

KEY FINDINGS

In 2023, religious freedom conditions in Algeria remained poor, with major impacts on Christians and Muslim minority communities. Authorities continued to close churches and prosecute individuals on religion-based charges, including blasphemy, proselytization, and unauthorized worship. The government also continued to deny religious minority groups, specifically the Evangelical Protestant Association (EPA), authorization to worship collectively as stipulated under the law.

Algerian law regulates the manifestation of religion or belief through various [legal mechanisms](#) penalizing unregistered religious activity and expression. While the constitution grants the right to freedom of religion or belief, the government [limits](#) the free expression and practice of belief through the enforcement of laws that favor a particular interpretation of Islam and restrict other religious activities. Algeria's penal and information codes criminalize blasphemy and proselytization. Punishments include imprisonment for up to five years and a fine up to \$7,500 (one million dinars).

In 2023, the Algerian government brought religiously grounded [blasphemy and proselytization](#) charges against several individuals, including Christians, Muslims, and freethinkers. In November, an [individual](#) in Bejaia was charged with blasphemy for social media posts and sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment and a fine of \$370 (50,000 dinars). In February, a court sentenced two employees of a Christian broadcast company to two months' imprisonment for "the production, storing, or distribution of printed documents, audio-visual materials, or using any other support or means with the intention of agitating/shaking the faith of a Muslim." After serving suspended prison terms, they were released with a lifelong ban from practicing Christian activities. In May, authorities raided the home of a Tizi Ghenif pastor, seizing his computer and subjecting him to multiple rounds of interrogation. In November, the pastor and four other unnamed Evangelical worshippers from the same church were

sentenced and fined for "inciting Muslims to change their religion" and "agitating the faith of Muslims," among other unauthorized worship charges. In March, a Bejaia court [dissolved](#) the nongovernmental Cultural Association of Aokas for "shaking the faith" in its distribution of various Christian-themed materials.

In 2023, 11 EPA churches were either forcibly closed or voluntarily shuttered their doors due to fears of government targeting, raising the total number to at least 41 since 2017. The few remaining open churches operate in a severely limited way. At least 10 Christians face ongoing court cases on religious-based charges, including EPA Vice President Pastor Youssef Ourahmane, whose case is illustrative of the government's ongoing [targeting](#) of senior EPA leaders. EPA clergy and members continue to face government surveillance, property searches, confiscation of worship materials, and interrogations without pretense.

Since 2016, the government has repeatedly rejected the authorization forms of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community to register as a religious association under law. As of late 2023, over 30 members are currently serving prison sentences ranging from six months to three years on charges such as unauthorized worship, distribution of religious materials, proselytization, and harming the safety and unity of the country. Five unnamed members are currently serving multiyear prison sentences. Worshipers of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light have also reportedly been subject to online monitoring and followed by plainclothes police.

With no operational synagogue left in Algeria, ritual observance for the roughly 200 practicing members of its Jewish community remains a challenge. Since the start of the Israel-Hamas war, [government ministers](#) and the largely state-run media have promoted antisemitic tropes, such as using [defamatory](#) and false language to describe Israel's military campaign in Gaza as "genocidal Zionist aggression."

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

- Maintain Algeria on the Special Watch List for engaging in or tolerating severe violations of religious freedom pursuant to the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA);
 - Encourage Algeria to continue multi-lateral engagement, including with the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance and United Nations (UN) expert delegations, to address religious freedom concerns;
 - Condition financial and technical support to the Algerian government on addressing violations of religious freedom, including decriminalizing blasphemy and proselytization, registering the EPA and the Ahmadiyya community as religious organizations, and reopening closed churches; and
 - Direct U.S. Embassy officials to attend and observe court proceedings on blasphemy charges or cases related to houses of worship to emphasize the U.S. government's concerns about such cases.
- The U.S. Congress should:
- Continue to raise the implementation of blasphemy laws and closure of houses of worship with the U.S. Department of State and relevant Algerian counterparts to ensure religious freedom concerns are incorporated into the U.S.-Algeria bilateral relationship.

KEY USCIRF RESOURCES & ACTIVITIES

- **Special Report:** [Anti-Conversion Laws Compendium](#)
- **Special Report:** [Blasphemy Law Compendium](#)
- **Podcast:** [The State of Religious Freedom in Algeria](#)
- **Frank R. Wolf Freedom of Religion or Belief Victims List:** [Algeria](#)

Background

Algeria is home to [nearly 45 million people](#), approximately 99 percent of whom are Sunni Muslim. The remaining one percent of the population includes Jews; nonbelievers; Ahmadiyya, Shi'a, and other Muslim minorities; and Christians (including Roman Catholics, Seventh-day Adventists, Methodists, Evangelicals, Lutherans, the Reformed Church, and Egyptian Coptic Christians). Algeria's [constitution](#) establishes Islam as the official state religion. With national elections set to take place in 2024, the Algerian government has continued to [crack down](#) on civil society and repress peaceful [protests](#).

Algeria's criminal code censors publications by prohibiting content "contrary to Islamic morals." [Ordinance 06-03](#) requires all non-Muslim organizations to register with the Minister for Non-Muslim Affairs to conduct activities and establish places of worship. The registration process has been opaque and poorly implemented, creating legal uncertainty for some non-Muslim religious communities and allowing the government to repress and prosecute religious minorities. Ordinance 06-03 also criminalizes proselytization by non-Muslims, with punishments of up to five years in prison and a maximum fine of roughly \$7,500 (one million dinars). A new information law that came into effect in August 2023 requires all media activities to respect "the Muslim religion, Islam in the national context" and "the moral and cultural values of the nation."

Restrictions on Christians

Christians, particularly members and institutions affiliated with the EPA, faced significant religious freedom restrictions in 2023. Authorities continued to withhold Christian worship materials from distribution at a port and rejected repeated attempts by the EPA to formally register as a religious association. Security officials continued to forcibly close EPA churches across Tizi Ouzou, interrogate church leaders, raid members' homes, and seize worship materials. In November, EPA Vice President [Pastor Youssef Ourahmane](#) was sentenced to one year in prison and fined \$725 (100,000 dinars) for holding an unauthorized gathering of Christian families in an unregistered church.

In January, authorities shuttered a Methodist church in Larbaa Nath Iraten, forcing members to worship in private. In October, a Tizi Ouzou court sentenced the pastor of a Methodist church in Oucaif to two months in prison. In July, an Algiers appeals court confirmed a three-year prison sentence and fine against Christian convert and activist [Slimane Bouhafis](#) on multiple charges, including "belonging to a terrorist organization," "receiving funds from abroad for the purpose of political propaganda," and "conspiracy."

Despite ongoing violations in 2023, positive developments included the release of Christian convert [Hamid Soudad](#) and an unnamed Ahmadiyya Muslim man as part of President Abdelmadjid Tebboune's [general amnesty](#) in July. Authorities also dismissed the case against [Dr. Saïd Djabelkhir](#), an Islamic scholar previously charged with blasphemy. The government allowed the Catholic community to air holiday programs on public radio, [granted citizenship](#) to the Catholic Archbishop in March, and offered to help renovate the Sacré-Cœur Cathedral in Algiers. In November, a high administrative court

removed the seals from seven Evangelical churches in Tizi Ouzou and Bajaia; however, they remain inoperable, lacking permission from the National Commission for Non-Muslim Worship.

Restrictions on Muslim Minorities

Non-Sunni Muslims continued to face significant pressures in 2023. Some of the 230 remaining members of Algeria's Ahmadiyya Muslim community reportedly have been subject to government surveillance and passport seizures. Efforts to formally register the community remain stalled on the government's precondition that Ahmadiyya Muslims renounce their identity as Muslims. Legal repression against members remains systematic and widespread, with over 50 cases against individuals from 26 provincial courts still pending in the Supreme Court. Members have been sentenced for multiple alleged offenses, including unauthorized worship, unlicensed fundraising, undermining national unity, and "desecrating the Qur'an."

The estimated 50 members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light faced major obstacles. In May, authorities launched an investigation into Othmane Mouchal for "mocking Islam." In November, police searched for the whereabouts of [Redouane Foufa](#), a community leader previously imprisoned for "participation in an unauthorized group" and "denigrating Islam." A government [fatwa](#) remains in effect, calling Ahmadi a "misguided group" of heretics "out of the Islamic faith" who "should be condemned and punished according to the law." While the religious decree was ruled by a local court, it extends to all Ahmadiyya Muslims throughout Algeria. It not only forbids Ahmadi from publicly discussing a 2022 Bejaia court prosecution against members but also has imposed a severe economic strain on the community by calling for the suspension of all Ahmadi commercial activities. Furthermore, the religious decree has reinforced an already harsh social stigma on Ahmadi, forcing members to conceal their religious identity and worship in private for fear of targeting or harassment.

Key U.S. Policy

The United States is one of Algeria's top trading partners, and professional exchanges play a valuable role in strengthening the bilateral law enforcement and security partnership at both the senior and working levels. In August 2023, U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken [met](#) with Algerian Foreign Minister Ahmed Attaf. In fiscal year 2023, the U.S. government obligated \$3 million for [programs](#) in Algeria. The U.S. Department of State's [Middle East Partnership Initiative](#) has supported the work of Algeria's civil society through trainings.

Several U.S. officials visited Algeria in 2023, including Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs [Michelle Sison](#). Topics of discussion included human rights and religious freedom concerns as well as stabilization and development assistance. U.S. Ambassador to Algeria Elizabeth Aubin continued to elevate religious freedom as an Embassy priority by engaging with civil society and Algerian officials. On December 29, 2023, the State Department [maintained](#) Algeria on its Special Watch List for severe violations of religious freedom.