

## USCIRF–RECOMMENDED FOR SPECIAL WATCH LIST (SWL)

### KEY FINDINGS

In 2025, religious freedom conditions in Algeria remained poor and unchanged from the prior year. The government continued its systematic campaign against minority religious communities, enforcing the anti-blasphemy provisions in Article 144 of the Penal Code and the proselytization ban under Ordinance 06-03, which penalizes anyone who “incites, constrains or utilizes means of seduction intending to convert a Muslim.” While this ordinance formally permits non-Muslim worship, it also imposes severe restrictions on such activities: gatherings must obtain state permission to operate, and the law criminalizes any printed or audiovisual materials that authorities deem as aiming to “shake the faith of a Muslim.” Non-Sunni Muslim Algerians or foreign nationals suspected of engaging in proselytism remain subject to prosecution or deportation, respectively. Furthermore, the government has continued to use Ordinance 06-03 to repress religious expression. In March, for example, the administrator of the Facebook page “Ramadan Breakers” received a two-year prison sentence and a fine for allegedly promoting atheism. In the same month, social media activist Moh El Washam was sentenced to five years in prison for posting TikTok videos that authorities deemed critical of Islam.

The Protestant Church of Algeria (EPA) churches that the government had forcibly closed between 2018 and 2024 remained

closed throughout 2025, with only one remaining open under tight restrictions in Algiers. The government continues to deny these churches legal registration despite EPA leaders having repeatedly attempted to certify compliance with all registration requirements. In June, authorities detained 10 Protestants in Béjaïa for “continuing church activities without authorization.” In December, a court convicted and sentenced them each to six months’ imprisonment and a fine of 50,000 dinars (\$385), for which all 10 have filed appeals. Since 2018, authorities have reportedly targeted the Protestant community in 59 related cases, all of which were still pending at the end of the reporting period.

Other religious minorities continue to face similarly challenging circumstances. The Ahmadiyya Muslim population has likely dwindled to around 200 according to the most recent estimates for 2024, largely due to ongoing government pressure; the community has remained unable to register in any official capacity, as the government has long accused them of “denigrating Islam and threatening national security.” The small Jewish community, now numbering fewer than 200 people, reported no direct action from Algerian authorities, yet antisemitic public discourse perpetuated an environment of fear and inhibited their ability to openly exercise their religious traditions.

### RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

- Maintain Algeria on the Special Watch List, or SWL, for engaging in systematic and ongoing violations of religious freedom, as defined by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA); and
- Link future U.S. security assistance and bilateral trade policies to discrete

improvements of religious freedom in Algeria and work with Government of Algeria ministries to permit registration of EPA churches and Ahmadiyya Muslim congregations as well as to release religious materials presently impounded at Port Algiers.

The U.S. Congress should:

- Highlight religious freedom conditions in Algeria through public hearings, briefings, legislation, and high-level congressional delegation visits focusing on religious freedom conditions.

### KEY USCIRF RESOURCES & ACTIVITIES

- Frank R. Wolf Freedom of Religion or Belief [Victims List](#) and Appendix 2

## Background

Approximately 99 percent of Algeria's nearly 47 million people are Sunni Muslims following the Maliki school of jurisprudence, and Islam is the official state religion. The remaining one percent includes Ahmadiyya, Shi'a, and Ibadi Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Although the constitution ostensibly guarantees freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), the government maintains laws that favor Sunni Islam and severely limits all other religious practices.

## Restrictions on Religious Minorities

The Algerian government's repression of religious freedom affects all non-Sunni Muslim groups, including the Protestant, Ahmadiyya Muslim, and other communities; however, in 2025, its actions most directly targeted the EPA community. EPA leadership reported repeated raids on their homes and places of worship, during which authorities confiscated religious literature and accused them of proselytization. These raids resulted in several investigations, arrests, and prosecutions—most recently concentrated in Tizi Ouzou, where community members said the government aimed to “make an example” of them by instilling fear to deter the activities of religious minorities. In May, authorities reportedly claimed “customs restrictions” to prevent 14 members of the EPA from traveling to Egypt to attend a religious conference.

The government has also increasingly used bureaucratic tools to prevent the ability of religious minority communities to obtain religious materials. According to the Bible Society of Algeria, the only organization in the country through which all churches can obtain religious literature, all of their materials remained impounded at the Port of Algiers under the pretext of “administrative issues.” Although Algerian authorities ostensibly approved the Roman Catholic Church's license to receive such materials, officials have reportedly released only a severely limited quantity of Bibles, crosses, and other items. Meanwhile, authorities have outright denied the EPA's application for a license to import Bibles.

The Jewish community in Algeria continues to decline, with no synagogues open for worship in 2025. In October, authorities demolished the remains of the historic Chaloum Lebar Synagogue in Algiers as part of an “urban renewal process” to remove deteriorated structures in historic districts. The Great Synagogue of Algiers had previously been converted into a mosque.

## Algerian Government Crackdown on Civic Space

In 2025, the government of Algeria markedly intensified its efforts to shut down civic space, using legal reforms and enforcement tactics to stifle dissent and restrict fundamental freedoms such as FoRB. According to multiple human rights organizations, authorities have engaged in arbitrary arrests and detentions of activists, journalists, and human rights defenders, worsening the country's already chilling environment for freedoms of religion or belief, expression, assembly, and association. In addition, updated legislation—such as the July adoption of the General Mobilization Act and reforms to the Criminal Procedure Code—empowers security services with broad powers, raising alarm that authorities would deem even nonviolent protest and organization as threats to national security.

Taken together, these developments signal the government's intention to escalate its repression of civic activity and institutionalize it into the country's legal and institutional framework. Crucially, minority religious groups—especially Protestant Christian, Ahmadiyya Muslim, and others—function through civil associations and rely on legal recognition to worship and conduct community work. The tightening of laws governing associations and assembly therefore not only silences political dissent but also threatens to enable the government's restriction of all religious expression and organization by these disfavored communities.

## Key U.S. Policy

In 2025, deepening security and economic cooperation marked the bilateral relationship between Algeria and the United States, even as both sides navigated underlying divergences in policy priorities. Early in the year, U.S. Africa Command signed a landmark defense-cooperation memorandum of understanding with Algeria, committing to expand collaboration in counterterrorism, search-and-rescue, maritime intelligence, and military training. In July, the Donald J. Trump administration's senior advisor on African and Middle East affairs, Massad Boulos, visited Algeria to engage in discussions around the two countries strengthening their relationship, particularly their economic relationship. U.S. government officials also continued to engage in dialogue about religious freedom with various religious groups in the country, including U.S. Ambassador Elizabeth Aubin's hosting of a roundtable discussion on FoRB with community members in September.

The U.S. Department of State last placed Algeria on its SWL under IRFA for severe violations of religious freedom on December 29, 2023.