

World
Watch
Research

Jordan: Country Dossier

December 2020



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Introduction

World Watch List 2021

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	11.1	94	94	94	94	92
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.2	94	93	94	93	89
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.3	9.8	92	92	91	91	91
4	Libya	15.6	15.4	15.9	16.3	16.3	12.4	92	90	87	86	78
5	Pakistan	13.9	14.2	15.1	14.9	13.5	16.7	88	88	87	86	88
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.9	15.9	15.4	11.1	88	87	86	86	82
7	Yemen	16.6	16.6	16.5	16.7	16.7	3.9	87	85	86	85	85
8	Iran	14.5	14.5	13.9	15.7	16.5	10.6	86	85	85	85	85
9	Nigeria	13.3	13.2	13.9	14.1	14.1	16.7	85	80	80	77	78
10	India	13.0	12.9	13.5	14.9	13.7	15.4	83	83	83	81	73
11	Iraq	13.6	14.6	14.2	14.8	13.8	11.5	82	76	79	86	86
12	Syria	13.3	13.9	13.5	14.5	14.0	12.0	81	82	82	76	86
13	Sudan	13.4	13.4	13.7	13.6	15.7	9.1	79	85	87	87	87
14	Saudi Arabia	15.1	13.9	14.4	15.8	16.6	2.2	78	79	77	79	76
15	Maldives	15.4	15.5	13.9	15.8	16.6	0.4	77	78	78	78	76
16	Egypt	12.5	13.2	11.5	12.7	11.0	14.1	75	76	76	70	65
17	China	12.6	9.7	12.0	13.2	15.4	11.1	74	70	65	57	57
18	Myanmar	11.9	12.0	13.1	12.9	12.3	11.9	74	73	71	65	62
19	Vietnam	12.1	8.8	12.7	14.0	14.5	10.0	72	72	70	69	71
20	Mauritania	14.3	14.0	13.5	14.1	13.6	1.9	71	68	67	57	55
21	Uzbekistan	15.1	12.9	14.1	12.2	15.7	1.3	71	73	74	73	71
22	Laos	12.1	10.2	13.6	13.5	14.3	6.9	71	72	71	67	64
23	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.8	13.3	15.7	1.5	70	70	69	68	67
24	Algeria	13.9	13.9	11.5	13.1	13.4	3.9	70	73	70	58	58
25	Turkey	12.5	11.5	10.8	13.3	11.6	9.3	69	63	66	62	57
26	Tunisia	12.0	13.1	10.4	11.5	13.2	7.4	67	64	63	62	61
27	Morocco	12.6	13.5	11.2	12.4	14.1	3.7	67	66	63	51	49
28	Mali	9.4	8.2	12.7	10.3	11.5	15.4	67	66	68	59	59
29	Qatar	14.0	13.9	10.8	13.1	14.1	1.5	67	66	62	63	66
30	Colombia	11.4	8.8	12.4	11.0	9.7	13.9	67	62	58	56	53
31	Bangladesh	11.5	10.3	13.0	11.3	10.1	10.6	67	63	58	58	63
32	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.0	9.4	11.8	14.3	67	66	48	-	-
33	Tajikistan	14.0	12.3	11.9	12.5	13.2	2.2	66	65	65	65	58
34	Nepal	12.4	9.7	9.9	13.0	12.3	8.5	66	64	64	64	53
35	CAR	9.0	8.6	13.1	9.6	9.9	15.6	66	68	70	61	58
36	Ethiopia	9.9	8.5	10.7	10.3	10.8	14.4	65	63	65	62	64
37	Mexico	10.3	8.1	12.4	10.7	10.3	12.6	64	60	61	59	57
38	Jordan	13.1	13.9	11.4	11.6	12.4	2.0	64	64	65	66	63
39	Brunei	13.9	14.6	10.7	10.9	13.5	0.7	64	63	63	64	64
40	DRC	8.0	7.9	11.2	9.4	11.6	16.1	64	56	55	33	-
41	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.5	11.0	12.5	13.4	2.4	64	64	63	63	56
42	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.0	12.3	15.7	64	60	54	38	-
43	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	11.9	12.7	13.8	0.0	64	61	64	62	61
44	Oman	13.2	13.5	10.3	12.5	13.0	0.9	63	62	59	57	53
45	Mozambique	9.3	7.6	11.3	7.9	11.1	16.1	63	43	43	-	-
46	Malaysia	12.1	14.3	12.9	11.5	10.0	2.4	63	62	60	65	60
47	Indonesia	11.5	11.4	12.4	10.7	9.3	7.8	63	60	65	59	55
48	Kuwait	13.2	13.5	9.9	12.2	13.2	1.1	63	62	60	61	57
49	Kenya	11.7	9.2	10.5	8.0	10.3	12.8	62	61	61	62	68
50	Comoros	12.5	11.1	11.4	11.3	14.2	1.9	62	57	56	56	56

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017
51	Cuba	10.9	7.7	11.8	12.9	13.4	5.4	62	52	49	49	47
52	Sri Lanka	12.2	9.1	11.7	12.2	9.7	7.0	62	65	58	57	55
53	UAE	13.4	13.3	9.7	12.0	12.4	1.1	62	60	58	58	55
54	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.3	7.2	11.6	10.6	62	60	52	45	47
55	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.3	11.2	10.4	12.0	1.3	58	57	56	54	48
56	Palestinian Territories	12.5	13.3	9.1	10.4	11.7	0.9	58	60	57	60	64
57	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	10.2	58	55	52	53	59
58	Russian Federation	12.3	8.0	10.2	10.5	12.1	3.9	57	60	60	51	46
59	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	10.3	10.0	11.2	0.0	56	56	56	56	57
60	Bahrain	12.1	12.5	9.1	10.7	10.5	0.9	56	55	55	57	54
61	Azerbaijan	12.8	9.8	9.4	11.1	12.6	0.0	56	57	57	57	52
62	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	3.7	53	56	48	40	-
63	Nicaragua	6.9	4.6	9.9	11.3	10.0	8.1	51	41	41	-	-
64	Burundi	5.1	5.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.9	48	48	43	-	-
65	Uganda	8.1	4.6	6.7	6.7	9.1	12.0	47	48	47	46	53
66	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	5.9	47	45	46	-	-
67	Honduras	6.8	5.0	10.6	7.6	9.0	7.6	46	39	38	-	-
68	Angola	6.4	3.6	7.0	10.1	11.4	7.2	46	43	42	-	-
69	South Sudan	5.7	1.5	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.0	43	44	44	-	-
70	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	0.6	43	43	43	-	-
71	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	9.8	0.7	43	41	42	-	-
72	Rwanda	5.3	4.4	6.7	7.8	10.1	8.1	42	42	41	-	-
73	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	6.6	3.3	42	42	43	-	-
74	El Salvador	6.6	4.9	9.8	4.2	8.7	7.8	42	38	30	-	-

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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).
- The highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”.
- The WWL 2021 reporting period was 01 October 2019 - 30 September 2020.
- 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 including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic

In the WWL 2021 reporting period, travel restrictions and other measures introduced by the governments of various countries to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic did cause delays and create the need for restructuring grass-roots research in some cases. Through the agile cooperation of Open Doors field networks, research analysts, external experts and an increased use of technological options, Open Doors is confident that the WWL 2021 scoring, analysis and documentation has maintained required levels of quality and reliability.

External Links - Introduction

- Sources and definitions: World Watch List Documentation - <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>

WWL 2021 Short country profile / Jordan

Brief country details

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

Jordan: Population (2020 UN estimate)	Christians	Chr%
10,209,000	180,000	OD estimate

Jordan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	64	38
WWL 2020	64	33
WWL 2019	65	31
WWL 2018	66	21
WWL 2017	63	27

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2017-2021 reporting periods

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Jordan: Main persecution engines		Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders, One's own (extended) family, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Government officials	
Clan oppression	Ethnic group leaders, One's own (extended) family	

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 relatively high level of religious freedom but experience discrimination in employment and restrictions against public preaching. 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, most Christians in Jordan live a safe and stable life. 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 can face harassment by public authorities, particularly those that actively evangelize. Although Jordan likes to present itself as a beacon of tolerance and interfaith dialogue, radicalized Sunnis and returning jihadists from Syria and Iraq continue to pose a threat to the Christian community.

Jordan has a disproportionately high number of Salafi Muslims who are potentially a danger to Christians and other non-conforming groups living in the country. 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.

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- Not being dressed as a Muslim lady - i.e. not wearing a hijab - creates a profile of vulnerability. At least 100 Christian women were sexually harassed for this reason.
- There were several cases of both female and male Christians with a Muslim background being beaten by their family (husband, brothers) and receiving death threats because of their faith. For security reasons no further details can be given.

Specific examples of positive developments

The Jordanian intelligence service foiled a [machine-gun attack on the Armenian Orthodox church](#) in Amman and a shop selling alcoholic drinks, Al Bawaba reported on 29 June 2020.

External Links - Short country profile

- Specific examples of positive developments: machine-gun attack on the Armenian Orthodox church - <https://www.albawaba.com/news/jordan-intelligence-foils-terrorist-plot-church-liquor-store-amman-1365426>

WWL 2021: Keys to understanding / Jordan

Link for general background information

- [Jordan country profile - BBC News](#)

Recent history

After the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War 1, the League of Nations mandated Britain to rule 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 Abdallah II succeeded him.

Jordan was also affected by the so-called Arab Spring which began in 2011. According to the [CIA World Factbook](#) (accessed 29 September 2020), King Abdallah II "implemented modest political reforms, including the passage of a new electoral law in early 2016 and an effort to devolve some authority to governorate- and municipal-level councils following subnational elections in 2017."

Jordan has been a relatively stable safe haven for refugees in the region and has hosted refugees from wars in Lebanon, Iraq and Syria. This has added significant strain on the economy and society. In addition, this has led to Jordan being used as a transit country for violent Islamic militants, causing the threat of Islamist attacks to increase in Jordan as well.

Though generally stable in terms of security, Jordan has faced four attacks by Islamists in the period 2016 - 2019 (see "Security situation" below). Human rights advocates have accused Jordan's rulers of using the threat of terrorism to restrict the rights of citizens and parliament. Jordanian authorities were also accused of violating rights to free expression and assembly when anti-corruption protests led them to increasingly target political and anti-corruption activists. Particularly in March 2019, the authorities detained more than a dozen people belonging to the "hirak shabaabi" (youth movement) coalition, as well as journalists, for public criticism of Jordanian leaders and policies.

Comparatively speaking, Jordan is one of the last islands of relative calm for Christians in the region. 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.

The COVID-19 crisis has had an adverse impact on the country as a whole and hence also on the Church. In March 2020, Jordan declared a state of emergency as part of a series of measures to limit the spread of the COVID-19 virus. On 25 July 2020 the country's largest labor union, "the Teachers' Syndicate", was [closed down](#) for two years and its leadership arrested due to criticizing the government and alleged "financial and administrative wrongdoing" (Reuters, 25 July 2020). Demonstrations resulted, which led to the further [arrest of 1000 protesting teachers](#) (The Guardian, 19 August 2020). According to insiders, the union was closed for continually criticizing the government and the government is using the COVID-19 crisis to silence dissident which is a serious violation of the rights to freedom of association and expression.

Despite the COVID-19 crisis, [parliamentary elections](#) were held in November 2020 and, according to observers, the historically low turnout indicated voter apathy (Al-Monitor, 12 November 2020). The election result was not surprising: Independent and pro-government candidates are expected to make up the majority of the House of Representatives, making it even more conciliatory towards the government.

Political and legal landscape

The [Economist Intelligence Unit](#) (EIU) Democracy Index 2019 classifies Jordan as an authoritarian regime. FFP's [Fragile States Index](#) (April 2020) shows political indicators have slightly improved, although human rights restrictions in Jordan remain a concern.

There are two major political forces at play in Jordan: King Abdullah II and 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 seem 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 not succeeded in rectifying its legal status. Now only the IAF remains, which is currently the largest opposition party of the country as well as the new version of the Muslim Brotherhood association, which is allegedly controlled by moderate elements close to the Crown and the so-called [Zamzam initiative](#) (Wilson Center, 13 September 2017). This event has been positively welcomed by some Christians considering it to be a positive step in the development of a civil state in Jordan.

[Middle East Concern](#) (last accessed 28 September 2020) 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."

A new proposal for [reforming inheritance law](#) in the personal status of Christians is under discussion (Zenith, 25 October 2019). No formal decisions have been made yet but this could be a very positive change for Christians. 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.

Religious landscape

Jordan: Religious context	Number adherents	of %
Christians	180,000	1.8
Muslim	9,708,628	95.1
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethno-religionist	0	0.0
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	23,879	0.2
Atheist	47,757	0.5
Agnostic	243,760	2.4
Other	4,676	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020).
(Adapted according to OD-estimate)

Around 95% of the population are Muslim of which the majority are Sunni, and Open Doors estimates that 1.8% 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 is implementing measures that are beneficial to religious minorities including Christians, such as implementing changes in university curriculum literature 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. Islamic State). 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 included in the WWL 2017 analysis as it was not a specifically anti-Christian attack.)

Economic landscape

According to [World Bank's May 2020 update](#):

- The Jordanian economy continued to grow slightly in 2019, but this was insufficient to alleviate the pressure on the domestic labor market. As a result, unemployment rose to 19,1 % in 2019 (compared to 18,6% in 2018).
- The weak growth of the Jordanian economy makes it difficult to address pressing socio-economic issues such as low employment rates and high unemployment, especially among women and young people.
- The effect of COVID-19 and measures to control its spread on the world economy is likely to weaken Jordan's economic growth prospects significantly in the short term.
- These developments make Jordan even more dependent on official funding from multilateral and bilateral donors.

The World Bank classifies Jordan as an upper-middle-income economy. However, the kingdom is faced with economic problems such as high 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 has suffered greatly from measures imposed to contain the spread of COVID-19 and it remains to be seen if and how the country will be able to recover from the economic downturn. The country's political stability depends on its economic

prosperity and its success in involving the population in economic progress. The COVID-19 crisis thus poses a huge threat to the economy and therefore to the stability of the country.

Depending on the duration of government measures and their overall impact on the tourism-dependent economy, instability could potentially have negative consequences for the country's Christians. While economics is not generally a factor leading to persecution of Christians, it is a very important factor in promoting their migration.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the [UNDP 2019 report](#) (page 300) and the [World Factbook](#) (accessed 29 September 2020):

- **Main ethnic groups:** Jordanian 69.3%, Syrian 13.3%, Palestinian 6.7%, Egyptian 6.7%, Iraqi 1.4%, other 2.6% (includes Armenian, Circassian) (2015 est.)
- **Main languages:** Arabic (official), English (widely understood among upper and middle classes)
- **Urban population:** 91.4% of total population (2020)
- **Literacy rate:** 98.2% of the population age 15 and over can read and write
- **Unemployment:** 15% of Jordan's labor force is without official employment. The youth unemployment rate is very high at 37.2% (ages 15 - 24).

According to the [UN Global Human Development Indicators](#) (HDI 2019):

- **HDI score and ranking:** With a score of 0.723 Jordan ranks 102nd out of 189 countries and falls in the 'High Human Development' category. From 1990 to 2018, Jordan's HDI value rose from 0.616 to 0.723, a 17.4% increase.
- **Life expectancy:** 74.4 at birth, a figure that increased by 4.5 years between 1990 and 2018.
- **Education:** Mean years of schooling is 10.5, an average that increased by 5.3 years between 1990 and 2018.

Jordanian culture is largely shaped by tensions between Jordanian natives and a variety of refugees, who are estimated to be at 14% 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. The majority of them 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. FFP's [Fragile State Index](#) (accessed 29 September 2020) shows that group grievance is dangerously high, scoring 8.9 points. The social and cultural pressure from refugees and IDPs coming into the country has decreased in recent years, but is still high. Christians play an important role in running well-respected humanitarian NGOs and schools serving all Jordanians.

The COVID-19 outbreak has had an adverse impact on the country as a whole and hence also on the Church. Under strict social distancing orders, churches and other places of worship were allowed to open again in July 2020 after being closed for almost three months. After a cluster-outbreak of infections at a church in Amman at the end of August 2020, the community was asked to keep its doors shut to prevent a further spread of the virus. However, these are not measures targeting Christians in particular, but affect the whole of the country.

Technological landscape

According to [World Internet Stats](#) (accessed June 2020):

- **Internet usage:** 85.3% penetration - survey date: December 2019
- **Facebook usage:** 56.4% penetration – survey date: February 2020

According to [World Bank's Country profile](#) (2018):

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 87.6 per 100 people

According to the [Jordanian ICT Ministry](#), around 90% of Jordanian households use a smartphone, 89% have an Internet subscription and in 33% possess a PC or laptop. The Internet is mostly accessed through smartphones or tablets (98.5%) (The Jordan Times, 26 December 2018). The rate of active social media usage and penetration in 2019 was 58% according to the [Arab Youth Survey \(2019\)](#).

In its [Freedom on the Net 2019 Report](#), Freedom House assessed the situation as follows:

- "Internet freedom in Jordan is undermined by the arrests and prosecutions of online journalists, activists, and social media users for criticism of the government; the blocking of news sites; and a number of laws that penalize legitimate expression online. Access to the internet has improved significantly in recent years, although concerns about state surveillance of online activity persist. Jordan is a monarchy in which the king plays a dominant role in politics and governance. Parliament's lower house is elected, but the electoral system continues to put the opposition at a disadvantage despite recent reforms, and the chamber wields little power in practice. The media and civil society groups are hampered by restrictive laws and government pressure."
- In the report's reporting period of 1 June 2018 to 31 May 2019, the following internet freedom violations took place: Social media or communications platforms blocked; political, social, or religious content blocked; blogger or ICT user arrested, imprisoned, or in prolonged detention for political or social content; technical attacks against government critics or human rights organizations.

Examples of restrictive laws are the Cybercrime Law and the Press and Publication Law (PPL) which determine that online defamation can lead to a fine and prison sentence of at least three months. In the [Freedom on the Net 2018 Report](#), Freedom House explained these laws as follows:

- "The Law Interpretation Bureau ruled that the law could also be applied to journalists for articles that appeared on their outlets' websites, thereby contravening journalistic protections outlined in the PPL. In September 2017, the government proposed a series of new amendments to the Cybercrime Law to explicitly cover hate speech. The changes could further impede free expression online given the term's vague definition and its propensity to be misused to prosecute reporters and social media users for nonviolent political, social, or religious speech and satire. ... Authorities have increasingly used extra-legal means to censor critical coverage in recent years. Licensed news sites have been blocked in murky circumstances and without transparent legal authorization. Self-censorship remains pervasive, particularly regarding the royal family and Islam, although digital activism continued to expand over the past year."

Jordanian Christians are increasingly anxious about expressing themselves on social media (even concerning posts about food during Ramadan) and have reported a high level of self-censorship to avoid 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.

Security situation

Though generally stable in terms of security, Jordan has faced four Islamist attacks in recent years: A cross border-car bombing launched from Syria in 2016; a shoot-out at the Crusaders castle in Karak in 2016; a bomb attack targeting a police car guarding a music festival in the majority Christian town of Fuheis in August 2018 and a stabbing attack on Western tourists in Jerash, which is famous for its Roman ruins in November 2019.

Jordan's intelligence service claim to have [prevented an Islamist attack on a church](#) and a shop in Amman, which was licensed to sell alcohol. The attack was supposedly planned for early in 2020. Four militants involved were reportedly affiliated with IS (Albawaba News, 26 June 2020).

Human rights advocates have accused Jordan's rulers of using the threat of terrorism to restrict the rights of citizens and parliament. Jordan has had a disproportionate high per capita share of Islamist thinkers and fighters. Large numbers of Jordanian Islamic fighters reportedly travelled to Syria and Iraq to fight with other Islamic militants from all over the world. Many are wondering what will happen when they return. With the ongoing war in Syria, Jordan has found itself being used as a transit country for Islamic militants, causing the threat of Islamist attack to increase in Jordan as well.

In Garda World's [Jordan Country Report](#) (Terrorism section updated 18 September 2020), Jordan's terrorist security risk is categorized as 'high' and the following explanation is given:

- "Jordan remains a high-value aspirational target for Sunni jihadists, specifically security forces, tourist and Christian areas. Returning jihadists and radicalisation among low-level members of the security forces pose the biggest threats to security forces and tourist sites. The small number of incidents during the past five years underscores the high capabilities

of the security services. The risk of terrorist attacks would increase in the unlikely event that the king approved the US's peace plan. Islamic State cells would exploit likely excessive force by the state against protesters to increase recruitment and attacks against state targets, notably security services."

Trends analysis

1) Jordanian society is becoming increasingly polarized

This polarization 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 (mentioned in "Religious landscape" above) 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 Islam 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 reportedly there are negative feelings in public opinion about the existence of Christians in the country.

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

According to the [Economist Intelligence Unit \(EIU\)](#) (accessed 14 December 2020), King Abdullah II is expected to remain in power for the next few years, "supported by his loyal armed forces. The authorities will pursue economic reforms, supported by a US\$1.3bn IMF programme, but only in the aftermath of trying to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic." The EIU forecasts a decline in real GDP and a significant increase in budget and current account deficits in 2020, making Jordan highly dependent on external aid in the next few years.

The country's political stability depends on its economic prosperity and its success in involving the population in economic progress. The COVID-19 crisis thus poses a huge threat to the economy and therefore to the stability of the country. 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 ongoing state of emergency (as part of measures to restrict the spread of the virus) and due to the arresting of leading activists.

3) Jordan 's image of protecting religious minorities

In general, many Christians in Jordan strongly believe that their security depends on the Hashemite king who has reiterated that he desires 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

- Link for general background information: Jordan country profile - BBC News - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14631981>
- Recent history: CIA World Factbook - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/jo.html>
- Recent history: closed down - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-jordan-opposition-teachers-idUSKCN24Q0N4>
- Recent history: arrest of 1000 protesting teachers - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/19/jordan-arrests-1000-teachers-in-crackdown-on-union?ref=hvper.com>
- Recent history: parliamentary elections - <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/11/jordan-low-voter-turnout-parliament-elections-apathy.html>
- Political and legal landscape: Economist Intelligence Unit - <http://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index>
- Political and legal landscape: Fragile States Index - <https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/>
- 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
- Political and legal landscape: Zamzam initiative - <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/the-islamist-spectrum-jordans-mosaic>
- Political and legal landscape: Middle East Concern - <https://meconcern.org/countries/jordan/>
- Political and legal landscape: reforming inheritance law - <https://magazine.zenith.me/en/society/christians-jordan-church-and-legal-reform>
- Economic landscape: World Bank's May 2020 update - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/jordan>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNDP 2019 report - <http://www.hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2019.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: World Factbook - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/jo.html>
- Social and cultural landscape: UN Global Human Development Indicators - <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/JOR>
- Social and cultural landscape: Fragile State Index - <https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/>
- Technological landscape: World Internet Stats - <https://www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm#jo>
- Technological landscape: World Bank's Country profile - https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&Id=b450fd57&tbar=y&dd=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=JOR
- Technological landscape: Jordanian ICT Ministry - <http://jordantimes.com/news/local/ict-internet-usage-among-jordanian-households-increases-%E2%80%9494-ministry>
- Technological landscape: Arab Youth Survey (2019) - https://www.arabyouthsurvey.com/about_the_survey.html
- Technological landscape: Freedom on the Net 2019 Report - <https://freedomhouse.org/country/jordan/freedom-net/2019>
- Technological landscape: Freedom on the Net 2018 Report - <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1180611/download>
- Security situation: prevented an Islamist attack on a church - <https://www.albawaba.com/news/jordan-intelligence-foils-terrorist-plot-church-liquor-store-amman-1365426>
- Security situation: Jordan Country Report - <https://www.garda.com/crisis24/country-reports/jordan>
- Trends analysis: Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) - <http://country.eiu.com/jordan>

WWL 2021: 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 29 September 2020):

“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		62.0
Catholic		22.5
Protestant		8.7
Independent		7.4
Unaffiliated		1.3
Doubly-affiliated Christians		-1.6
Total		100.4

(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals.)

Evangelical movement	6.8
Renewalist movement	8.5

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020)

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

According to [Middle East Concern's](#) country profile (accessed 29 September 2020): The recognised Christian communities make up 2-3% of the population. 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.

External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: JMECA - <https://www.jmecca.org.uk/christianity-middle-east/history>
- Church spectrum today - additional information: Middle East Concern's - <https://meconcern.org/countries/jordan/>

WWL 2021: Persecution Dynamics / Jordan

Reporting period

1 October 2019 - 30 September 2020

Position on the World Watch List

Jordan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	64	38
WWL 2020	64	33
WWL 2019	65	31
WWL 2018	66	21
WWL 2017	63	27

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2017-2021 reporting periods

The WWL 2021 score is the same as in WWL 2020. The increases in pressure and violence were very small and did not lead to a change in total score. The average pressure on Christians in Jordan increased very slightly from 12.4 points in WWL 2020 to 12.5 points and the score for violence increased from 1.7 points in WWL 2020 to 2.0 points in WWL 2021. Violent incidents occurred mostly against Christians with a Muslim background, but other Christians active in evangelism were also affected.

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	Weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Weak
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.

Islamic oppression (Strong)

Islamic oppression is one of the main Persecution engines in Jordan, but works mostly in non-violent ways. The government has imposed more Islamic values and laws on society although they still promote tolerance and the peaceful coexistence of other religions. 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 - or even 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.

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. After the mass influx of Palestinians into Jordan after the 1967 war with Israel, Jordan became divided into pure Jordanian 'East Bankers' (originating from the region east of the Jordan river) and Palestinian/Jordanian 'West Bankers' (who have their roots west of the Jordan river). 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 'pure' 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 'pure' Jordanian Christian. This issue requires more detailed research.

Drivers of persecution

Jordan: Drivers of persecution per engine	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG	-	-	STRONG	WEAK	-	-	WEAK	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	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Jordan:									
Drivers of persecution per engine	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG	-	-	STRONG	WEAK	-	-	WEAK	VERY WEAK
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.)	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 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 liquor stores are reportedly encouraged by local and regional extremist Muslim 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 traditional churches 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, airport police (denied 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 Islamically conservative areas such as in the south. Social media offers an additional platform for targeting Christians with hate-speech.

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.

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.

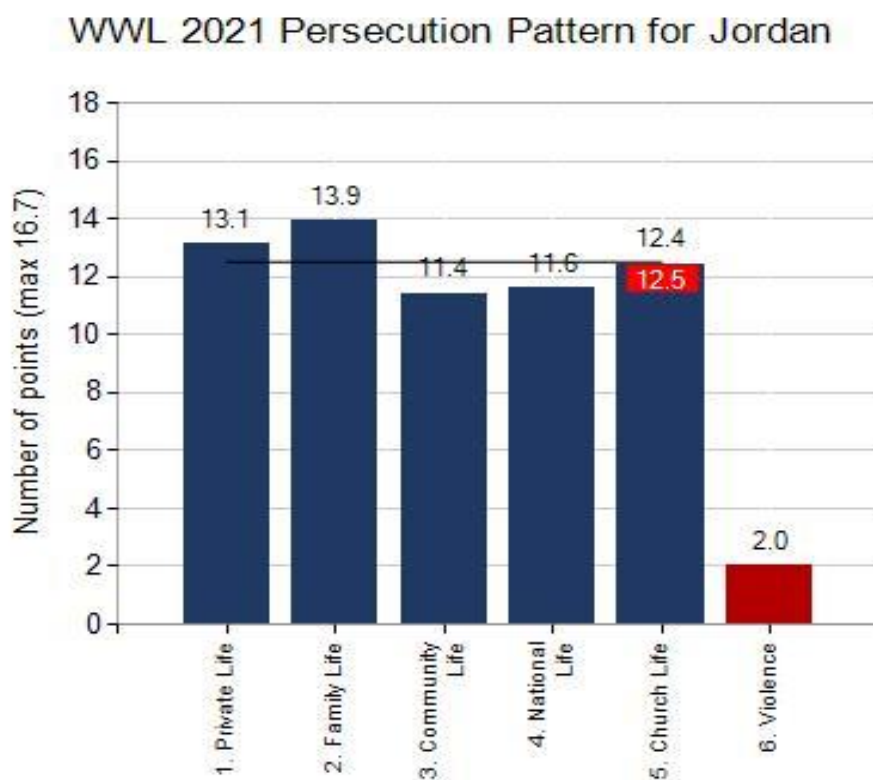
Historical Christian communities: This category makes up the largest group of Christians in Jordan, most of whom belong to Orthodox and Roman Catholic denominations. Overall, they enjoy a relatively high level of religious freedom but can experience discrimination, e.g. in the area of employment. Some pressures persist, especially from extremist societal 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 intelligence 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 Muslim lives outside of their homes,

including attending Islamic classes - and Christian lives 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 outreach. They are especially scrutinized by the intelligence service and have reportedly suffered from government pressure and job blocks. Allegedly violence against these Christians is mostly met with impunity. Non-traditional Christian communities are not recognized as churches but as societies and as such have legal personality, though they 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 disrupting interreligious stability.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2021 persecution pattern for Jordan shows:

- Overall, the pressure on Christians in Jordan – mainly on converts from Islam - is at a very high level; the average score of 12.5 points increased very slightly from the WWL 2020 level of 12.4 points.
- Pressure is at very high levels in all *spheres of life* with the exception of *Family Life*, where it reached an extreme level and especially affects 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 *Islamic oppression* is the main persecution engine combined with *Clan oppression*.
- The score for violence increased from 1.7 points in WWL 2020 to 2.0 points in WWL 2021.

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 2021 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: <http://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 allowed. 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 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 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.25 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. Negative repercussions are especially likely if a convert writes about or otherwise

confirms her/his 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.

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 would be seen as betrayal of their ancestral faith, a betrayal of the family, and a betrayal of the tribe.

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 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 faith on public documents, their children will be registered as Muslim. This brings with it a 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 believer 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 those who leave Islam lose custody of any children according to Islamic law, 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 3.10: 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 government and armed forces has a pro-Muslim bias, although nine parliamentary seats are reserved for Christians and Christians have been selected to work as ministers on a regular basis.

Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.25 points)

This applies primarily and with greatest impact to converts from Islam whose Christian faith has become known. Although non-convert Christian communities generally enjoy respect and good standing, low levels of harassment are encountered from time to time from more conservative elements within Jordanian society, especially in rural areas. Since most Jordanian women wear the *hijab*, Christian women are more obvious in public settings and are often viewed as dressing inappropriately and can thus become subjected to harassment. In society there is generally less tolerance for Christians and, in the business world, suppliers might choose to stop selling to someone known to be a Christian. Also, Muslim customers prefer to buy from Muslim shopkeepers.

Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.25 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" call to come to Islam.

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, officially leaving Islam to convert to another religion is illegal (as is 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 4.2: 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. No Christian from a Muslim background is known to have applied to change official religious affiliation from Islam in the WWL 2021 reporting period. To make such an application would expose them to the authorities and so be potentially dangerous. Some have pursued this in the legal systems and failed.

Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.50 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 military or 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 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (3.50 points)

For converts from Islam who are victims of crime on account of their faith, the perpetrators (including those of so-called 'honor crimes') are likely 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 5.1: 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 - though such monitoring could be used against churches if provocative messages or activities were detected, or if Muslims were observed to be attending. The government controls church activities via interrogation (amongst other methods), and might exert pressure on churches that are not officially recognized or that actively proselytize. Known meetings of Christians with an Islamic background are very likely to be closely monitored and obstructed.

Block 5.7: Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts. (3.75 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 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (3.50 points)

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

Block 5.14: Openly selling or distributing Bibles (or other Christian materials) has been hindered. (3.50 points)

The sale of Bibles and the distribution of Christian materials is only permitted in designated places, such as within recognized churches and adjacent church book stores but not in ordinary markets or bookshops. The distribution of Christian materials must not be perceived to constitute proselytism and most Christians exercise self-censorship in this regard. Many historical churches tend to refrain from distributing Bibles publicly for fear of stirring up social unrest and facing hostility.

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. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures. In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10, 100 or 1000) is given. (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 1000 could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain.) In cases where it is clear that (many) more Christians are affected, but a concrete number could be given according to the number of incidents reported, the number given has to be understood as being an absolutely minimum figure. The symbol "x" denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security considerations.

Jordan: Violence Block question	WWL 2021	WWL 2020
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
6.2 How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	1
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	5	0
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	0
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?	100	0
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	0
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	10	5
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	0
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	6	3
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	1	9

For the WWL 2021 reporting period: (Details of places and dates cannot be provided for security reasons.)

- ***Christians detained:***

The reported five cases are a very conservative estimate. Christian laymen and leaders involved in outreach can be called in regularly for questioning. It is unknown beforehand how long this will take, it can vary from 20 minutes to 12 days.

- **Christians attacked:**

Not being dressed as a Muslim lady - i.e. not wearing a hijab - creates a profile of vulnerability. At least 100 Christian women have been sexually harassed for this reason. For this reason, many Christian women choose not to use public transport or taxi especially at night. There is a lot of taboo around this topic which makes it hard to get concrete figures. The 100 is a very conservative estimate. There were several cases of both female and male converts being beaten by their family (husband, brothers) and receiving death threats because of their faith. This is known to be happening when a convert's new faith is discovered. Because of the sensitivity of the situation of converts it is hard to gather this information. In the table above, 10 cases is a conservative estimate.

- **Christians forced to leave their homes:**

There were at least six converts from Islam who needed to leave their homes and find shelter elsewhere as a result of a threatening situation developing after their Christian faith had become known to their families.

5 Year trends

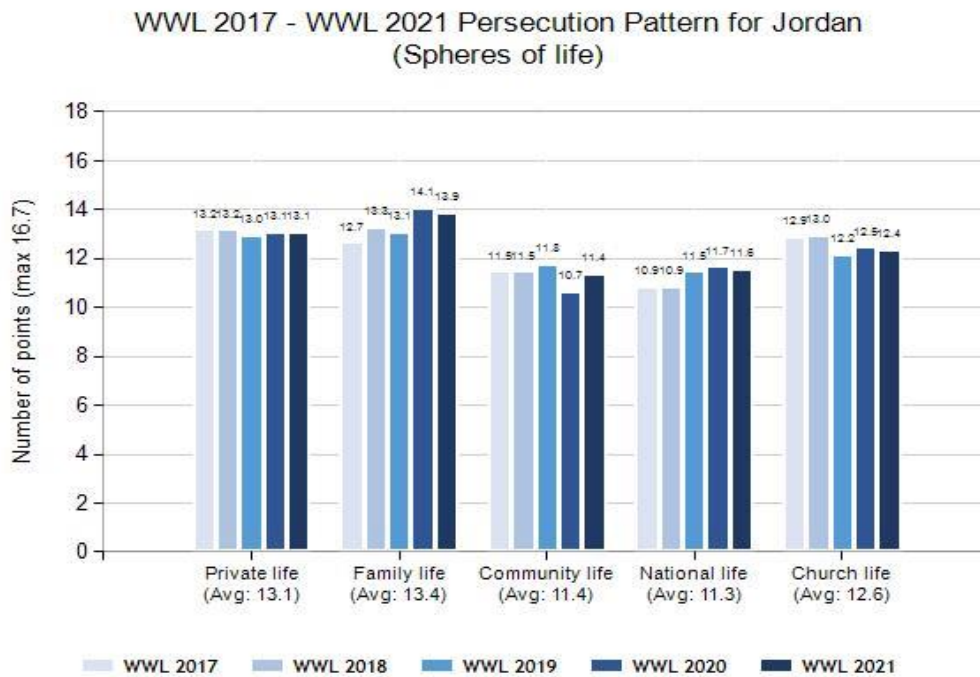
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

Jordan: WWL 2017 - WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2021	12.5
2020	12.4
2019	12.3
2018	12.4
2017	12.3

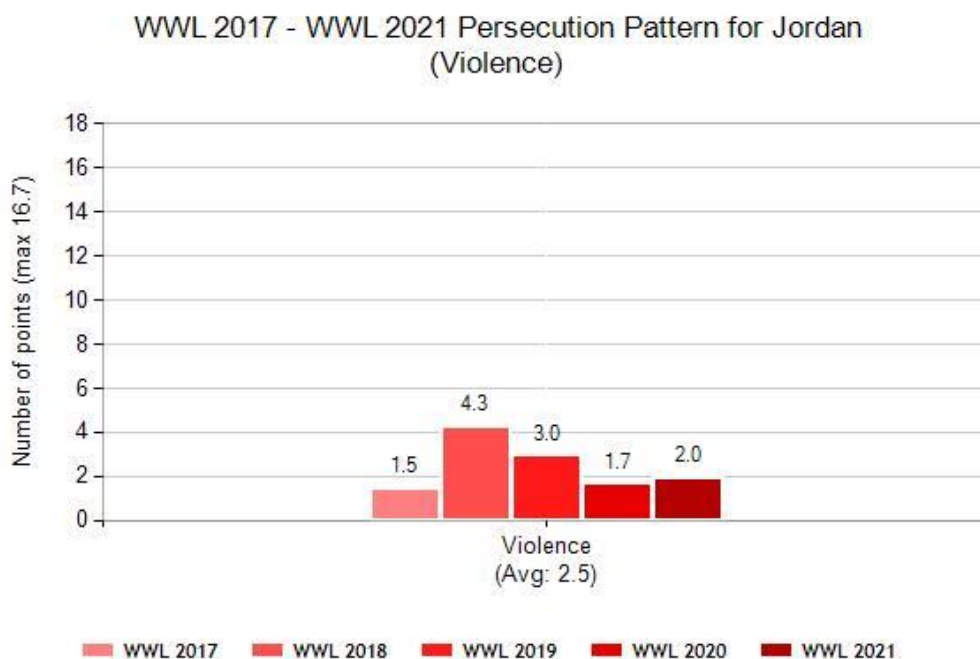
The table above shows how the overall score for pressure on Christians has remained stable in the last five reporting periods at a very high level of 12.3 - 12.5 points.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



Pressure in the *Private* and *Church spheres of life* rose gradually until WWL 2018 and is now stabilizing or slightly declining. The growth in pressure in the *Family sphere of life* and *National sphere of life* seem to be levelling off in WWL2021. While the growth in the *Community sphere of life* decreased in WWL2020, an increase can be seen in WWL2021 mostly due to more information becoming available.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The violence scores have varied over the years and only reached a high level once (in WWL 2018). The score fell again in WWL 2019 and further decreased in WWL 2020. There was a slight increase in the violence score for WWL 2021, but in general this score is at a stable low level.

Gender-specific religious persecution Female

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

Of all the categories of Christian community in Jordan, it is above all female converts from Islam who are particularly vulnerable to persecution for their faith. Pressure comes most often from family members. If she still lives with her family, she risks house arrest, isolation, beatings 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'. This can extend to honor killings, which are a risk for converts in rural areas. Whilst no such instances have been reported in the WWL 2021 reporting period, it remains a risk.

Female converts from Islam cannot officially marry male Christians. Even if they marry abroad, the state does not recognize such marriages. When married to non-Christian husbands, female converts risk physical 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 under the threat of forced divorce and loss of custody of their children. The attitude of the 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 Oct 2019). Discussions remain ongoing and inheritance remains influenced by Islamic tradition. Jordanian culture is highly conservative and patriarchal and change is slow. While the legal age for marriage is 18, some girls continue to be married earlier from the age of 15 with judicial consent ([UNDP](#): "Gender Justice and the Law: Jordan"). The personal status laws also facilitate house arrest and forced marriage, to which young female converts are particularly vulnerable.

Apostasy laws continue to pose challenges to Christian women. In cases decided by a Sharia court, judges can annul converts' marriages, transfer child custody to a non-parent Muslim family member or declare the children 'wards of the state' and convey an individual's property rights to Muslim family members. In divorce cases between a Christian wife and Muslim husband, a wife used to automatically lose custody of the children when they reached seven years. [Recent legal developments](#) have granted mothers' greater custody rights, irrespective of religious background (USDS, "2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Jordan"). Christian convert women remain at risk of losing their children however, if their new faith is discovered, as conversion to Christianity remains illegal under Sharia. If a divorced Christian woman becomes a Muslim, she can gain custody rights over the children and receive an inheritance from her husband. This puts a lot of pressure on divorced Christian women to convert.

On a wider level, all Christian women face pressure to follow a specified dress code. According to a country expert, "Christian women are more singled out in public settings as dressed less appropriately and are subject to harassment." Christian women have also been reportedly strategically targeted for the purpose of marriage and conversion.

Gender-specific religious persecution Male

Male Pressure Points
Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse
Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Economic harassment via fines

Forced out of home – expulsion
Forced to flee town/country
Imprisonment by government
Violence – physical
Violence – psychological

Job discrimination affects all Christians, especially those working in the public sector. General unemployment rates for all men in Jordan have risen in recent years and have been worsened still by the COVID-19 crisis, with a reported [23% of people](#) out of work (The World Bank). This has increased the pressure on any 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, or face extortion through fines. 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.

Christian 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. They are susceptible to violence “by extended family group beatings,” as one country expert describes. Christian men also face pressure from the state authorities. Men are reported to be interviewed 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 are also targeted for interviews.

The result is that such difficulties all too often prompt men to emigrate in what could appear to be an economic migration but is actually rooted in the situation caused by their Christian faith. If the pressure on Christian families leads to emigration, this has a potentially negative effect on future church leadership.

Persecution of other religious minorities

Details are available in the [US State Department’s IRF 2019 Jordan report](#).

In general, Jordan's systems tends to be "repressive" for groups and communities belonging to non-Sunni dimensions, for instance Shiites, Bahai, Druze, Buddhists, Hindus, Iraqi Mandaean and Jehovah's Witnesses . These groups are not recognized and therefore they suffer from forms of discrimination due to that lack of recognition.

It is reportedly harder for a Sunni to convert to Shiite Islam than to convert to Christianity. The Bahai religion is not officially recognized and therefore their activities can be banned, although most Bahai adherents are unofficially allowed to practice their religion. Marriage certificates of Bahais are also not recognized by the Department of Civil Status and Passports. An example of the difficulties facing Bahai was described in the US State Department's [International Religious Freedom Report for 2017](#): The Governor of Amman cancelled a Bahai-hosted event in October 2017 due to concerns that the event honoring "Harmony Among Religions" could incite a radical Islamic attack.

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 [International Religious Freedom Report for 2019](#), the "government continued to record Druze as Muslims on civil documents identifying the bearer's religious affiliation, without public objection from the Druze." This report stated continued discrimination of Druze which prevented them from holding high positions in government and official departments.

Non-Muslims and non-Christian migrants, mostly Buddhist and Hindus, are also not recognized as a religion, just like Mandaean who are found among Iraqi refugees who entered the country. 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:

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, 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 slump. [Unemployment is anticipated to remain high](#) at least during 2021, according to economic analyst [Adli Qandah](#) quoted in an Al-Monitor article on 8 December 2020. A high unemployment rate, especially for youth, is fertile soil for political unrest and recruitment by radical Islamic groups. Also, with the war in Syria apparently nearing its end, battle-hardened Jordanian Islamic militants could soon be returning home. Their presence could pose serious dangers to the population and particularly to vulnerable minorities such as Christians. Therefore there is a real risk that the country will destabilize in the course of the pandemic which might give room for the empowerment of radical elements in the country. These projections indicate that the persecution engine *Islamic oppression* is not likely to decrease in influence in the near future.

Clan oppression

This Persecution engine is not currently facing any major changes. 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.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: revision of personal status laws - <https://magazine.zenith.me/en/society/christians-jordan-church-and-legal-reform>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: UNDP - https://arabstates.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Jordan%20Country%20Summary%20-%20English_0.pdf
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Recent legal developments - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/jordan/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: 23% of people - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/jordan/overview>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: US State Department's IRF 2019 Jordan report. - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/jordan/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: International Religious Freedom Report for 2017 - <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: International Religious Freedom Report for 2019 - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/jordan/>
- Future outlook: Unemployment is anticipated to remain high - <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/12/jordan-2021-state-budget-deficit-coronavirus-economic-crisis.html>
- Future outlook: Adli Qandah - <http://alghad.com/%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A9-2021-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B9/>
- Future outlook: Arab Youth Survey - <http://www.arabyouthsurvey.com/findings.html>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on World Watch Research's Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) and on the World Watch Monitor website:

- <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Jordan>
- <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/Jordan>