

World  
Watch  
Research

## Jordan: Full Country Dossier

January 2023



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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# Introduction

## World Watch List 2023

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	94	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.7	92	91	92	92	91
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	88	87	85	86
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.2	89	88	88	87	86
5	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.1	16.3	9.1	88	91	92	90	87
6	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.6	14.8	14.4	16.7	88	87	85	80	80
7	Pakistan	13.4	13.8	14.8	14.8	12.9	16.7	86	87	88	88	87
8	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.8	15.8	16.5	10.7	86	85	86	85	85
9	Afghanistan	15.4	15.7	15.4	16.1	16.6	4.6	84	98	94	93	94
10	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	9.4	83	79	79	85	87
11	India	12.3	13.1	13.0	14.8	13.3	15.7	82	82	83	83	83
12	Syria	13.2	14.1	13.6	14.1	14.1	11.3	80	78	81	82	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.9	15.8	16.7	2.4	80	81	78	79	77
14	Myanmar	12.5	11.6	13.9	13.9	12.9	15.4	80	79	74	73	71
15	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.8	16.0	16.4	0.2	77	77	77	78	78
16	China	12.9	10.0	12.7	14.5	15.6	11.1	77	76	74	70	65
17	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	10.3	15.1	15.0	76	70	67	66	68
18	Iraq	14.1	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	4.6	76	78	82	76	79
19	Algeria	14.1	14.1	11.5	13.7	15.1	4.8	73	71	70	73	70
20	Mauritania	14.5	14.2	13.3	14.1	14.2	1.3	72	70	71	68	67
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	13.9	12.7	15.6	1.5	71	71	71	73	74
22	Colombia	11.8	8.9	13.1	11.3	10.4	15.4	71	68	67	62	58
23	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.5	9.6	13.8	15.6	71	68	67	66	48
24	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	68	66	68	70
25	Vietnam	11.8	9.6	12.8	14.6	14.4	6.9	70	71	72	72	70
26	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	14.1	15.7	0.6	70	69	70	70	69
27	Cuba	13.1	8.3	13.1	13.2	14.9	7.0	70	66	62	52	49
28	Niger	9.4	9.5	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.4	70	68	62	60	52
29	Morocco	13.2	13.8	10.9	12.2	14.5	4.8	69	69	67	66	63
30	Bangladesh	12.6	10.7	12.8	11.3	10.6	10.7	69	68	67	63	58
31	Laos	11.7	10.2	13.3	14.2	14.0	5.0	68	69	71	72	71
32	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.6	68	65	63	43	43
33	Indonesia	11.3	12.0	11.6	11.1	9.2	12.8	68	68	63	60	65
34	Qatar	14.2	14.1	10.5	13.2	14.4	1.5	68	74	67	66	62
35	Egypt	12.7	13.5	11.6	12.1	10.8	7.0	68	71	75	76	76
36	Tunisia	12.0	12.8	10.4	12.0	13.5	6.5	67	66	67	64	63
37	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.6	67	66	64	56	55
38	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	11.0	10.5	13.9	67	65	64	60	61
39	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.4	12.1	10.6	66	66	65	63	65
40	Bhutan	13.2	12.3	11.6	13.9	14.2	1.1	66	67	64	61	64
41	Turkey	12.8	11.5	11.8	13.0	11.5	5.7	66	65	69	63	66
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.5	66	63	62	57	56
43	Malaysia	12.8	14.3	11.4	12.2	11.1	3.9	66	63	63	62	60
44	Tajikistan	13.8	12.2	12.3	12.8	13.4	1.1	66	65	66	65	65
45	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.9	65	65	64	60	54
46	Brunei	14.8	14.6	10.1	10.9	14.4	0.4	65	64	64	63	63
47	Oman	14.0	14.1	10.3	13.3	12.9	0.6	65	66	63	62	59
48	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.6	11.9	12.7	14.2	1.1	65	64	64	64	63
49	Jordan	13.0	14.0	10.5	12.3	12.7	2.0	65	66	64	64	65
50	Nicaragua	10.8	5.9	11.9	12.8	13.6	9.4	65	56	51	41	41

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.3	64	63	62	61	61
52	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	64	63	62	60
53	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.6	63	61	58	55	52
54	UAE	13.4	13.4	9.9	11.2	12.8	1.1	62	62	62	60	58
55	Nepal	12.0	9.8	9.4	13.0	12.6	4.4	61	64	66	64	64
56	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	0.6	60	59	56	56	56
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.3	9.7	10.3	12.0	2.0	60	59	58	60	57
58	Azerbaijan	13.2	10.0	9.5	12.0	13.6	0.6	59	60	56	57	57
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.2	11.0	10.4	12.0	2.0	59	58	58	57	56
60	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	7.6	58	55	53	56	48
61	Russian Federation	12.3	7.9	10.3	11.8	12.8	2.0	57	56	57	60	60
62	Sri Lanka	12.8	9.1	10.6	11.3	9.5	3.9	57	63	62	65	58
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	8.9	57	50	42	42	41
64	Venezuela	6.0	4.6	11.7	10.2	11.4	11.7	56	51	39	42	41
65	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	11.1	55	52	48	48	43
66	Bahrain	12.7	13.3	8.7	10.7	8.8	0.9	55	57	56	55	55
67	Honduras	7.1	5.0	11.9	7.6	9.8	11.9	53	48	46	39	38
68	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	51	46	43	42
69	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	9.2	14.8	51	48	47	48	47
70	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	5.4	49	44	43	41	42
71	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	3.0	48	43	47	45	46
72	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.0	46	43	43	44	44
73	El Salvador	7.7	4.2	10.6	7.4	9.1	6.7	46	45	42	38	30
74	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	42	42	42	43
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	1.1	44	44	43	43	43
76	Belarus	9.5	3.8	4.8	9.4	12.1	3.3	43	33	30	28	35

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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 2023 reporting period was 01 October 2021 - 30 September 2022.
- 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).

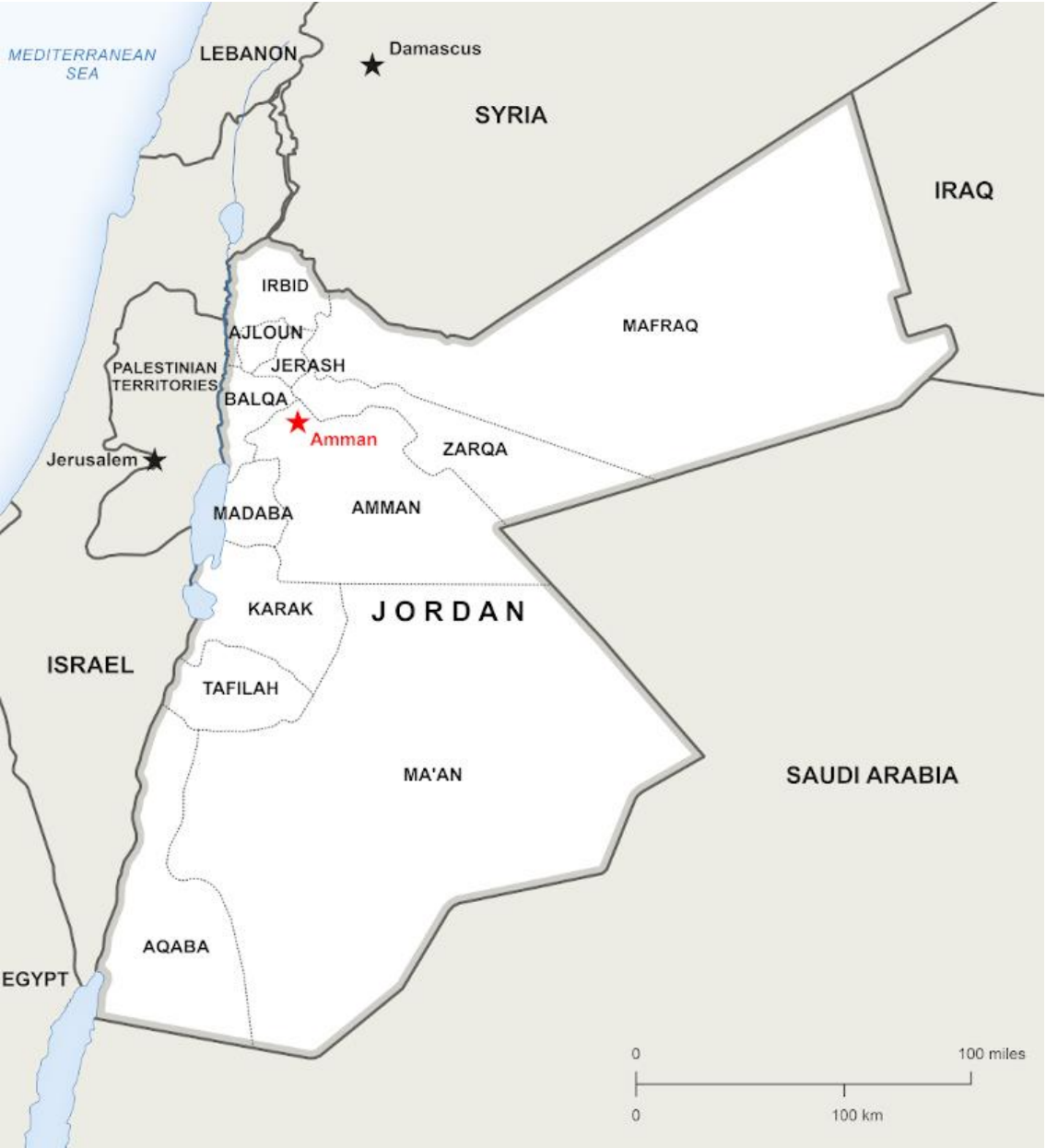
# WWL 2023 Situation in brief / Jordan

## Brief country details

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

Jordan: Population (UN estimate for 2022)	Christians	Chr%
10,301,000	170,000	OD estimate

## Map of country



Jordan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	65	49
WWL 2022	66	39
WWL 2021	64	38
WWL 2020	64	33
WWL 2019	65	31

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

## 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 relatively high 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, 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, 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 2023 reporting period:

- **Christians detained:** Converts and other Christians involved in outreach 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 taxi especially at night.
- **Christians physically or mentally abused:** Several converts and other Christians active in aiding and discipling converts were physically or mentally abused, usually by the families of the converts.

## Specific examples of positive developments

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2021): "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>

## WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Jordan

### Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2021/22 country report – covering 154 countries	AI country report 2021/22 (pp.215-217)	<a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf">https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf</a>	20 June 2022
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14631981">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14631981</a>	20 June 2022
Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI report 2022	<a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/JOR">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/JOR</a>	20 June 2022
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	<a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/jordan/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/jordan/</a>	20 June 2022
Crisis24 country report (Garda World) – covering 193 countries	Crisis24 country report	<a href="https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/jordan">https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/jordan</a>	20 June 2022
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2021 – covering 167 countries	EIU 2021 (p. 52)	<a href="https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf">https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf</a>	20 June 2022
FFP's Fragile States Index 2022 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2022	<a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>	1 August 2022
Freedom House's 2022 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Jordan not included	Democracy Index 2022	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores</a>	
Freedom House's 2022 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2022	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/jordan/freedom-world/2022">https://freedomhouse.org/country/jordan/freedom-world/2022</a>	20 June 2022
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 report – covering 70 countries	Freedom on the Net 2022	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/jordan/freedom-net/2022">https://freedomhouse.org/country/jordan/freedom-net/2022</a>	9 January 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 (country chapter) – covering 100+ countries	HRW 2022 country chapter	<a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/jordan">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/jordan</a>	20 June 2022
Internet World Stats 2022	IWS 2022	<a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm#jo">https://www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm#jo</a>	20 June 2022
Middle East Concern – covering 24 countries	MEC Country report	<a href="https://meconcern.org/countries/jordan/">https://meconcern.org/countries/jordan/</a>	1 August 2022
RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2022	<a href="https://rsf.org/en/jordan">https://rsf.org/en/jordan</a>	20 June 2022
Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2021	<a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/jordan">https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/jordan</a>	20 June 2022
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators	HDI profile	<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>	20 June 2022
US State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom (country profile)	IRFR 2021	<a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/jordan/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/jordan/</a>	20 June 2022
USCIRF 2022 country reports – covering 15 CPC / 12 SWL, Jordan not included	USCIRF 2022	<a href="https://www.uscifr.gov/countries">https://www.uscifr.gov/countries</a>	
World Bank country overview – covering 178 countries	World Bank overview 2022	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/jordan/overview">https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/jordan/overview</a>	20 June 2022
World Bank country profile data – covering 222 countries	World Bank profile (2020 data)	<a href="https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&amp;b=450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=JOR">https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&amp;b=450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=JOR</a>	20 June 2022
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 – covering 147 countries (divided per region)	Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 (pp. 14-15)	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/macro-poverty-outlook">https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/macro-poverty-outlook</a>	20 June 2022

### Recent history

After the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War 1, 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 Abdallah II succeeded him.

Jordan was also affected by the so-called Arab Spring which began in 2011. According to the CIA Factbook, 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 faced four attacks by Islamists in the period 2016 - 2019 (see below: *Security situation*). 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.

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.

The COVID-19 crisis had an adverse impact on the country as a whole and hence also on the Christian community. 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 criticism of 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 dissent 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: as a result Independent and pro-government candidates now make up the majority of the House of Representatives, making it even more conciliatory towards the government.

In March 2021 there were several [protests](#) against the economic impact of lockdowns and other pandemic emergency measures; protests also took place on the 10th anniversary of the Arab Spring uprising (International Crisis Group, March 2021). Several protesters were detained. Peaceful protests occur regularly, particularly against proposed austerity measures and in solidarity with Palestinian issues. In April 2021, former Crown Prince Hamza bin al-Hussein was placed under house-arrest on [charges of plotting to destabilize the country](#) (Al-Monitor, 22 April 2021). In a video recorded after his arrest, Hamza accused the government of "incompetence and corruption". Peace was restored when Hamza signed a pledge of support to King Abdullah a few days later. According to Al-Monitor, the royal feud "threatened to undermine the Arab monarchy's standing as one of the most stable Middle East countries." However, in 2022, dis-

agreements between the king and his half-brother emerged again: Crown Prince Hamzah announced in April 2022 that he was relinquishing his title because his convictions could not be reconciled with the "approaches, policies and methods" of Jordan's institutions ([Al-Jazeera](#), 3 April 2022). A month later, King Abdullah II placed his half-brother under house-arrest again, stating that he would not be given room to "offend the nation". According to the palace, royal family laws state that titles can only be revoked by the monarch ([Al-Jazeera](#), 19 May 2022).

In January 2022, the Jordanian Upper and Lower House passed a number of controversial constitutional amendments. Critics say these reforms [increase the king's power at the expense of the government](#) (European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, 4/3/22). This seems to be in stark contrast to the king's earlier statements about wanting to become a "constitutional monarch" and that he wants Jordan to be a parliamentary democracy in ten years' time.

The kingdom was rocked by a [poisonous gas leak](#) in the port city of Aqaba that killed 13 people and injured 251 in June 2022 (BBC News, 28 June 2022). In the same month, the government presented a [10-year development strategy](#) with "366 planned initiatives spanning healthcare, education, transport, and infrastructure development. Attracting investment, decreasing reliance on fuel and food imports, and cutting unemployment remain the government's main policy aims (Crisis24 Country Report).

In December 2022, protests over high fuel prices spiraled out of control when a Jordanian army officer was shot in the head in the town of Maan. According to an AI Monitor article of 16 December 2022 "The killing of the officer comes after governmental measures failed to stop a strike staged by lorry and public transport drivers in different regions of the country calling for a reduction in fuel prices and the removal of government taxes. Large areas of the kingdom witnessed [riots, tire burnings and the blocking of roads](#) in the last two weeks. The strike, which paralyzed the southern cities of Maan, Karak and Tafila, entered its 13th day Friday, as shops closed their doors in solidarity, amid widespread sit-ins and road closures."

## Political and legal landscape

The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index (EIU 2021) classifies Jordan as an authoritarian regime. FFP's Fragile States Index (FSI 2022) puts Jordan in the elevated warning category. Trends for cohesion and economic indicators improved slightly, whereas political and social indicator trends deteriorated to some degree.

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 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 commu-

nity 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 is 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-invigorating 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

A new proposal for [reforming inheritance law](#) in the personal status of Christians has officially been under discussion since 2019 (Zenith, 25 October 2019). 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, even by the end of 2022, no formal decisions had yet been made.

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, 2022). The [legal minimum age](#) for marriage is 18, although exemptions can be made with judicial consent (Girls Not Brides, 2022). 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	1.7
Muslim	9,796,028	95.1
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethno-religionist	0	0.0
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	25,223	0.2
Atheist	51,343	0.5
Agnostic	254,222	2.5
Other	5,084	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 April 2022) (Adapted according to OD-estimate)

Around 95% of the population are Muslim of which the majority are Sunni, and Open Doors estimates that approximately 1.7% 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 included 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 (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 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 country 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. However, the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated

Jordan's jobs challenge: Unemployment stood at 23.3% in Q4-2021, youth unemployment reached nearly 50% and the women's labor force participation rate is 14%, one of the lowest in the world."

- However: "High unemployment rates, widening external imbalances, elevated debt levels and weak investment highlight sizable challenges to a robust recovery."

It remains to be seen to what extent the country will be able to recover from the economic challenges. 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 ([OECD, 2019](#)). Despite having achieved gender parity in relation to access to education, less than one-fifth of the workforce is made up of women (World Bank data profile). This is not reflective of women's aspirations. According to a [Georgetown 2019/20 study](#), 60% of women agreed with the statement: "Having a job is the best way for a woman to be an independent person." In addition, female unemployment rose sharply in the fourth quarter of 2020 to 32.8% from 24.1% in 2019 ([World Bank Press Release, 22 December 2021](#)). Another worrisome development is the strong increase in youth unemployment which rose in the same quarter to an all-time high of 50% from 40.6% in 2019.

## Social and cultural landscape

According to the CIA Factbook and UNDP's HDI profile:

- **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:** 91.8% of total population (2022)
- **Literacy rate:** 98.2% of the population age 15 and over can read and write.
- **HDI score and ranking:** With a score of 0.729 Jordan ranks 102nd out of 189 countries and falls in the 'High Human Development' category. From 1990 to 2019, Jordan's HDI value has risen 16.6% since 1990.
- **Life expectancy:** 74.5 at birth, a figure that has increased by 4.7 years since 1990.
- **Education:** Mean years of schooling is 10.5, an average that increased by 5.4 years since 1990.
- **Unemployment:** 23.3% of Jordan's labor force is without official employment. The youth unemployment rate is very high at 52.1% (ages 15 - 24) - 47.9% for males; 70.2% for females (Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, [Department of Statistics](#), 24 March 2022).



Jordanian culture is largely shaped by tension between Jordanian natives 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. FFP's Fragile State Index (FSI 2022) shows that "group grievance" is still dangerously high, scoring 8.3 points. The social and cultural pressure from refugees and IDPs coming into the country has decreased in recent years, but is still high and rose slowly in 2021. Christians play an important role in running well-respected humanitarian NGOs and schools serving all Jordanians.

According to the World Food Program ([ReliefWeb](#), 6 July 2022):

- "In 2021, COVID-19 hit the country even harder in its second year, increasing the needs of many refugees and many Jordanians. The food security of refugees significantly deteriorated in 2021, largely due to the loss of employment opportunities. WFP monitoring data showed that food insecurity increased from 67 percent in 2019 to 80 percent in 2021."

### Gender perspective

In Jordan's patriarchal, predominately Islamic context, men and women are expected to assume traditional roles; women remain typically restricted to roles that are subordinate to men ([IREX, 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.

## Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2022):

- **Internet usage:** 83.9% penetration - survey date: March 2022
- **Facebook usage:** 69.3% penetration – survey date: January 2022

According to the World Bank's country profile:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 68 per 100 inhabitants (2020 est.)

Freedom House made the following assessment (Freedom on the Net 2022):

- "Internet freedom in Jordan remains restricted. The government continued to block access to communications platforms during high school exams and Clubhouse separately re-



mained inaccessible during the coverage period. Online journalists, activists, and social media users were prosecuted for their criticism of the government, based on several laws that penalize legitimate expression online. Journalists were pressured to remove online content and local media were pushed to limit their coverage of critical topics online, especially content associated with the king or the royal family. Access to the internet has improved significantly in recent years, although concerns about state surveillance of online activity persist. Human rights defenders (HRDs) were targeted with spyware technology during the coverage period."

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. Freedom House explained these laws In an earlier report ([Freedom on the Net 2018](#)):

- "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 what they write about on social media (even concerning posts about food during Ramadan) and have reported a high level of self-censorship to avoid any possibility of insulting the Islamic majority. 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 2021):

- "Religious leaders reported continuing online hate speech, frequently through social media, directed towards religious minorities and those who advocated religious moderation. One NGO reported increased online hate speech towards the Christian community in direct response to radio and internet broadcasts of local services to the local Christian community. ... Religious broadcasts were an alternative to regular in-person services, which were not allowed when the country was under periodic comprehensive lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic. NGO sources said the negative responses were the reactions of Muslims to their first real exposure to Christianity. ... One NGO worried about calls from the local community to criminalize hate speech in new laws or amendments, believing it would lead to selective application of the law."

- "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; Christians relocated to the cities and moved abroad seeking economic opportunities as well."

## Security situation

Although 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 in November 2019 on Western tourists in Jerash, which is famous for its Roman ruins. 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 to the Islamic State group (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 a disproportionately 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 worried about their [repatriation](#) (Washington Institute, 9 August 2019). 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.

According to Crisis24's Jordan Country Report, Jordan's terrorist security risk is categorized as 'medium' and the following explanation is given:

- "Jordan remains a high-value aspirational target for Sunni jihadists. Returning jihadists and radicalization among low-level members of the security forces pose the biggest threats to security forces, tourist sites, and Christian areas. The small number of incidents during the past five years underscores the high capabilities of the security services, primarily in securing the border with Iraq and Syria. Islamic State cells would exploit likely excessive force by the state against protesters to increase recruitment and attacks against state targets, notably security services."

## 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 Chronicle](#), 18 September 2020; [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).

## 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.

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

According to the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU 2022), King Abdullah II is expected to remain in power for the next few years "supported by his loyal armed forces. GDP growth will remain sluggish over the forecast period, albeit with a slight acceleration in 2022 and 2023 from 2021. A slow recovery in tourism will set in. Inflation will be underpinned by rising global food prices. Persistently high unemployment will increase the risk of social unrest."

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 King Abdullah II announced in May 2022 that he would be lifting the defense law in the following months.

### 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: 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>
- Recent history: protests - [https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/database?location%5B%5D=90&date\\_range=last\\_12\\_months&from\\_month=01&from\\_year=2021&to\\_month=01&to\\_year=2021](https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/database?location%5B%5D=90&date_range=last_12_months&from_month=01&from_year=2021&to_month=01&to_year=2021)
- Recent history: charges of plotting to destabilize the country - <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/04/jordan-releases-16-detained-over-royal-family-feud>
- Recent history: Al-Jazeera - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/3/jordans-prince-hamzah-bin-hussein-renounces-his-title>
- Recent history: Al-Jazeera - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/19/jordans-king-places-erratic-half-brother-under-house-arrest>
- Recent history: increase the king's power at the expense of the government - <https://www.europeanforum.net/headlines/jordan-approves-controversial-constitutional-amendments>
- Recent history: poisonous gas leak - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-61950965>
- Recent history: 10-year development strategy - <https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/jordan>
- Recent history: riots, tire burnings and the blocking of roads - <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/12/jordanian-officer-killed-protests-over-fuel-prices-spread>
- 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: reforming inheritance law - <https://magazine.zenith.me/en/society/christians-jordan-church-and-legal-reform>
- Political and legal landscape: 10% - <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/atlas/jordan/>
- Political and legal landscape: legal minimum age - <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/atlas/jordan/>
- Economic landscape: (OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/JO.pdf>
- Economic landscape: Georgetown 2019/20 study - <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WPS-Index-2019-20-Report.pdf>
- Economic landscape: World Bank Press Release, 22 December 2021 - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/12/22/jordan-us-112-million-to-finance-national-employment-program-in-the-private-sector-focused-on-jobs-for-youth-and-women>
- Social and cultural landscape: Department of Statistics - [http://dos.gov.jo/dos\\_home\\_e/main/archive/Unemp/2021/Q4\\_2021.pdf](http://dos.gov.jo/dos_home_e/main/archive/Unemp/2021/Q4_2021.pdf)
- Social and cultural landscape: ReliefWeb - <https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/wfp-jordan-2021-annual-country-report-overview>
- Social and cultural landscape: IREX, 2021 - <https://www.irex.org/insight/localizing-gender-discussions-jordan-lessons-learned-usaid-takamol-gender-resource-manual>
- Technological landscape: (Freedom on the Net 2018) - <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: repatriation - <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/how-jordan-can-deal-jordanian-isis-fighters-still-syria>
- Security situation: UN Chronicle - <https://www.un.org/en/un-chronicle/peace-synonymous-women%E2%80%99s-rights>
- 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>

## WWL 2023: 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			63.1
Catholic			20.9
Protestant			8.1
Independent			7.5
Unaffiliated			1.4
Doubly-affiliated Christians			-1.1
<b>Total</b> <i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>			<b>99.9</b>

Evangelical movement		6.4
Renewalist movement		8.2

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

**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 (MEC country 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 relatively high 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 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 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 outreach. They are especially scrutinized by the intelligence service and have reportedly suffered from government pressure and hindrances to 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.jmeca.org.uk/christianity-middle-east/history>

# WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Jordan

## Reporting period

1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022

## Position on the World Watch List

Jordan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	65	49
WWL 2022	66	39
WWL 2021	64	38
WWL 2020	64	33
WWL 2019	65	31

*Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods*

In WWL 2023 Jordan scored one point less than in WWL 2022: 65 instead of 66 points. This small difference is mainly due to a lower number of reported violent incidents. For example, there were no reports this year of Christians who had to leave their homes and find another place to stay inside or outside the country. Other incidents continued to be reported, such as physical abuse (mainly concerning converts from Islam). Average pressure stayed at the same very high level as in WWL 2022, namely 12.5 points.



### 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 usually leads 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 moder-



mate 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 (traditional) churches and newer churches (often including charismatic and evangelical movements). This is because evangelicals generally accept converts from Islam as well as Christians from traditional churches into their congregations. According to evangelical leaders, it is primarily Greek Orthodox (but sometimes Catholic) leaders who are exerting pressure on newer denominations. 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

Jordan: Drivers of Persecution									
	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG	-	-	STRONG	MEDIUM	-	-	MEDIUM	VERY 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 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 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.

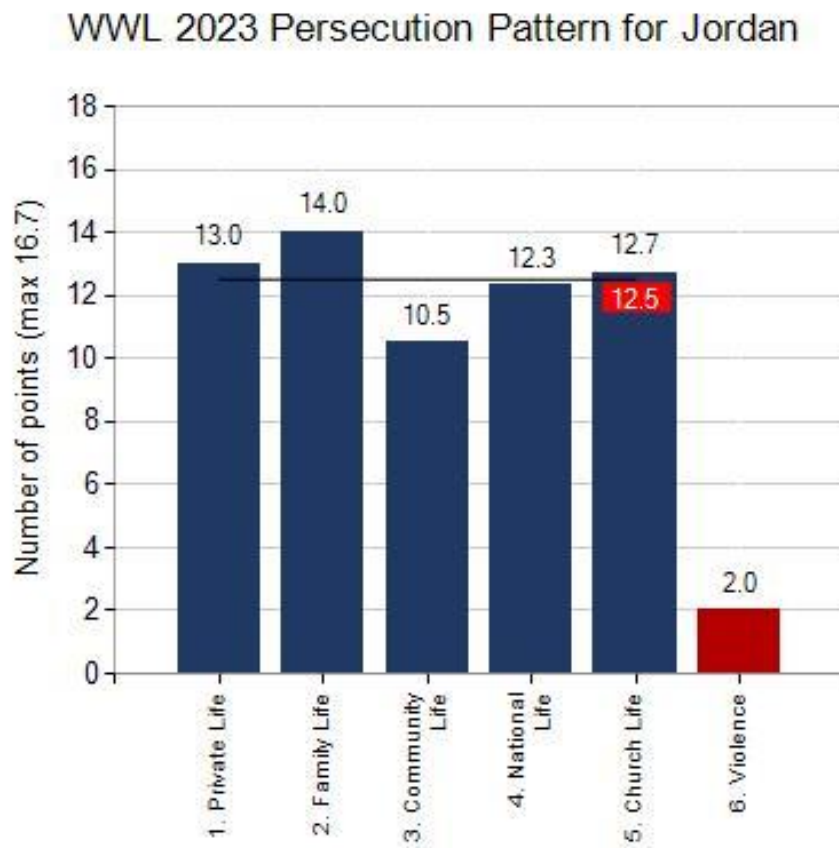
#### Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Medium):** While genuine in its affirmation of Jordan's traditional churches 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 2023 persecution pattern for Jordan shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Jordan – mainly on converts from Islam - is at a very high level (12.5 points), the same as in WWL 2022.
- 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 decreased from 3.0 points in WWL 2022 to 2.0 points in WWL 2023.

## 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 2023 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://openodoorsanalytical.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. 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.

### **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.

## 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 - according 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'), 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 5.7: 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 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (3.75 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.

**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.

## 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 5 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. For further discussion** (with a focus on the complexity of assessing the numbers of Christians killed for their faith) please see World Watch Monitor's article dated 13 November 2013 available at:

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/11/number-of-christian-martyrs-continues-to-cause-debate/>.

**4. 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.

**5. The symbol "x" in the table:** This denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security concerns.

Jordan: Violence Block question		WWL 2023	WWL 2022
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?	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?	1	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?	10 *	100 *
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?	1	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?	0	4
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	1

Details of places and dates cannot be provided for security reasons. In the WWL 2023 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.

## 5 Year trends

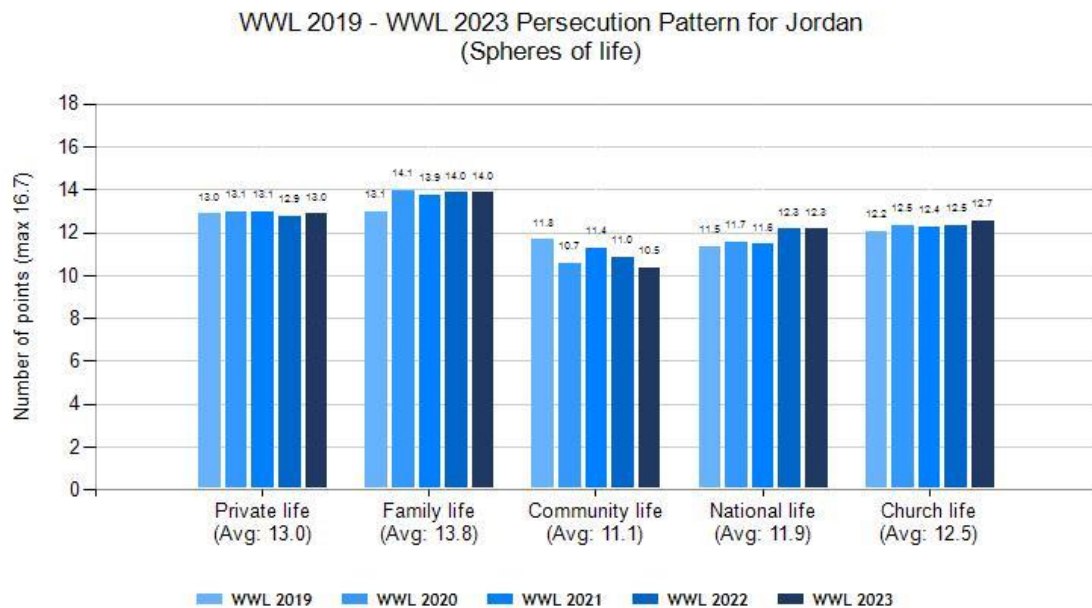
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Jordan: WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern history		Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2023		12.5
2022		12.5
2021		12.5
2020		12.4
2019		12.3

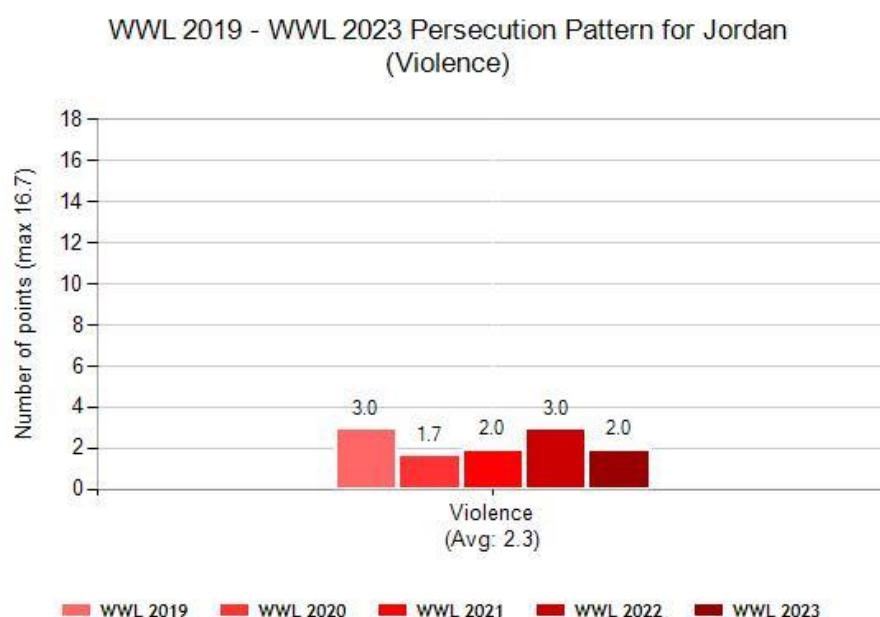
The table above shows how the overall score for pressure on Christians has remained stable in the last five reporting periods at a very high level of 12.3 - 12.5 points.

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



Pressure in the *Private*, *Family* and *Church spheres of life* has been more or less stable in the last four reporting periods (WWL 2020-2023). Pressure in the *National sphere of life* has risen the most, from 11.5 points in WWL 2019 to 12.3 points in WWL 2022 and 2023, but has never reached the levels of pressure recorded in *Private* and *Family life*. *Family life* is the only sphere to have reached extreme levels of pressure, which is characteristic for a persecution situation where both *Islamic oppression* and *Clan 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 legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced marriage; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Targeted Seduction; Violence – death; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Female converts from Islam are the Christians who are most vulnerable to persecution for their faith in Jordan. This is especially notable, considering the many refugees in Jordan. 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, although such killings are now punishable. While no such instances have been reported in the WWL 2023 reporting period, it remains a live risk. A country expert commented: "Female converts from Islam are more likely to be killed based on honor, and in fact female converts in Jordan are more likely to face harder persecution even if it does not lead to murder."

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 vulnerable under Islamic Family Law (which is used for personal status matters in Jordan among Muslims) and are likely to be forced to divorce, lose the guardianship of their children, and lose claims to inheritance. 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) but to date no major improvements have been achieved. In particular, apostasy laws continue to pose challenges to Christian women ([St Charles Institute](#), last accessed 6 December 2022).

On a wider level, all Christian women face pressure to follow a specified dress code, and are at risk of sexual harassment within the public sphere. Christian women have also been reportedly enticed into marriage with a Muslim; this seems to be a strategic means to prevent the establishment of Christian families.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
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 were made even worse by the COVID-19 crisis, with a reported 23% of people out of work and a 48% youth unemployment rate (World Bank country overview). 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.

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. 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: In 2022, a male Christian leader was coerced into signing an agreement to stop church activities and was threatened with deportation.

In light of economic difficulties, often exacerbated by faith-related pressures, some men are prompted to emigrate. If the pressure on Christian families leads to emigration, this has a potentially negative effect on future church leadership.

## 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 Mandaean 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 2021):

- 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. 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."

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 2021):

- 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 June to reform the political system, despite the committee's assurances that it would consider the country's demographics and to include representation from all facets of society."

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:

### 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. 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: "Jordan remains a high-value aspirational target for Sunni jihadists. Returning jihadists and radicalization among low-level members of the security forces pose the biggest threats to security forces, tourist sites, and Christian areas. The small number of incidents during the past five years underscores the high capabilities of the security services, primarily in securing the border with Iraq and Syria. Islamic State cells would exploit likely excessive force by the state against protesters to increase recruitment and attacks against state targets, notably security services."

These projections indicate that the persecution engine *Islamic oppression* is not likely to decrease in influence in the near future.

### 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.

### Dictatorial paranoia

Jordan's image as a beacon of stability suffered a considerable blow in April 2021, when a palace intrigue surfaced and led to the arrest of several royal family members including a half-brother of King Abdulla. International news sources and commentators were all equally surprised by the developments, leading many to believe that Jordan could fall into turmoil with the cracks that this revolt has shown among the royal family. The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU 2022) however expects "King Abdullah to remain in power during the 2023-27 forecast period, supported by the loyal armed forces." Nevertheless, the EIU expects that unemployment will remain high in 2023-27, "increasing the risk of social unrest." To stem the unrest, the govern-



ment 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 has recently increased in strength after it became known that historical church leaders have 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 have an effect on *Christian denominational protectionism*.

## **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: St Charles Institute - <https://www.stcharlesinstitute.org/voices/the-apostasy-law-first-hand-accounts-of-suffering>
- 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 the new Research & Reports page of the website od.org. As in earlier years, they are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) using the following links:

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