

KEY FINDINGS

In 2025, religious freedom conditions in Iran remained poor. The Iranian government escalated its systematic targeting of non-Shi'a Muslim religious minorities, including Baha'is, Jews, Christians, Sufis, and Sunnis. Authorities also persecuted dissenters from the government's interpretation of Islam and systematically enforced religiously grounded policies limiting freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for Iranian women and girls.

In June, Iran's top judiciary official instructed prosecutors throughout the country to expedite trials and impose harsher punishments for individuals arraigned on religiously grounded charges of *moharabeh* (waging war against God) and *esfad-fil-arz* (corruption on Earth). In July, United Nations (UN) experts [wrote](#) to the Iranian government condemning the increase in hate speech in state media falsely accusing religious minorities as traitors and dehumanizing them as "filthy rats." Weeks later, hundreds of regime-aligned clerics endorsed a fatwa labeling threats against Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as *moharabeh*, a capital offense in Islamic legal jurisprudence. In October, Iran's Parliament and Guardian Council approved an espionage law expanding the range of punishable actions and use of the death penalty for individuals allegedly cooperating with the United States or Israel on the religious charge of "corruption on Earth." The law targets Baha'is, Christians, and Jews in Iran with ties to Israel but who pose no demonstrable threat.

The June military escalation exacerbated religious freedom concerns for religious minorities. Authorities coerced Jewish community leaders to vocalize government support and held Jews collectively responsible for Israeli actions. Authorities systematically arrested Jews in Isfahan, Yazd, Shiraz, and Tehran and subjected them to hours-long interrogations. In July, Ayatollah Khamenei posted a graphic depicting Israeli Jewish civilians and soldiers as rats, contributing to a hostile environment in which Iranian Jews feel increasingly threatened. Iranian state media also portrayed Christians as national enemies and accused Evangelical Christians of collaboration with foreign "Zionist" churches. In June, *Ferghe*

News claimed Evangelicals harbor the same "racist and inhuman beliefs of the Zionist regime." In July, Iran's Ministry of Intelligence claimed to have "neutralized" over 50 Christian "Mossad mercenaries" allegedly trained by churches in the United States and Israel.

Of the more than 1,900 executions in 2025, including 152 in May alone, roughly half involved religiously grounded *qisas* (retributive justice) cases. In April, judicial authorities sentenced Iranian singer Amirhossein Maghsoudou to death for "insulting the Prophet." That month, five Sunni Muslim men were executed for their religious identity. In October, authorities affirmed the death sentence of Hossein Shahu, another Sunni detained for his religious identity.

In 2025, the Iranian government systematically targeted Sunni and non-Muslim minorities through torture, disappearance of prominent clergy, and destruction of homes. In January, prison authorities placed [Abolfazl Pour-Hosseini](#), a member of the Erfan-e-Halgheh spiritualist movement, in solitary confinement for protesting unfair prison conditions. In May, authorities deployed security forces to Zahedan's Sunni Makki Mosque after Sunni cleric Molavi Abdolhamid condemned government arrests of Sunnis. In June, authorities detained 19 members of the Yamani religious movement during a religious gathering. That month, Kerman authorities arrested the sister of Gonbadi Sufi activist [Behnam Mahjoubi](#), who died from medical malpractice while imprisoned in 2021.

A March [report](#) from the UN Fact-Finding Mission on Iran noted that Iranian women and girls "continue to face systematic discrimination, in law and in practice" regarding the enforcement of mandatory hijab laws against their individual religious beliefs. That same month, authorities arrested women journalists in Tehran who removed their headscarves to protest these laws. Authorities also deployed sophisticated and often foreign-sourced technology to surveil and harass women to ensure their compliance with the law.

Iran's government continued to recruit organized crime networks around the world to violently attack Jewish sites and individuals in Azerbaijan, Sweden, Denmark, and the United Kingdom.

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);
 - Enforce the [Mahsa Amini Human Rights and Security Accountability Act \(MAHSA Act\)](#) by imposing sanctions on top Iranian officials responsible for human rights abuses, including religious freedom violations; and
 - Reopen the legal pathway under the Lautenberg-Specter Program allowing persecuted Iranian religious minorities to resettle in the United States.
- The U.S. Congress should:
- Permanently reauthorize and exercise oversight of the bipartisan Lautenberg Amendment;
 - Adopt legislation that enables U.S. support for Iranian dissidents protesting
- FoRB conditions and encourages the Donald J. Trump administration to issue general licenses that facilitate internet freedom in Iran; and
- Hold hearings through the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission about Iran's transnational repression and other malign activities impacting religious freedom.

KEY USCIRF RESOURCES & ACTIVITIES

- **Country Update:** [State Perpetration of Religious Freedom Violations in the Islamic Republic of Iran](#)
- **Press Release:** [USCIRF Calls on Trump Administration to Seek Iranian Concessions on Religious Freedom in Oman Discussions](#)
- **Press Release:** [USCIRF Urges Resumption of Lautenberg-Specter Program](#)
- **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 like Erfan-e Halgheh.

Baha'is

Authorities conducted raids and arrests of Baha'is across Iran throughout 2025, seizing assets, destroying property, and sentencing Baha'is to prison time. In February, intelligence forces raided the Shiraz home of Mahboub Habibi, a Baha'i previously sentenced for "propaganda against the regime," seizing personal devices. That month, Judge Davoud Khatir sentenced nine Baha'is for membership in a group "opposing the Islamic Republic of Iran." In May, Yazd security forces raided the homes of six Baha'i citizens, confiscating religious books and electronic devices.

The government also subjected Baha'is to systematic economic discrimination for their religious practice and identity. In May, authorities shuttered four Baha'i businesses in Urmia, penalizing the owners for not working in observance of a Baha'i religious holiday. In June, authorities targeted Baha'i business owners in Shiraz with legally ambiguous procedures and interrogations about their religious practices. In August, judicial authorities began invoking Article 49 of the constitution to authorize government confiscation of Baha'i assets allegedly "obtained by illicit means." That month, over 20 religiously engaged Baha'is were notified of government plans to seize homes, autos, and other assets without legal recourse. In September, authorities barred Arshia Rowhani, a Baha'i resident of Isfahan, from reviewing court documents ordering the confiscation of his shop for allegedly "disrupting national security and promoting the Baha'i Faith among Muslims."

The government targeted Baha'i women during violent home raids, detaining 11 in January for peaceful religious activity, including teaching moral education classes or gathering for worship. In August, the Hamedan Appeals Court upheld the sentences of six Baha'i women charged for "teaching and propagating against Shari'a."

Promotion of Antisemitism

Throughout 2025, government leaders, state media, and regime-aligned clerics repeatedly promoted antisemitic tropes in public statements, including ideas that Jews are subhuman. In January, officials convened Iran's annual Holocaust cartoon competition, which promotes Holocaust distortion and denial. During Ramadan, the

Iranian Broadcasting Authority aired a show depicting an antisemitic caricature of a Jewish man—including a long, crooked nose and distorted face—performing sorcery. In March, Ayatollah Ahmad Alam Al-Hoda—the Friday prayer imam for the city of Mashhad—claimed that "all the stories about the Holocaust are a complete lie." Also that month, individuals from the paramilitary Basij organization and Hezbollah engaged in intimidating expressions at the tomb of Esther and Mordechai, a Jewish religious site.

Christians

Iranian authorities systematically targeted Iranian Christians throughout 2025. At least 143 Christians have been arrested across 24 cities in Iran, with approximately 162 active court cases involving Christians prosecuted for religious activities. In February, authorities re-arrested [Joseph Shahbazian](#), a pastor and house church leader previously sentenced for religious activity. Shahbazian was arrested with Christian convert [Naser Navard Goltapeh](#). Authorities later charged both with "collusion" and "propaganda against the state." Their indictment cites peaceful religious activities as their alleged crimes, including praying, performing baptisms, taking communion, and celebrating Christmas. It deems the Bible a "prohibited book." In April, Christian converts [Mehdi Rahmi](#) and [Kia Nourinia](#) were sentenced in absentia under Article 500 for "propaganda activity of deviant Christian Zionist beliefs opposed to the system of the Islamic Republic of Iran." In June, prison authorities reportedly tortured Christian [Morteza Faghanpour-Saasi](#) during his pre-trial detention. In October, authorities upheld his conviction to serve nine years in prison, along with six other converts also sentenced on the charge of "propaganda activity contrary to Islamic law due to overseas connections."

Key U.S. Policy

Throughout 2025, the U.S. government backed policies aimed at addressing religious freedom conditions in Iran and holding the government accountable for its transnational repression abroad. In March, the U.S. Department of the Treasury [announced](#) sanctions against the Sweden-based Foxtrot Network and its leader, Rawa Majid, who was recruited by the government of Iran to carry out attacks on Jewish sites in Europe.

In April, representatives Joe Wilson (R-SC) and James Panetta (D-CA) introduced the [Maximum Support Act](#) (H.R. 2514), which would require the Trump administration to develop a policy for supporting Iranian dissidents protesting religious freedom by issuing specific licenses that facilitate internet freedom in Iran. In August, the U.S. Department of State [designated](#) Iranian entities and individuals responsible for facilitating Iran's evasion of U.S. sanctions and continued repression of Iranians. In December, members of the U.S. House of Representatives introduced a bipartisan [resolution](#) condemning Iran's state-backed persecution of Baha'is.

The U.S. Department of State last [redesignated](#) Iran as a CPC under IRFA for particularly severe violations of religious freedom on December 29, 2023. Any presidential action taken as a result of this designation terminates by the end of 2025 unless expressly reauthorized by law.