severe sanctions. It should be noted that, although religious affiliation no longer appears on National ID cards, this remains on official files as personal status court jurisdiction is determined by religious affiliation. Few Christians from a Muslim background dare to attempt to change the officially recorded religious affiliation from Islam, since making such an application exposes their conversion to the authorities and is potentially dangerous. Some have pursued this via the legal system and failed.

### **Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (3.50 points)**

Perpetrators of persecution against converts from Islam on account of their faith (including so-called 'honor crimes'), can expect to enjoy a high degree of impunity. Within non-convert Christian communities, frustration has also been expressed about the degree of impunity given



to perpetrators of violence or hate-speech.

## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

### **Block 5.7: Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts. (4.00 points)**

The incorporation of converts into recognized church congregations is an extremely sensitive subject. Routine surveillance by state intelligence officers means that most church leaders would be wary of openly welcoming and accepting Muslim enquirers or converts, fearing negative repercussions, including possible closure of the church. Also, they would be suspicious of people openly claiming to be converts, since this could be a trap.

### **Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (3.75 points)**

There is a level of routine monitoring of church activities, ostensibly for the protection of churches. However, such monitoring could be used against churches if provocative messages or activities were detected, or if Muslims were observed to be attending. Known meetings of Christians with an Islamic background are very likely to be closely monitored and obstructed.

### **Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored. (3.75 points)**

Most church leaders accept the fact that there is some routine surveillance of activities on church premises, including the content of what is preached and taught. They effectively exercise self-censorship by avoiding provocative or inflammatory messaging, such as mentioning evangelism among Muslims or anything that could be perceived as derogatory towards Islam, or any political commentary which could instigate social or political unrest. Especially in Muslim-majority areas, openly preaching, teaching and/or publishing Christian materials could bring strong social pressure on the person doing those activities. This especially affects Christians belonging to non-traditional and convert communities. Books can only be published after getting approval from the Ministry of Culture. Anything that will aggravate Islam - for instance, apologetics - will not be allowed.

### **Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (3.50 points)**

Any form of worship or Christian activity outside designated church property must be undertaken with discretion to avoid provoking hostile reactions and the accusation of proselytism.

## 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.

### **3. The use of symbolic numbers**

- In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10\*, 100\* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10\* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100\* could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1,000\* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000\*, 100,000\* and 1,000,000\*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

Jordan: 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?	0	0
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	10 *	10 *
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	1
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?	10 *	10 *
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)?	10 *	10 *
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	1
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	1	0
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	2	0

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

- **Christians detained:** Christians involved in outreach and converts can be called in regularly for questioning. It is unknown beforehand how long this will take, it can vary from 20 minutes to 12 days.
- **Christians sexually harassed:** Women who do not dress as a Muslim (i.e., who do not wear a *hijab*) risk harassment. It is estimated that at least 10 Christian women were sexually harassed for this reason. Therefore, many Christian women choose not to use public transport or taxis, especially at night.

- **Christians physically or mentally abused:** Several converts and Christians who are active in aiding and discipling converts have been physically or mentally abused, usually by the families of the converts.
- **Christians forced to leave home and/or country:** Several converts had to leave their homes and/or country after their Christian faith became known to their families, creating great risks regarding their safety.

## 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.

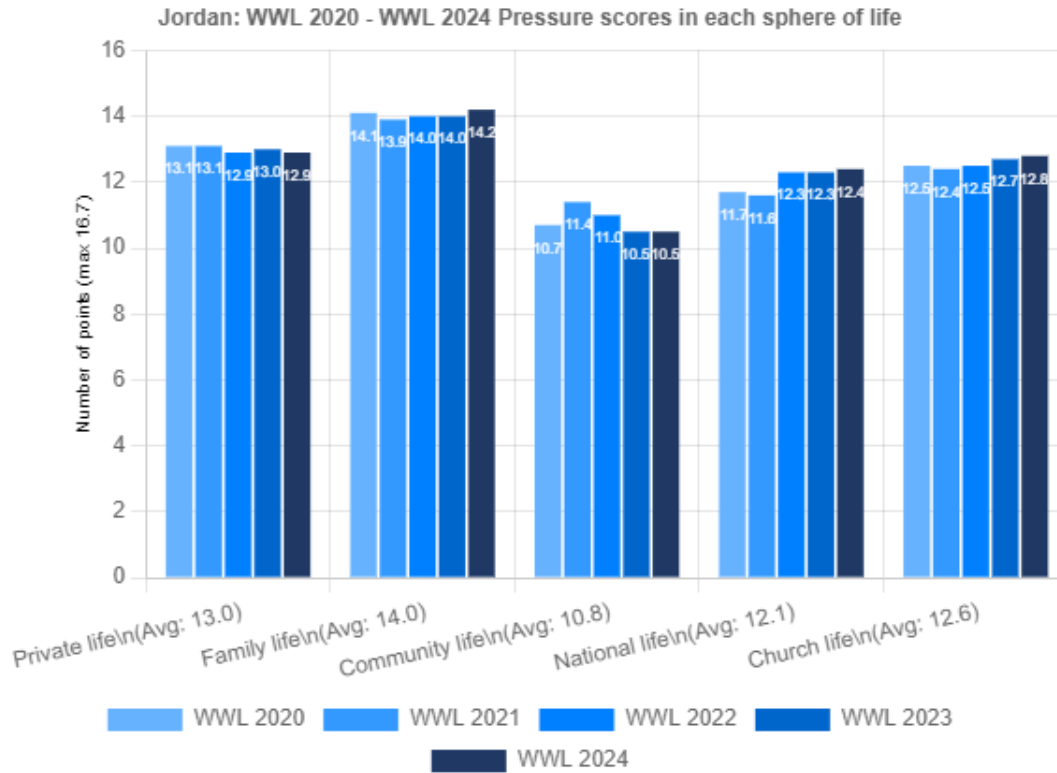
### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Jordan: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024	12.6
2023	12.5
2022	12.5
2021	12.5
2020	12.4

The table above shows how the overall score for pressure on Christians has remained stable in the last five reporting periods at a very high level of 12.4 - 12.6 points, while increasing very slightly. Just one example of slightly increased pressure was the removal of a statue of Jesus Christ from the predominantly Christian town of Fuheis in January 2023, due to objections from Muslim residents, which sparked controversy on social media.

### 5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

As can be seen in the chart below, pressure in the *Private, Family and Church spheres of life* has been more or less stable in the last five reporting periods (WWL 2020-2024). Pressure in the *National sphere of life* has risen the most, from 11.7 points in WWL 2020 to 12.4 points in WWL 2024, but has never reached the levels of pressure recorded in *Private and Family life*. The latter is the only sphere to have reached an extreme level of pressure, which is characteristic for a persecution situation where both *Clan oppression* and *Islamic oppression* (blended) are the strongest persecution engines.



### 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The violence scores have varied between low and fairly high, but have never gone above in 3.0 points in the five WWL reporting periods depicted.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied custody of children; Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced marriage; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Violence – death; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Female converts from Islam are the most vulnerable to persecution for their Christian faith in Jordan. This is especially notable, considering the many refugees in Jordan. Pressure comes most often from family members. If a female convert still lives with her family, she risks verbal abuse, isolation, and sexual harassment. Female converts can also be prevented from meeting with other like-minded Christians as a punishment for conversion and to prevent the individual from bringing more shame upon the family. Although arranged marriages are not uncommon in Jordan, female converts are under additional threat to be married off involuntarily in a further effort to retain family honor and bring the daughter back on 'the right path'. A country expert commented that female converts are vulnerable to forced marriage, which is "usually to a conservative Muslim, as a corrective measure". In addition, honor killings remain a live risk for converts in rural areas, although such killings are now punishable.

Female converts from Islam cannot officially marry men from a Christian background. Even if they marry abroad, the state does not recognize such marriages. When married to non-Christian husbands, female converts risk harassment and verbal abuse (women might also face similar challenges if their formerly Christian husband converts to Islam). They are also faced with travel restrictions; travel bans can be imposed by the authorities but also by family members, for instance to prevent the female convert from leaving the country. If this ban is violated, a court case can be started for "travelling without permission."

Female converts are also vulnerable under Islamic Family Law (which is used for personal status matters in Jordan among Muslims) and are likely to lose the guardianship of their children. The attitude of the non-Christian spouse's family is crucial in this issue. The recognized churches in Jordan have been working on the [revision of personal status laws](#), to improve the position of women regarding divorce and inheritance rights (Zenith, 25 October 2019). Progress has been seen this year in the form of a [draft law](#) to grant equal inheritance rights for male and female Christians (Al-Monitor, 2023). However, it is important to note that this will only apply to Christians from a non-Islamic background, as Sharia law will continue to apply to all converts.

On a wider level, all Christian women face pressure to follow a specified dress code, especially outside of the big cities like Amman, and are at risk of sexual harassment within the public sphere.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Within Jordan’s heavily Islamic context, Christian men – particularly converts – face a wide range of pressure for their faith. While some Christian men do occupy senior positions in the workplace, government and armed forces, job discrimination continues to affect all Christians, especially those from a Muslim background. General unemployment rates for all men in Jordan have risen in recent years and remain higher than pre-pandemic levels, with a reported 22.6% of people out of work and a 46% youth unemployment rate (World Bank overview Jordan). This has increased the pressure on men who have lost their jobs because of their Christian faith. If their faith becomes known, Christian men with a Muslim background can be denied security clearances and jobs. In the mostly traditional and tribal Jordanian society where men are regarded as the financial providers for their families, this can cause economic troubles for the wider family, as well as feelings of worthlessness for men.

Under Sharia, marriages between Muslim women and non-Muslim men are not allowed. For the marriage to be legal, the man must convert to Islam. This makes legal marriage impossible between a Christian man who is not a convert and a Christian woman with a Muslim background. Sharia law also determines that if a Christian wife converts to Islam, her husband must convert as well for their marriage to remain legal.

Men who are converts to Christianity face further difficulties in an honor-shame culture when their families reject them and expel them from their homes because of their choice of religion. Christian men also face psychological pressure and physical violence; in his book ‘Identity Crisis’ Jonathan Andrews refers to a specific case of a Christian convert who within the Jordanian legal system “no longer had legal personality, anybody could take his possessions ... and injuring him would be regarded in law in the same manner as injuring a rodent, giving total impunity to the perpetrator” (Identity Crisis: Religious Registration in the Middle East, 2016, Gilead Books Publishing). There is also pressure from the state authorities: Male converts are reported to be interrogated by intelligence services and placed under pressure to provide information on other Christians, especially if they are part of a ministry helping converts. Pastors and denominational leaders involved in evangelization and/or ministry among former Muslims are also targeted for interviews and may receive death-threats from the families of converts.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

In general, the authorities in Jordan tend to be "repressive" towards non-Sunni groups and communities such as Shiites, Bahai, Druze, Iraqi Mandaeans and Jehovah's Witnesses. These are not officially recognized and therefore suffer various forms of discrimination.

Shia Islam is especially prevalent among Syrian and Iraqi refugees. It is reportedly harder for a Sunni to convert to Shiite Islam than to convert to Christianity.

As an unrecognized religion, activities by Bahai can be banned, although most Bahai adherents are unofficially allowed to practice their religion. The government also involved them in officially sponsored interfaith events. Marriage certificates issued by Bahai assemblies are not recognized by the Department of Civil Status and Passports. However, according to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Jordan):

- The Department of Civil Status and Passports did issue "family books to Baha'is, allowing them to register their children, except in cases of marriages between a Baha'i man and a Baha'i woman when the marriage was erroneously registered as Muslim. In those cases, the children were considered illegitimate and were not issued birth certificates or included in family books and subsequently were unable to obtain citizenship or register for school. Baha'i parents could generally designate a dash in lieu of assigning Islam or the Christian religion on their children's birth certificates. There were cases of daughters of Baha'i converts unable to marry Baha'i men because the birth certificates and official documents of the women maintained their religious designation as Islam, the prior faith of their fathers. The Baha'is were able to obtain some documents such as marriage certificates through the civil courts, although they reportedly were required to pay fees that sometimes amounted to more than 500 dinars (\$710) for documents normally available for five dinars (\$7) through religious courts. Some Baha'is traveled to other countries to obtain officially recognized marriages and others sought marriages from sympathetic Muslim clergy, a process that Baha'is deemed unsustainable and unacceptable. Members of the Baha'i community stated that they continued to lobby the government unsuccessfully for recognition of Baha'is or at least for marriages, which are a requirement for their civil rights including transmitting citizenship to non-Jordanian spouses."

Druze experience social exclusion and live in specific areas. Like the Bahai religion, the Druze faith is also not officially recognized by the Jordanian government and as they do not have their own religious buildings they continue to worship in Sunni Muslim mosques. According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Jordan):

- The "government continued to record Druze as Muslims on civil documents identifying the bearer's religious affiliation, without public objection from the Druze. Druze continued to report discrimination, and the way constituencies were geographically distributed hindered their coreligionists from reaching high positions in government civil service and official departments. The government did not include members of the Druze community in the Political Modernization Committee, established by the King in 2021 to reform the political system."



Non-Muslims and non-Christian migrants, mostly Buddhist and Hindus, are also not recognized as a religion. Their rituals take place without official permission and are sometimes prohibited. Finally, Muslims who decide to leave Islam to become atheists, or who have adopted other beliefs, face similar pressure from family and community as Christian believers from a Muslim background.

## Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

### Clan oppression

The influence of this Persecution engine remains currently unchanged. However, according to the 2018 [Arab Youth Survey](#), Jordanian youth are becoming more influenced by their peers and the media than by their families or religious authorities. If this loosening of contact between youth and family or youth and religious leaders continues, it could weaken Clan oppression in the long run. On the other hand, this Persecution engine especially affects converts from Islam. If the number of converts and those Muslims interested in the Christian faith is growing, this could lead to an increased number of incidents of persecution against converts in the future. Finally, according to a more recent study ([Youth in Jordan](#), Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, March 2023), "religiosity and conservatism are prevalent among young people" and they are found to trust traditional institutions, such as the family and armed forces, more than representative institutions, such as parliament and civil society. For now this seems to indicate little change in the power of the Persecution engine Clan oppression.

### Islamic oppression

Salafism is known to be steadily increasing in Jordan and in the mid-term this could produce an important change in religious attitudes in society. A stricter interpretation of Islam could seriously affect Christian public life. In addition, with the war in Syria nearing its end, battle-hardened Jordanian Islamic militants could soon return home. Their presence could pose serious dangers to the population and in particular to vulnerable minorities such as Christians. Furthermore, Jordan's economy has suffered massively from the government's measures to restrict the spread of COVID-19 and it remains to be seen whether or how the country will be able to recover from the economic challenges. Unemployment is anticipated to remain high, although a downwards trend has begun to be registered. A high unemployment rate, especially for youth, is fertile soil for political unrest and recruitment by radical Islamic groups.

According to the Crisis 24 Jordan country report: "The Islamic State group has been linked to a number of attacks against security and military forces, however Jordan's capable counter-terrorism forces help to mitigate this threat." Nevertheless, Jordan remains alert to developments in the region, such as the Hamas-Israel war, which could provide a breeding ground for attacks on Western or perceived Western targets.

### Dictatorial paranoia

The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU Jordan profile 2023) expects "King Abdullah to remain in power during the 2024-28 forecast period, supported by the loyal armed forces." The EIU also

expects that unemployment will decrease but remain high in 2024-28, "maintaining the elevated risk of social unrest throughout the forecast period." To stem any unrest, the government is likely to crack down on dissidents. A politically stable situation is also of benefit to the Christian community: Any changes to the political status quo could have negative consequences, since any new leadership might be less determined to keep radical Islamic influences under control and uphold religious freedom.

### **Christian denominational protectionism**

This Persecution engine increased in strength after it became known that Historical church leaders had been meeting with the Jordanian intelligence service to exchange information, especially concerning non-traditional church groups. It is expected that as Dictatorial paranoia grows stronger, it will also cause Christian denominational protectionism to increase in influence as well.

## **External Links - Persecution Dynamics**

- Position on the World Watch List.: removal of a statue - <https://www.persecution.org/2023/02/17/jordans-monarchy-seeks-to-protect-a-legacy-of-religious-co-existence/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: revision of personal status laws - <https://magazine.zenith.me/en/society/christians-jordan-church-and-legal-reformhttps://magazine.zenith.me/en/society/christians-jordan-church-and-legal-reform>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: draft law - <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2023/05/christians-jordan-welcome-progress-inheritance-law>
- Future outlook: Arab Youth Survey - <http://www.arabyouthsurvey.com/findings.html>
- Future outlook: Youth in Jordan - <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/amman/20346.pdf>

## **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=Jordan>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>.