

JORDAN 2020 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. In October, the government eased COVID-19-related restrictions, allowing movement on all days of the week except Fridays. The government amended this decision after Muslim worshippers organized small-scale, uncoordinated, nationwide protests about what they viewed as an unfair limit on attendance at Friday prayers. On July 15, the Court of Cassation, the country’s highest court, dissolved the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) branch in country, saying the organization had failed to resolve its legal status. The court’s decision did not affect the MB’s political wing, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), which won 10 seats in the November 10 parliamentary election, down from 15 in the previous election. Members of some unregistered 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 political commentary and adhere to approved themes and texts

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. There were instances of anti-Semitism in the press and online. In media commentary,

writers made anti-Semitic comments, saying, in one newspaper column, that “Jewish families” had taken over the global economy, and in an online article, “Judaism is a cancer.”

U.S. embassy officers continued to engage with government officials at all levels, including the Minister of Awqaf, Grand Mufti, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and officials at the Royal Hashemite Court, to raise the rights of religious minorities, the protection of cultural resources, interfaith tolerance, and the legal status of expatriate religious workers and volunteers. Embassy officers also engaged with Muslim scholars, Christian community leaders, and representatives of nonrecognized 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 2020 estimate). According to U.S. government estimates, Muslims, virtually all of whom are Sunni, make up 97.2 percent of the population. Some church leaders estimate Christians make up approximately 1.8 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 as Muslims by the government). According to the Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies (RIIFS), there is also a small community (consisting of a few families) of Zoroastrians. Most of the approximately 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 770,000 refugees registered with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees from 57 countries of origin, including more than 670,000 Syrians and 100,000 of other nationalities. 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 Ifta' Department, 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 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. The law also provides a term of imprisonment not exceeding three months or a fine not exceeding 20 Jordanian dinars (\$28) for anyone who publishes anything that offends religious feelings or 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 about its religious doctrine. 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, church 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 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. 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 the issuance of 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. Non-recognized 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 Islamic Affairs and Holy Places (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 Ifta' 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 Ifta' 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 classes on Christianity. 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. 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 the 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. Per 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 nonrecognized 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” (*diyya*) 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 with regard to 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 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 nonrecognized religious groups. Members of nonregistered Christian groups, as well as members of groups registered as associations, may obtain marriage certificates from any recognized Christian denomination such as the Anglican Church, 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 Personal Status Law (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.

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 to Christianity are not allowed to change their religion on electronic records. Converts from Christianity 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 additional 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.

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 ministers, former judges, members of parliament, religious leaders, and civil society representatives.

Political parties may not be formed on the basis of religion.

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 about their religious beliefs and practices, as well as some instances of surveillance, as part of the government's effort to prevent conversions of convenience for the purpose of receiving advantageous divorce or inheritance benefits. 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 20 books for insulting religion as well as displaying pornographic images and promoting homosexuality.

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.

In March, as part of its COVID-19 response and prevention measures, the government ordered comprehensive lockdowns on Fridays and Saturdays. In October, the government eased the lockdown restrictions to Fridays only, allowing movement every other day of the week. On the day after that announcement, in response to the change, Muslim worshipers organized small-scale, uncoordinated, protests across the country. Protesters stated they viewed the decision as unfairly limiting religious services for Muslims, who attend prayers on Friday. Subsequently, the government amended its decision, lifting the lockdown for one hour on Fridays and allowing worshipers to commute to their local mosques by foot. Churches reported they continued to meet online and in-person.

The Ministry of Awqaf continued to monitor sermons at mosques and required that preachers refrain from political commentary. 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 of Awqaf 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 of Awqaf allowed smaller mosques to continue Friday sermons along with their areas' central mosque.

During the year, expatriate religious volunteers from the evangelical Christian community continued to report bureaucratic delays in the renewal of residency permits. 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 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 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.

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. 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 nonrecognized religious groups reported they continued to operate schools and hospitals and they were able to hold services and meetings if they were low profile.

Security forces were largely diverted to COVID-19 response and prevention measures, and the nationwide ban on large gatherings negated any need for enhanced security or protection for Christian neighborhoods and churches for holidays and special events, unlike in previous years.

Religious minorities, including Christians and Druze, continued to serve in parliament and as cabinet ministers. Christians served as deputy prime minister, cabinet ministers, senators, and ambassadors. The cabinet appointed in October 2020 included one Druze member and two Christian members, unchanged from the previous cabinet.

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 hindered their coreligionists from reaching high positions in government civil service and official departments.

On July 15, the Court of Cassation, the country's highest court, dissolved the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood's (MB) legal identity, according to the AFP, 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 claimed to have severed ties with the broader movement. In 2019, the court ruled the original group be dissolved on the grounds it did not renew its license as required by the

law. Sheikh Hamza Mansur, head of the MB's ruling council, said his group would appeal the decision. The court's decision did not affect the MB's political wing, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), which won 10 seats in the November 10 parliamentary election, down from 15 in the previous election.

The government continued to permit non-Muslim members of the armed forces to practice their religion. Christians and Druze achieved general officer rank in the military, but Muslims continued to hold most 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.

Members of non-Muslim religious 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 refused on the basis of proselytization accusations.

In a March 8 program on *Yarmouk TV*, associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, Ahmad al-Shahrouri, a professor of sharia at the public Al-Zaytoonah University and also the imam of the university's mosque, said that the Jews were more dangerous than coronavirus, AIDS, cholera, and every disease in the world.

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.

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. Church leaders continued to report incidents of violence 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. Nonbelievers reported societal intolerance and discrimination.

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 Christian services. Religious broadcasts were an alternative to regular in-person services, which were not allowed under comprehensive lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The same NGO reported some negative responses to the presence of an Orthodox bishop during televised, and widely viewed, COVID-19 updates from the government. NGO sources said the negative responses were the reactions of Muslims to their first real exposure to Christianity.

Criticism online and in social media continued to target converts from Islam to other religions. Religious minorities expressed concerns some Muslim leaders preached intolerance. Christians reported they self-segregated into Christian enclaves to escape social pressure and threats.

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” against their members by evangelical churches and that evangelical churches were disrupting interfaith harmony and the CCL’s relationship with the government and security services. 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 article posted in March on the website *Al-Awai News*, Kafa al-Zou’bi, a journalist and author, stated that “Judaism is a cancer that has harmed humanity since the dawn of civilized history” and that “capitalism could have been less barbaric had it not been anchored in the sources of Jewish philosophy.” In his July 11 column in the newspaper *Al-Dustour*, Abd al-Hamid al-Hamshari wrote that “Jewish families” took over the global economy in order to subordinate the world

to the Zionist movement, and that the Rothschild family ordered the assassinations of U.S. presidents Lincoln and Kennedy because they threatened its economic interests.

In a September 15 television interview with a Lebanese channel, former Minister of Health and Deputy Prime Minister Mamdouh al-Abadi said that neither the UAE nor Bahrain were familiar with Israel, which they had recently recognized and that the Jews were only “Shylocks” who were interested in Gulf money.

On a January 27 show on *Yarmouk TV*, host Omar Ayasra said the story of the Holocaust was not about massacres, crimes against humanity, and anti-Semitism but a story used by Israel to promote itself and to extort the West to garner sympathy and support. In the same program, he criticized the Secretary-General of the Muslim World League for his visit to Auschwitz earlier in the month.

In a November 3 post on social media, Abu Qatada al-Filastini recommended that his followers read Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* if they wished to understand modern political history. Abu Qatada said the texts had been misrepresented due to a “propaganda campaign against them run by the Jews, as well as by their negative reputation among the public.”

In a poll conducted by the Arab Center of Washington, D.C. and released in November, 79 percent of Jordanian respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that “No religious authority is entitled to declare followers of other religions infidels,” compared with 65 percent of the broader Arab world. On a separate question, 73 percent of those polled strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that “The government has no right to use religion to win support for its policies,” compared with 71 percent of others in the region.

In a poll conducted by a Dubai-based public relations firm in the first three months of the year and involving a team of international experts, 20 percent of Jordan’s citizens aged 18-24 agreed religion was “the most important” factor to their personal identity, compared to 41 percent overall for youth polled in the 17 Arab states included in the survey.

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 officials at the Royal Hashemite Court, to advocate for the rights of religious minorities, the protection of cultural resources, interfaith tolerance, and the legal status of expatriate religious workers and volunteers.

Embassy officers continued to meet frequently with representatives of religious communities, including nonrecognized groups, religious converts, expatriate religious volunteers, and interfaith institutions, such as RIIFS and the Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research, to discuss the ability to practice religion freely.

The embassy continued its sponsorship of the participation of religious scholars, teachers, and leaders in exchange programs in the United States designed to promote religious tolerance and understanding. 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.