

KEY FINDINGS

In 2024, religious freedom conditions in Iran remained poor, particularly for religious minorities, religious dissidents, and women and girls. Authorities subjected prisoners detained on religious grounds to torture and severe punishment, including by denying them [medical care](#). The government also continued to systematically harass, intimidate, and target religious minorities through its arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, forced closure of businesses, destruction of property, and promotion of online hate speech.

Iran's government carried out over 900 [executions](#) in 2024 and issued scores of [death sentences](#) for religiously based charges. In January, authorities executed [Mohammed Ghobadlou](#) on charges of "corruption on Earth" and "waging war against God" for participating in the 2022 protests against the government's religiously oppressive policies. In May, authorities executed Sunni Muslim Khosrow Besharat on the same charges, after he had already served 14 years in prison. In August, the government [executed Reza Rasaei](#), a member of the Yarsani religious minority, for his religious association and involvement in the 2022 protests. In November, authorities hanged Arvin Ghahremani, a 20-year-old Iranian Jew, for killing a Muslim in apparent self-defense, despite irregular judicial proceedings because of his religion.

The government continued targeting Sunni Muslims through executions, arrests, disappearances of prominent clergy, destruction of homes, and denial of building permits. In August, the Special Clerical Court in Hamedan issued Sunni cleric Mamusta Saber Khodamoradi a 15-month sentence for "propaganda against the state." In July, authorities reportedly attacked a Sufi house of worship in Saqqez, killing three. In June, Vakilaband Prison authorities denied medical treatment to [Farzaneh Gharehassanlou](#) in response

to her hunger strike protesting the deliberate medical mistreatment of prisoners arrested for objecting to mandatory hijab laws. In July, after rejecting multiple requests for a retrial, Judge Abbasali Houzan of the Tehran Court of Appeals sentenced [Neda Fotouhi](#), a follower of the Erfan-e-Halgheh movement, to nearly seven years in prison for her religious identity and participation in protests.

In April, the government launched the "Nour" campaign, which intensified its [crackdown](#) on women and girls dissenting from the country's religiously grounded mandatory hijab laws. Morality police violently arrested and assaulted women not in compliance with these regulations and also penalized businesses that allowed patronage by women not wearing the hijab. In July, authorities shot and paralyzed Arezoo Badri after using closed-circuit television footage to identify her and other women who were driving without a hijab. In September, the United Nations (UN) Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Iran released a [report](#) criticizing the government for "endorsing human rights violations against women and girls" dissenting from mandatory hijab laws. In November, UN Special Rapporteur on Iran Mai Sato [called](#) for the release of [Ahoon Daryaei](#), a university student whom authorities assaulted and arrested after she publicly disrobed down to her undergarments in protest of the country's hijab laws. In December, Iran's National Security Council announced a [pause](#) on the implementation of a new law that the Islamic Consultative Assembly had passed to expand penalties for all Iranian women who refuse to comply with hijab laws, following a call from [UN experts](#) to repeal it.

Iran's government also continued to engage in transnational repression, harassing religious dissidents abroad and reportedly recruiting organized crime networks to violently attack Jewish sites in Sweden and Denmark.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

- Redesignate Iran as a "country of particular concern," or CPC, for engaging in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom, as defined by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA);
 - Work with like-minded governments, as well as multilateral organizations such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, to impose coordinated sanctions against judges presiding over freedom of religion or belief (FoRB)-related cases and security forces leaders violently enforcing hijab laws and to stem the flow of surveillance technology and weapons platforms used to suppress peaceful religious expression in Iran; and
 - Support the UN Fact-Finding Mission on Iran and other international accountability mechanisms to investigate the government's possible culpability for crimes against humanity by systematically targeting those asserting their freedom of religion or belief.
- The U.S. Congress should:
- Permanently reauthorize and exercise oversight of the bipartisan [Lautenberg Amendment](#), which aids persecuted Iranian religious minorities seeking refugee status in the United States; and
 - Hold hearings through the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission about Iran's and its proxies' transnational repression and other malign activities impacting religious freedom.

KEY USCIRF RESOURCES & ACTIVITIES

- **Press Release:** [USCIRF Condemns Severe Medical Mistreatment of Imprisoned Gonabadi Sufi in Iran](#)
- **Press Release:** [USCIRF Calls for Additional Sanctions amidst New Harsh Enforcement of Iran's Mandatory Hijab Law](#)
- **Press Release:** [USCIRF Calls for Accountability for Iran's Crimes against Humanity](#)
- **Frank R. Wolf Freedom of Religion or Belief [Victims List](#) and Appendix 2**

Background

The Islamic Republic of Iran is a theocratic, authoritarian state with limited participatory governance under Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Around 90 to 95 percent of Iran's population of nearly 88.4 million is Shi'a Muslim, while Sunni Muslims account for five to 10 percent. Approximately 0.3 percent of the population identifies as non-Muslim, including adherents of the Baha'i faith, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Judaism. While the Ja'fari school of Shi'a Islam is the official religion, the constitution ostensibly extends respect to the four major schools of Sunni thought and designates some Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians as protected minorities. Five of the Parliament's 290 seats are reserved for recognized religious minorities—two for Armenian Christians and one each for Assyro-Chaldean Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians. Iran is also home to several smaller, persecuted religious groups, including Mandeans, Yarsanis, nonbelievers, and spiritualist movements such as Erfan-e Halgheh.

Baha'is

Authorities conducted raids and arrests of Baha'is across Iran throughout the year, including the seizure, confiscation, and destruction of their farmland. In September, Judge Mehdi Raskhi from Branch 3 of the Rasht Revolutionary Court sentenced [Mojgan Samimi](#) to two years in prison and a fine for "promoting the Baha'i faith." In October, judicial authorities overturned the appeal of [Payam Vali](#), detained since 2022 for speaking about persecution of Baha'is. Throughout the year, authorities further restricted Baha'i access to cemeteries, razed their gravestones in the Khavaran cemetery, and tolerated vandalism at the community's Semnan cemetery. In August, assailants set fire to a Baha'i cemetery in Ahvaz, and the government pursued no formal investigation into the incident.

The government has particularly targeted Baha'i women, including sentencing 10 in October for "propaganda against the Islamic Republic" and "promotional activities against Islamic Shari'a." In January, the Revolutionary Court of Semnan affirmed [Shahdokht Khanjani's](#) 11-year sentence for "forming groups to act against national security" and deemed that charge inseparable from "propagating the Baha'i sect." In November, security forces arrested 11 Baha'is in Isfahan, and in December, authorities transferred former Baha'i leader [Mahvash Sabet](#)—serving a 10-year sentence alongside [Fariba Kamalabadi](#) for leading an "illegal group"—from Evin Prison to a hospital for open-heart surgery.

Jews and State Antisemitism

In March, assailants threw Molotov cocktails at the Tomb of Mordecai and Esther, a historic Jewish religious site, but the government pursued no formal investigation. During Iran's 2024 presidential election, authorities reportedly set up Jewish-only ballot stations to identify how many Jews voted and for whom. In July, assailants vandalized the historic Jewish Giliard cemetery. In November, an Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) official speaking on a state-owned media channel claimed that "the holy Qur'an . . . says that the Jews are our biggest enemies" and held Jews collectively responsible for Israeli actions in Gaza. Also in November, Iran's Deputy President for Strategic Affairs Javad Zarif claimed that Israel "cannot represent

Judaism" since it "does not uphold the 10 Commandments" and admonished Jews to save their faith "from Zionist forgeries." Zarif also described Israel as the "reincarnation of the darkness of Nazism." The government's antisemitic rhetoric not only continued to threaten Jews in Iran but also legitimized criminal networks' targeting of Jewish sites around the world, particularly in Europe.

Christians

Although a Tehran appeals court released Pastor [Anooshavan Avedian](#) and Christian convert Mehdi Akbari in September after overturning spurious national security charges against them, at least 21 Christians remained imprisoned in Iran. In January, a court sentenced Armenian Christian [Hakop Gochumyan](#) to 10 years in prison for "engaging in deviant proselytizing activity" and leadership in "a network of evangelical Christianity." That same month, authorities summoned 60-year-old Christian convert Mina Khajavi to begin a six-year prison sentence for "promoting Zionist Christianity." Judicial authorities sentenced Christian convert Laleh Saati to two years in prison in March and eight Christians from Izeh to decades in prison in June for their religious activity and—in an effort to broadly link Christians to Israel—promotion of so-called "Zionist" Christianity. In August, a Bandar Anzali court detained and later released Christian converts on charges related to allegedly insulting "divine religions or Islamic schools of thought" for attending a 2022 Christmas gathering. Authorities released one of the detainees, Pastor Abdolreza Ali-Haghejad, in December. In September, security officials arrested three Christian converts in Nowshahr and continued to hold them incommunicado by the end of the year.

Key U.S. Policy

The U.S. government [raised](#) religious freedom [concerns](#) in Iran throughout 2024. In March, Congress [reauthorized](#) the bipartisan Lautenberg Amendment. In April, the United States [co-sponsored](#) a UN resolution to renew mandates of the Special Rapporteur and Fact-Finding Mission on the human rights situation in Iran. That month, then President Joseph R. Biden [signed](#) into law the MAHSA Act—named for Mahsa Zhina Amini—which, if enforced, would impose sanctions on top leaders and entities responsible for human rights violations. In May, the U.S. Department of the Treasury [updated](#) the Iranian Transactions and Sanctions Regulations (ITSR) by clarifying General Sanctions License D-2, which gives a waiver to technology companies seeking to help Iranians coordinate protests against FoRB restrictions and related human rights violations. In August, Representatives Eric Swalwell (D-CA) and Claudia Tenney (R-NY) introduced the IRAN Act ([H.R. 9299](#)), which would mandate a comprehensive strategy to promote internet freedom in Iran, and then Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD) and Senator James Lankford (R-OK) [introduced](#) similar legislation in September. Neither bill passed before the conclusion of the 118th Congress. In December, the Senate unanimously adopted a bipartisan [resolution](#) condemning Iran's state-backed persecution of Baha'is.

On December 29, 2023, the State Department last [redesignated](#) Iran as a CPC under IRFA for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.