

JORDAN 2021 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution declares Islam the religion of the state but safeguards “the free exercise of all forms of worship and religious rites” as long as these are consistent with public order and morality. It stipulates there shall be no discrimination based on religion. It does not address the right to convert to another faith, nor are there penalties under civil law for doing so. According to the constitution, matters concerning the personal and family status of Muslims come under the jurisdiction of sharia courts. Under sharia, converts from Islam are still considered Muslims and are subject to sharia but are regarded as apostates. Converts to Christianity from Islam reported that security officials continued to question them to determine their “true” religious beliefs and practices. The government continued to deny official recognition to some religious groups, including Baha’is and Jehovah’s Witnesses. Converts to Islam from Christianity and from Christianity to Islam continued to report security officials questioning them regarding their religious beliefs and practices, as well as some instances of surveillance. Muslim women were unable to attend congregational Friday prayers throughout the year as part of the government’s efforts to reduce crowd sizes, although the government eased most COVID-19 pandemic-related restrictions in September. Members of some unregistered religious groups continued to face problems registering their marriages and the religious affiliation of their children, and also renewing their residency permits. The government continued to monitor mosque sermons and required that preachers refrain from unsanctioned political commentary and adhere to approved themes and texts. The Judicial Council issued an order in February requiring adherents of unrecognized Christian denominations to use an ecclesiastical court (instead of civil courts) to adjudicate Personal Status Law (PSL), but it reversed the order in March.

Some converts to Christianity from Islam continued to report ostracism as well as physical and verbal abuse from their families and communities, and some worshipped in secret due to the social stigma they faced. Some converts reported persistent threats of violence from family members concerned with protecting traditional honor. Religious leaders reported continued online hate speech directed towards religious minorities and moderates, frequently through social media. Some social media users defended interfaith tolerance, with posts condemning content that criticized Christianity or tried to discourage interfaith dialogue. In December, the German broadcaster Deutsche Welle (DW) suspended a 10-year-old partnership with Roya TV, a privately owned, Amman-based satellite television

channel, over “the discovery of anti-Israeli and antisemitic comments and caricatures in social media disseminated” by Roya.

U.S. embassy officers continued to engage with government officials at all levels, including the Minister of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs, and Holy Places (Minister of Awqaf), Grand Mufti, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, and officials at the Royal Hashemite Court, to raise the rights of religious minorities, the protection of cultural resources, and interfaith tolerance. Embassy officers also engaged with Muslim scholars, Christian community leaders and members, and representatives of unrecognized religious groups to promote interfaith tolerance and dialogue. The embassy supported programs promoting religious tolerance, as well as civil society programs seeking to preserve the cultural heritage of religious minorities.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 10.9 million (midyear 2021). According to U.S. government estimates, Muslims, virtually all of whom are Sunni, make up 97.1 percent of the population while Christians make up 2.1 percent. Church leaders’ estimates of the size of the Christian community range from approximately 1.8 percent to as high as 3 percent of the country’s population. Groups constituting less than 1 percent of the population include Buddhists, Baha’is, Hindus, and Druze (who are considered Muslims by the government). According to the Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies (RIIFS), there is also a small community (consisting of a few migrant families) of Zoroastrians and Yezidis. Most of the more than one million migrant workers are from Egypt, South and Southeast Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. Migrant workers from sub-Saharan Africa and South and Southeast Asia are often Christian or Hindu. There are an estimated 760,000 refugees and other displaced persons registered with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees from 57 countries of origin, including more than 670,000 Syrians, 67,000 Iraqis, and 13,000 Yemenis. The government states there are 1.3 million Syrians present in the country. The Syrian and Iraqi refugee populations are mostly Sunni Muslim. Shia Muslims and Christians account for less than one-third of the Iraqi refugee population.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution declares Islam “the religion of the state” but safeguards “the free exercise of all forms of worship and religious rites,” as long as these are consistent with public order and morality. It stipulates there shall be no discrimination in the rights and duties of citizens on grounds of religion and states the King must be a Muslim. The constitution allows for religious courts, including sharia courts for Muslims and ecclesiastical courts for Christian denominations recognized by the government. According to the General Iftaa Department, the office charged with issuing religious guidance in the form of fatwas, in adjudicating personal status cases, sharia courts follow the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence.

The constitution does not address the right to convert to another faith, nor are there penalties under civil law for doing so. The constitution and the law, however, allow sharia courts to determine civil status affairs for Muslims; these courts do not recognize converts from Islam to other religions. Under sharia, converts from Islam and their children are still considered Muslims and are subject to sharia but are regarded as apostates. Neither the penal code nor the criminal code specifies a penalty for apostasy. Sharia courts, however, have jurisdiction over marriage, divorce, and inheritance, and individuals declared to be apostates may have their marriages annulled or be disinherited, except in the case of a will that states otherwise. Any member of society may file an apostasy complaint against such individuals before the Sharia Public Prosecution. The Sharia Public Prosecution consults with the Council of Church Leaders (CCL), a government advisory body comprising the heads of the country’s 11 officially recognized Christian denominations, before converting a Christian to Islam to make sure the conversion is based on religious conviction and not for purposes of marriage and/or divorce. The penal code contains articles criminalizing acts such as incitement of hatred, blasphemy against Abrahamic faiths, undermining the regime, or portraying citizens in a manner that violates their dignity. The penal code criminalizes insulting the Prophet Muhammad, punishable by one to three years’ imprisonment. Written works, speeches, and actions intended to cause or resulting in sectarian strife, including conflicts between religious groups, are punishable by one to three years’ imprisonment and a fine not exceeding 200 Jordanian dinars (\$280). The law also provides a term of imprisonment not exceeding three months or a fine not exceeding 20 dinars (\$28) for anyone who publishes anything that offends religious feelings or beliefs and for anyone who speaks within earshot of another person in a public space and offends that individual’s beliefs.

Authorities may prosecute individuals who proselytize Muslims under the penal code’s provisions against “inciting sectarian conflict” or “harming the national

unity.” Both of these offenses are punishable by imprisonment of up to three years or a fine of up to 200 dinars (\$280).

Islamic religious groups are granted recognition through the constitution and do not need to register with the government. Non-Islamic religious groups must obtain official recognition through registration. If registered as “denominations,” they may administer rites such as marriage. Recognized religious groups may also own land, open bank accounts, and enter into contracts. Religious groups may alternatively be registered as “associations.” If so, they must work through a recognized denomination on matters such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance, but they may own property and open bank accounts. They must obtain government approval to accept foreign funding. Recognized non-Islamic religious groups are tax-exempt but do not receive the government subsidies granted to Islamic religious groups.

Religious groups not recognized as denominations or associations lack legal status and may not undertake basic administrative tasks such as opening bank accounts, purchasing real estate, or hiring staff. Individuals may exercise such activities on behalf of the unrecognized group, however. To register as a recognized religious denomination, the group must submit its bylaws, a list of its members, its budget, and information regarding its religious doctrine to the Ministry of Interior and Prime Ministry. In determining whether to register or recognize Christian groups, the Prime Minister confers with the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) and the CCL. Although the practice is not explicitly mandated by law or the constitution, church and government leaders have stated that the CCL must endorse recognition for new Christian groups prior to the Prime Minister’s approval. To achieve official recognition as denominations, Christian groups must be recommended by the MOI and approved by the cabinet. The government also refers to the following criteria when considering recognition of Christian groups: the group’s teachings must not contradict the nature of the constitution, public ethics, customs, or traditions; the Middle East Council of Churches, a regional body comprising four families of churches (Catholic, Orthodox, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant/Evangelical), must recognize it; its religious doctrine must not be antagonistic to Islam as the state religion; and the group’s membership must meet a minimum number of citizens, although a precise figure is not specified.

An annex to the 2014 Law for Councils of Christian Denominations lists 11 officially recognized Christian religious groups: Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Melkite Catholic, Anglican, Maronite Catholic, Lutheran, Syrian Orthodox, Seventh-day Adventist, United Pentecostal, and

Coptic. In 2018, five additional evangelical Christian denominations, formerly registered under the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), were recognized by the MOI as associations but not as religious denominations and, as a result, none have been permitted to establish an ecclesiastical court: the Free Evangelical Church, Church of the Nazarene, Assemblies of God, Christian and Missionary Alliance, and Baptist Church. Religious groups such as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Jehovah's Witnesses are not registered and gather in unofficial meetings places. The government granted legal status as an association to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 2018.

The CCL serves as an administrative body to facilitate tax and customs exemptions, as well as to issue civil documents related to marriage or inheritance. In other matters, such as issuing work permits or purchasing land, the denominations interact directly with the relevant ministries. Religious groups that do not have representatives on the CCL handle administrative tasks through the ministry relevant to the task. Unrecognized Christian groups do not have representatives on the CCL, have no legal status as entities, and must have individual members of their groups conduct business with the government on their behalf.

According to the constitution, a special provision of the law regulates the activities and administration of finances of the Islamic *awqaf* (religious endowments). Per this provision of the law, the Ministry of Awqaf manages mosques, appoints imams, pays mosque staff salaries, manages Islamic clergy training centers, and subsidizes certain mosque-sponsored activities, such as holiday celebrations and religious observances. Other Islamic institutions are the Supreme (Sharia) Justice Department, headed by the Office of the Supreme (Sharia) Justice (OSJ) and in charge of the sharia courts, and the General Iftaa Department, which issues fatwas.

The government requires imams to adhere to officially prescribed themes for Friday sermons. Muslim clergy who do not follow government policy may be suspended, issued a written warning, banned from delivering Friday sermons for a certain period, or dismissed from the Ministry of Awqaf. In addition to these administrative measures, a preacher who violates the law may be imprisoned for a period of one week to one month or given a fine not to exceed 20 dinars (\$28).

The law forbids any Islamic cleric from issuing a fatwa unless authorized by an official committee headed by the Grand Mufti in the General Iftaa Department. This department is independent from the Ministry of Awqaf, with the rank of Grand Mufti being equal to that of a government minister.

The law prohibits the publication of media items that slander or insult “founders of religion or prophets” or that are deemed contemptuous of “any of the religions whose freedom is protected by the constitution,” and it imposes a fine on violators of up to 20,000 dinars (\$28,200). The government’s Media Commission regulates the publishing and distribution of all books and media. If the Media Commission deems that passages “violate public norms and values, are religiously offensive, or are insulting to the King,” it can request a court order to prohibit the distribution of the book.

By law, public schools provide Islamic religious instruction as part of the basic national curriculum; non-Muslim students are allowed to opt out. Private schools may offer alternative religious instruction. The constitution provides “congregations” (a term not defined in the constitution, but which, according to the legal code, includes religious groups recognized as denominations and associations) the right to establish their own schools, provided “they comply with the general provisions of the law and are subject to the control of government in matters relating to their curricula and orientation.” To operate a school, religious institutions must receive permission from the Ministry of Education, which ensures the curriculum meets national standards. The ministry does not oversee religious courses if religious groups offer them at their places of worship. In several cities, Christian groups, including Baptists, Orthodox, Anglicans, and Roman Catholics, operate private schools and are able to conduct religious instruction. Private schools, both nonreligious and religious, are open to adherents of all religions.

Knowledge of the Quran is required by law for Muslim students in both public and private schools but is optional for non-Muslims. Every student, however, must pass an Arabic language exam in their final year of high school that includes linguistic mastery of some verses of the Quran. Islamic themes appear in lesson examples of other subjects’ curriculums. The Islamic religion is an optional subject for secondary education certificate exams for non-Muslim students following the standard curriculum, or for Muslim students following international curricula.

The constitution specifies the judiciary shall be divided into civil courts, religious courts, and special courts, with religious courts divided into sharia courts and tribunals of other religious communities. According to the constitution, matters concerning personal status, which include religious affiliation, marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance, are under the jurisdiction of religious courts. Matters of personal status in which the parties are Muslim fall within the exclusive

jurisdiction of sharia courts. A personal or family status case in which one party is Muslim and the other is non-Muslim is heard by a civil court unless both parties agree to use a sharia court. According to the constitution, matters of the personal status of non-Muslims whose religion the government officially recognizes are under the jurisdiction of denomination-specific courts of religious communities, except for matters of inheritance, when sharia is applied to all persons, regardless of religious affiliation. Such ecclesiastical courts exist for the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Melkite Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Coptic, Syrian Orthodox, and Anglican communities. According to the law, members of recognized religious groups lacking their own courts may take their cases to civil courts, which, in principle, follow the rules and beliefs of the litigants' denomination in deciding cases, unless both parties to a case agree to use a specific religious court. There are no tribunals for atheists or adherents of unrecognized religious groups. Such individuals must request a civil court to hear their case.

The OSJ appoints sharia judges, while each recognized non-Islamic religious community selects the structure and members of its own tribunal. The law stipulates the cabinet must ratify the procedures of each non-Islamic religious (ecclesiastical) court. All judicial nominations must be approved by a royal decree.

According to the constitution, sharia courts also exercise jurisdiction with respect to cases concerning "blood money" (*diya*) in which the two parties are Muslims or one of the parties is not a Muslim and the two parties consent to the jurisdiction of the sharia courts. Sharia courts also exercise jurisdiction regarding matters pertaining to Islamic awqaf. Muslims are also subject to the jurisdiction of sharia courts on civil matters not addressed by civil status legislation.

Sharia courts do not recognize converts from Islam as falling under the jurisdiction of their new religious community's laws in matters of personal status. Sharia court judges may annul the marriages of converts and transfer child custody to a Muslim nonparent family member or declare the children "wards of the state" and convey an individual's property rights to Muslim family members.

According to the PSL, in accordance with its interpretation of sharia, marriages between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man are not permitted; the man must convert to Islam for the marriage to be considered legal. If a Christian woman converts to Islam while married to a Christian man, her husband must also convert to Islam for their marriage to remain legal. If a Christian man converts to Islam while married to a Christian woman, the wife does not need to convert to Islam for

the marriage to remain legal. There is no legal provision for civil marriage or divorce for members of unrecognized religious groups. Members of nonregistered Christian groups, as well as members of groups registered as associations, must obtain marriage certificates from any recognized Christian denomination with an ecclesiastical court, such as the Anglican or Orthodox Churches, which they then may take to the Civil Status Bureau to receive their government marriage certificates.

Sharia governs all matters relating to family law involving Muslims or the children of a Muslim father. The PSL stipulates that mothers, regardless of religious background, may retain custody of their children until age 18. Minor children of male citizens who convert to Islam are considered Muslims and are not legally allowed to reconvert to their father's prior religion or convert to any other religion. Like citizenship, religion is transmitted only via the father. Female children of a Muslim father who converts to Christianity remain registered as Muslims and thus are ineligible to marry a non-Muslim.

In accordance with sharia, adult children of a man who has converted to Islam become ineligible to inherit from their father if they do not also convert to Islam, unless the father's will states otherwise. All citizens, including non-Muslims, are subject to the PSL, which mostly follows Islamic legal provisions regarding inheritance if no equivalent inheritance guidelines are codified in their religion or if the state does not recognize their religion. In practice, Christian ecclesiastical courts use sharia-based rules to adjudicate inheritance.

National identification cards issued since May 2016 do not list religion, but religious affiliation is contained in records embedded in the card's electronic chip and remains on file in other government records. National identification cards are renewed every 10 years. Passports issued since May 2016 do not list religion. Passports are renewed every five years. Atheists and agnostics must list the religious affiliation of their fathers as their own. Per the ban on conversion from Islam under sharia, converts from Islam are not allowed to change their religion on electronic records. Converts to Islam must change their religion on their civil documents, such as family books (a national registration record issued to every head of family), and on electronic records.

According to the electoral law, Christians are allocated nine of 130 parliamentary seats. Christians may not run for office in electorates not designated as Christian seats. No seats are reserved for adherents of other minority religious groups. The law stipulates that Muslims must hold all parliamentary seats not specifically

reserved for Christians. There are no reserved seats for the Druze population. The government classifies Druze as Muslims and permits them to hold office as Muslims.

Although the constitution prohibits discrimination based on religion, labor law does not explicitly prohibit it.

The National Center for Human Rights, a quasi-independent institution established by law, receives both government and international funding. The Prime Minister nominates its board of trustees, and the King ratifies their appointment by royal decree. The board appointed in 2019 includes Islamists, former cabinet ministers, former judges, members of parliament, religious leaders, and civil society representatives.

The law prohibits parties formed on the basis of religion or sect, as well as membership in unlicensed parties.

In 2020, the Court of Cassation, the country's highest court, dissolved the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood's (JMB) legal identity, saying the organization had failed to resolve its legal status. Authorities shut down the Brotherhood's headquarters and several offices in 2016 and transferred ownership of the property to a government-authorized offshoot, which said it severed ties with the broader movement. The Ministry of Social Development's committee in charge of the JMB's legal dissolution announced on December 21, 2020, that the Court of Cassation's final decision declaring the JMB officially dissolved had been implemented and directed any creditors to address financial or legal claims on the JMB to the ministry.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

Converts to Islam from Christianity continued to report security officials questioning them regarding their religious beliefs and practices, as well as some instances of surveillance, as part of the government's effort to prevent nominal conversions of convenience for the purpose of receiving advantageous divorce or inheritance benefits. Likewise, some converts to Christianity from Islam reported instances of harassment by security officials, in-person and electronic surveillance, and bureaucratic delays or rejections of document requests, including passport applications. Others reported security forces pressured converts to denounce their

conversions and to recite Quranic verses in their offices. Christian converts belonging to unregistered denominations described personal accounts of being summoned to security forces offices on several consecutive days, putting their jobs at risk. Christians converts from larger Jordanian tribes with more supportive families tended to avoid some of the more extreme examples of scrutiny. Some converts to Christianity from Islam reported they continued to worship in secret to avoid scrutiny by security officials. Because of the sharia ban on conversion, government officials generally refused to change the religion listed on official documents from Islam to any other religion. Accordingly, the converts' religious practice did not match their official religion, opening them up to claims of apostasy and personal status issues involving marriage, divorce, and inheritance.

During the year, the government Media Commission banned distribution of 15 books for insulting Islam, five for insulting Christianity, and 19 for “unethical” content, including books that contained sexual content without caveating for age and “promoting homosexuality.” The commission banned 20 books in 2020.

Members of religious groups unable to obtain religious divorces converted to another Christian denomination or to Islam to divorce legally, according to reports from religious leaders and the MOJ. The chief of the OSJ continued to ensure that Christians wanting to convert to Islam did not have a pending divorce case at one of the Christian religious courts to prevent them from converting for the sole purpose of obtaining a legal divorce. The OSJ continued to enforce the interview requirement for converts to Islam, introduced in 2017, to determine whether their conversion reflected a genuine religious belief.

Youth Sub-Committee Member Wafa al-Khadra resigned from the Royal Committee for the Modernization of the Political System in July after she critiqued Eid al-Adha sacrifice practices, saying these rituals “lacked mercy.” Social media users called for her resignation, calling her a “heretic” and stating her comments insulted Islam. Al-Khadra said her statement had been taken out of context and clarified that some individuals sacrificed sheep in an inhumane way. A public prosecutor declined to proceed with an apostasy complaint lodged against al-Khadra.

As part of its COVID-19 pandemic response, the government instituted defense orders and ordered periodic comprehensive lockdowns, including places of worship, on Fridays, and daily curfews from October 2020 to April 2021. The government intermittently allowed Muslim worshippers to walk to their local mosques for Friday prayers when driving was prohibited. Protesters throughout

the year demanded the government ease restrictions on congregational prayers at mosques. Muslim religious leaders wrote a letter in March to the King requesting permission to perform group prayers in mosques, while others expressed support for the government's efforts to combat the pandemic. In March, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Awqaf said the ministry's decision to suspend Friday prayers aimed to preserve human life and complied with Islamic laws. Greek Orthodox Bishop Christophoros Atallah, in his capacity as CCL President, also affirmed during a March press conference that worshippers should remain committed to the government's efforts to combat the pandemic. After the government decided to reopen all sectors in September, mosques partially opened, on the conditions that adherents comply with crowd-size mandates. Worshippers accused the government of having double standards when applying defense orders, since it allowed large gatherings of individuals for concerts, while preventing in-person worship. Churches reported they continued to meet online and in person except during periods of general lockdown. According to RIIFS, 58 percent of respondents supported the government's decision to close places of worship for health and safety purposes during the pandemic, 27 percent opposed the closures, and 15 percent were neutral.

The same RIIFS survey found 24 percent of respondents believed government closures affected Muslim women's freedom of worship, since they were not allowed to participate in Friday prayers at mosques, while 49 percent did not believe the closures affected women's ability to worship. When polled by RIIFS, 43 percent of the country's religious experts viewed the decision to prevent women from attending Friday prayers as discriminatory, while 39 percent said the decision did not discriminate between men and women, on the grounds that Friday prayers were only obligatory for men under the experts' interpretation of sharia. At year's end, women were still not allowed to attend Friday prayers.

Muslim and Christian leaders worked with the government to raise awareness regarding the pandemic during Friday and Sunday sermons, according to RIIFS. The Ministry of Awqaf used social media to publish statements on the significance of helping others, donating to relief funds, and following government measures. Religious charitable societies distributed health supplies and food to citizens around the country. Religious leaders also preached about the importance of vaccines during the government's rollout.

The Ministry of Awqaf continued to monitor sermons at mosques and required that preachers refrain from political commentary not approved by the government. Authorities continued to disseminate themes and required imams to choose from a

list of recommended texts for sermons. Imams violating these rules risked being fined or banned from preaching.

Unofficial mosques continued to operate outside Ministry of Awqaf control in many cities, and imams outside of government employment preached without ministry supervision. Ministry of Awqaf investigations uncovered some unregistered imams leading prayers in mosques during the year. In these cases, the government ordered all attendees and imams to cease their activities and gather in a designated mosque in their area for the Friday sermons led by a registered imam. Friday prayers in major cities were consolidated into central mosques, over which the Ministry of Awqaf had more oversight, continuing a process that began in 2018. The ministry allowed smaller mosques to continue Friday sermons along with their areas' central mosque.

On January 26, Greek Orthodox Bishop Christophoros Atallah, in his capacity as CCL President, sent a letter to the Judicial Council and Royal Court requesting they refer all Christian PSL cases to the CCL instead of to civil courts. Atallah's letter said adherents of unrecognized Christian denominations used the civil courts to enter into "illegal marriages" and "gain legitimization" by bypassing the CCL. Judicial Council Chief Justice Mohammad al-Ghazo subsequently issued a memorandum on February 5 requiring Christians to use the CCL for PSL cases. Evangelical Christian church leaders expressed concern regarding their ability to function as churches, and in early March, after lobbying by the evangelical churches, the Judicial Council retracted its order and convoked a meeting with Christian leaders to resolve the dispute. Evangelicals said they had been specifically targeted because the CCL and government officials viewed them negatively, associating their religious groups with proselytization and U.S.-based, pro-Israel evangelical denominations.

Authorities continued to deny a license to an unrecognized Christian church to operate a publishing house and approval for a private Baptist school in the city of Zarqa.

During the year, expatriate religious volunteers from the evangelical Christian community continued to report bureaucratic delays in the renewal of residency permits and what they termed occasionally arbitrary rejections of paperwork. In 2018, the government began enforcing a new residency policy to limit the ability of churches to sponsor religious volunteers for residency. Observers suggested that the volunteers were illegally proselytizing Muslims. Authorities previously allowed the churches to obtain residency status for religious volunteers with the

approval of the MOI and a letter of sponsorship from the church. Volunteers were required to obtain additional approvals, including from the Ministry of Labor, lengthening the average renewal process by several months, according to church officials. Some expatriate religious volunteers reported the government refused to grant residency permission, forcing them to depart the country.

The government policy of not recognizing the Baha'i Faith continued, but the government continued to allow Baha'is to privately practice their religion and included them in officially sponsored interfaith events. Sharia courts and the courts of other recognized religions continued not to issue Baha'is the marriage certificates required to transfer citizenship to a foreign spouse or to register for government health insurance and social security. The Department of Civil Status and Passports also continued not to recognize marriages conducted by Baha'i assemblies, but it issued 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.

In an article that detailed the problems facing the foreign-born wives in Baha'i families, the news website *Middle East Monitor* stated that these women seeking to become naturalized citizens, as allowed by the country's laws, were unable to do so because of the government did not recognize the Baha'i Faith and the government did not issue marriage certificates to Baha'i couples. As a result, the women faced limited options in employment, career, education, and travel outside the country.

There continued to be two recognized cemeteries registered in the name of the Baha'i Faith through a special arrangement previously agreed between the group and the government. Baha'i leaders reported they continued to be unable to register other properties under the name of the Baha'i Faith but remained able to register property under the names of individual Baha'is. In doing so, the Baha'i

leaders said they continued to have to pay new registration fees whenever they transferred property from one person to another at the death of the registered owner, a process that created a large financial burden. Baha'i leaders said they were using the civil courts to challenge their group's property registration restrictions, stating they were unable to legally protect Baha'i assets if individuals who registered Baha'i property under their names decided to misappropriate funds or property. The Baha'i community's request for religious exemptions for property registration fees remained pending.

The government continued to deny official recognition to other religious groups, including the Jehovah's Witnesses. Some unrecognized religious groups reported they continued to operate schools and hospitals and were able to hold services and meetings if they maintained a low profile. Some unregistered Christian denominations said that although all religious groups were equal in the eyes of the constitution, the government practiced favoritism toward specific Christian groups that had more political power, which increased tensions among these religious groups.

In early December, the Director of the Public Security Directorate, Major General Hussein al-Hawatmeh, announced an increase in security force presence in Christian areas and public areas decorated for the holidays throughout the month. Christian leaders expressed their appreciation to the authorities for protecting churches and Christian spaces during the holidays.

The government authorized Christian civil servants leave for Sunday worship and religious holidays.

Religious minorities, including Christians and Druze, continued to serve in parliament and as cabinet ministers. Members of religious minorities served as deputy prime ministers, senators, members of parliament (MPs), and ambassadors. The cabinet appointed in October included one Druze member and two Christian members, unchanged from the previous cabinet. A Christian MP served as House Second Deputy Speaker for parliament's 2020-21 and 2021-22 terms.

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.

Christians and Druze achieved general officer rank in the military, but Muslims continued to hold most of the senior positions across the security and intelligence services.

The national school curriculum, including materials on tolerance education, did not mention the Holocaust, but some private schools included it in their curricula. An Anti-Defamation League study found examples of antisemitic tropes in public school textbooks, including a passage that says, "Treason and the breaking of pacts are among the characteristics of the Jews." Another textbook, used for 12th grade history, described the Zionist movement as "a racist, settler political movement aimed at establishing a national homeland for the Jews in Palestine, founded on historical claims without basis in truth," and said that Jewish links to Jerusalem are "founded on historical and religious claims without any actual grounds on which to base them."

Christian leaders reported many Jordanians believed Christianity arrived in the country during the Crusades due in part, said the leaders, to the national secondary school curriculum's practice of not teaching Jordan's pre-Islamic history nor acknowledging that there was a Christian presence in the region prior to the rise of Islam.

Members of non-Muslim religious groups, especially unregistered groups, continued to report occasional threats by the government to arrest them for disrupting public order if they proselytized Muslims. Security officials continued to refuse to renew residency permits for some foreign religious leaders and religious volunteers after raising concerns their activities could incite extremist attacks, according to multiple nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Others were denied residency permits on the basis of proselytization accusations.

Christian groups that maintained a lower profile noted examples of security forces monitoring them only when other Christian denominations submitted official complaints against them.

The government deemed some children, including children of unmarried women or interfaith marriages involving a Muslim woman and converts from Islam to another religion, "illegitimate" and denied them standard registration. The

government issued these children, as well as orphans, special national identification numbers, which made it difficult for these children to attend school, access health services, or receive other documentation.

In June, the Bible Society of Jordan posted a verse from the Book of Psalms, Psalms 37:11 – “The meek shall inherit the earth” – on city entrances and bridges in Amman, an annual practice to honor Jordan’s Independence Day. The banners sparked widespread controversy; several social media users posted antisemitic commentary equating the Book of Psalms only with Judaism and the promotion of Zionism. MP Hasan Riyati sent a request to the House Speaker to investigate the “authorities that licensed a Torah verse to be hung around the city in a country whose religion is Islam and whose main enemy is the Zionists.” The Greater Amman Municipality (GAM) subsequently removed the banners and issued a statement saying it would not allow anyone to post statements that violate public morals. Christians and some Muslims criticized the GAM’s statement, arguing the verse was in line with public morals. Others saw the controversy as an opportunity to educate the public, explaining the verse was found in the holy books of both Christians and Jews and that the Quran contained a similar verse. GAM Mayor Yousef Shawarbeh met with Christian leaders to offer an apology; he removed the GAM statement from official media but did not reinstall the banners. Christian youth groups held a protest outside the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate offices, saying the government’s apology was insufficient. Many citizens asked the government to take concrete actions against hate speech and against those who did not respect the religious freedom of Christians in the country.

In December, MP Suleiman Abu Yahya stated the Jews attempted to “poison” the Prophet Muhammad and “would not hesitate to poison Jordanians” during a parliamentary hearing on Project Prosperity, a planned energy-for-water project involving Jordan, Israel, and the United Arab Emirates.

In September, parliament approved legislation to develop public lands adjacent to the Jordanian side of the Jordan River identified by some scholars as Jesus’s baptism site, which some MPs said would promote religious tourism, support local communities, and provide job opportunities. The law would also establish a nonprofit charitable foundation supervised by a Board of Trustees, appointed by the Royal Hashemite Court, and would grant fee and tax exemptions. Christian leaders largely supported the law, noting it would deepen church connections around the world as pilgrims travelled to the country, and it would supplement the national economy.

Throughout the year, RIIFS, established under the patronage of Prince Hassan bin Talal, organized periodic discussions and sponsored initiatives with religious leaders and social activists to promote political pluralism, cultural diversity, religious tolerance, and civic responsibility in the country and throughout the region. It also held comparative religion seminars on Muslim and Christian doctrinal teachings.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Converts from Islam to Christianity reported continued social ostracism, threats, and physical and verbal abuse, including beatings, insults, and intimidation, from family members, neighbors, and community or tribal members. Some reported they worshipped in secret because of the social stigma they faced as converts, while others reported persistent threats of violence from family members protecting traditional honor. According to international NGOs, female converts from Islam were particularly vulnerable to harassment and pressure to renounce their conversions. Church leaders continued to report incidents of violence, pressure, and discrimination against religious converts and persons in interfaith romantic relationships; the latter continued to report ostracism and, in some cases, feuds among family members and violence toward those involved. Some converts from Islam expressed interest in resettlement abroad due to discrimination and threats of violence. Converts from Christianity to Islam also reported social stigma from their families and Christian society. Christian women married to Muslim men were more often stigmatized. Nonbelievers reported societal intolerance and discrimination. Although an individual's religion was no longer written on identification cards, one's religion could often be surmised based on personal and family names.

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. This NGO turned off comments on websites and blocked repeat offenders on its social media accounts in an effort to avoid hate speech. 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. NGOs disagreed on the prevalence of hate speech in local society. 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.

Some religious leaders privately associated hate speech, intolerance, and extremism with poverty and lack of educational opportunities in the country.

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.

Observers reported friction between Christian denominations on the CCL and evangelical churches not recognized by the government. Leaders from some CCL-affiliated churches said there were “recruitment efforts” and “hidden agendas” against their members and Jordanian society writ large by evangelical churches, and that evangelical churches were disrupting interfaith harmony, creating rifts in local society and undermining the CCL’s relationship with the government and security services. CCL leaders stated they worried that outsiders “causing trouble” would bring unwanted attention on the Christian community. Members of the evangelical community said that some CCL leaders applied pressure on the government to not recognize evangelical churches in the country.

In an April Yarmouk TV broadcast, a University of Jordan professor, Ahmad Nofal, accused Jews of “ruling the world” and stated there was no differentiation between “Zionists” and “Jews.” He also accused Zionists of purposefully harvesting organs and infecting Palestinians with diseases. In November, Nofal asked on Yarmouk TV, “Do the Europeans love the Jews that much?...They want to dump them on us....Instead of doing what Hitler did – massacring and burning and whatever – they dump them on the Middle East.”

In April, Jordanian analyst Mohammed Faraj, on Lebanon’s Mayadeen TV, denounced a Holocaust memorial ceremony held in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), saying that commemorating the Holocaust was a UAE attempt to cover up the real massacres perpetrated by Israel against the Palestinians. He said it was a “Zionist strategic policy” to focus on only six million of the 42 million who were killed in World War II.

In May, former MP Saud Abu Mahfouz, in a video posted to YouTube, said that Jews are “bastards [who have] all the money of [Irving] Moskowitz, of Rothschild, and of Sheldon Adelson.” With their “deeds [and] filth...[Jews] are provoking the Islamic identity.”

When criticizing Israeli government policies in November, Roya TV, a privately owned, Amman-based satellite channel, published a cartoon on social media that appeared to show Lord Balfour and a Jewish man wearing a kippah and holding the map of Israel and Palestinian territories in a police lineup. Also in November, Roya posted a video with an exaggerated reenactment of an Orthodox Jew when discussing an energy-for-water deal between Jordan, the UAE, and Israel. In December, the German broadcaster DW suspended a 10-year-old partnership with Roya over “the discovery of anti-Israeli and antisemitic comments and caricatures in social media disseminated” by Roya. A senior DW executive apologized for overlooking “these disgusting images.” In response, Roya’s CEO said that “criticism of illegal, inhuman, or racist actions by Israel as a state” should be distinguished from antisemitism.

A Christian boxer’s death sparked criticism online in April after some individuals sent their condolences to his family using the phrase, “May God have mercy on him.” Some individuals criticized those offering condolences, claiming mercy should be reserved only for Muslims.

In July, the Religion News Service reported on a debate in the country over the possibility of opening up to Shia pilgrims, long discouraged from visiting the tombs of the relatives of the Prophet Muhammad, most prominently Jafar, Muhammad’s cousin and the brother of Ali, the first leader of Shia Islam. Zaid Nabulsi, a lawyer and prodemocracy advocate, first made the suggestion in a Facebook post, noting that most of the sites of interest to Shia pilgrims are in the impoverished southern part of the country. Government officials said no change in policy was being considered.

The Catholic Center for Studies and the international Muslim Council of Elders, based in Abu Dhabi, organized a conference in Amman in September, “Media Against Hate.” More than 100 Arab media professionals attended the meeting, which was sponsored by Prince Ghazi bin Mohammed. Attendees discussed the use of legacy and social media in spreading and countering hate speech. Religious leaders expressed skepticism regarding officially and unofficially organized

interfaith conferences in the country, saying such conferences did not increase intercommunal harmony and were often a facade for the West.

In a poll published by RIIFS that included 400 Muslims, 83 Christians, and nine individuals identified as “other,” 83 percent of respondents agreed all worshippers should have equal rights to practice their religion regardless of cultural, social, and religious backgrounds, and any discrimination in this regard should be considered a human rights violation; 7 percent disagreed; and 10 percent were neutral. In the same study, 74 percent said that religious rites were practiced freely in the country and that it had appropriate legislation allowing freedom of worship.

In a poll conducted by a Dubai-based public relations firm in June and involving a team of international experts, 57 percent of the country’s citizens between the ages of 18 and 24 agreed that religion was “the most important” factor to their personal identity, compared with 34 percent overall for youth polled in the 17 Arab states included in the survey. Only one other state included in the survey had a larger percentage of respondents agreeing with this response. Other choices offered by the poll as possible responses included family/tribe, nationality, Arabic heritage, political beliefs, language, and gender.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Embassy officers, including the Ambassador, continued to engage with government officials at all levels, including the Minister of Awqaf, Grand Mufti, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, and senior officials at the Royal Hashemite Court, to advocate for the rights of religious minorities, the protection of cultural resources, and interfaith tolerance.

Embassy officers continued to meet frequently with representatives of religious communities, including unrecognized groups, religious converts, expatriate religious volunteers, and interfaith institutions such as RIIFS and the Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Center, to discuss issues related to religious freedom.

The embassy continued to advise the government’s Baptism Site Commission on its efforts to increase revenue from religiously based tourism, create jobs, preserve the country’s religious heritage, and highlight religious pluralism. The embassy used social media to promote religious tolerance and mark religious holidays, including through posting video messages, which generally received positive responses from social media audiences.