



## UNITED STATES COMMISSION *on* INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

# COUNTRY UPDATE: ALGERIA

April 2026

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### USCIRF's Mission

*To advance international freedom of religion or belief, by independently assessing and unflinchingly confronting threats to this fundamental right.*

Algeria continues to *impose* significant restrictions on freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), negatively impacting both individuals and broader religious communities. In recent years, authorities have routinely delayed or blocked the importation of non-Sunni Muslim religious materials—including Bibles, other religious literature, and educational resources—at the Port of Algiers, limiting access to religious materials for Catholic and Protestant Christians as well as for Ahmadiyya Muslims and members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light (AROPL). These measures coincide with ongoing legal cases targeting religious minorities and point to a broader pattern of state pressure on non-Muslim and Muslim minority communities.

This publication assesses these interrelated challenges and underscores the systemic and ongoing nature of religious freedom restrictions in Algeria, with particular attention to state limitations on access to religious materials and the wider legal environment shaping FoRB in that country.

### Background

Algeria's constitution names Islam as the official religion of the state (Article 2) and requires a High Islamic Council to serve directly under the presidency (Article 217). Around 98–99 percent of the population of around 43.7 million people is Muslim—mostly Sunni, with small Ibadi, Shi'a, and Ahmadiyya communities. Non-Muslim groups—including a Christian population estimated at 100,000–300,000—Jews, Baha'is, and nonreligious individuals make up an additional small minority.

Algeria formally recognizes religious freedom through its constitutional commitment to key agreements such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. However, the government maintains a tightly controlled religious environment *in law and practice*. Ordinance 06-03 (2006) regulates non-Muslim worship, requiring state approval for places of worship while also restricting the distribution of religious materials and criminalizing non-Muslim proselytization and conversion from Islam. Penal Code provisions further criminalize blasphemy and perceived offenses against Islam, often targeting religious minorities, converts, and dissenting voices.

The government often wields its bureaucracy as a blunt instrument to stymie disfavored religious communities' efforts to comply with the law. These legal and administrative barriers combine with societal pressures to create a shrinking space for Algeria's religious minorities despite state claims that it has engaged in reform efforts.



## Ongoing FoRB Violations

### Bureaucratic Impacts on FoRB

Religious minorities in Algeria [face](#) both legal and customary barriers that restrict their ability to practice their religion. Authorities routinely delay or block the importation of religious materials such as Bibles and educational resources at the Port of Algiers, limiting access for Catholic, Protestant, and other religious minorities. As of April 2026, authorities held up to 6,000 Bibles in English, French, and Arabic at the Port of Algiers—most of which they intercepted upon arrival in customs in 2021. Individuals can request licenses to retrieve Bibles, but approvals of such requests are inconsistent and typically result in the release of only small quantities. For example, the Bible Society of Algiers successfully retrieved 250 Bibles after submitting a request in July 2025; since then, however, the organization has submitted five additional requests with no reply from the government commission responsible for such approvals. Sunni Islamic materials also face customs scrutiny, ostensibly in a state effort to weed out literature that may involve violent interpretations of Islam, but they do not typically involve years of confiscation and stalling.

These conditions often force individuals and communities to risk informal transport, such as carrying small quantities of materials in personal luggage, in hopes of evading these restrictions. In prior years, state authorities have used these restrictions to further their ongoing crackdown against Protestant Christians, invoking their possession of Christian literature as legal

evidence of their attempts to “shake the faith of Muslims” in a [series of cases](#) in 2022 and 2023. There have been no reports of more recent arrests, likely due to heightened fear among Christian communities—most of whom now operate in secret amid the persistent closure of nearly every Evangelical Protestant Church of Algeria (EPA) church in the country.

There are no widely reported cases of authorities holding Shi’a or Ahmadiyya Muslim materials en masse at the Port of Algiers, although regulations reportedly restrict the importation of their materials and authorities have indeed confiscated Ahmadiyya publications in past enforcement actions. Ibadi Muslims, who have a longstanding historical presence in Algeria, do not face the same level of restriction regarding their religious materials. Notably, Algeria recently formalized small-scale “micro-importation,” which permits the import of goods valued at less than 1.8 million dinars (\$13,532), but it failed to extend this authorization to individuals seeking to import religious materials.

### Recent Updates of FoRB Cases

Government enforcement of restrictive laws like Ordinance 06-03 and blasphemy provisions has led to prosecutions and sentences targeting individuals for unauthorized worship, distribution of religious materials, or perceived criticism of Islam. There has been no significant progress in individual cases involving Algerian Protestants, as many previously documented cases remain unresolved or simply stalled within the judicial system. The government also has a notable track record of applying travel bans to religious dissidents, such as

preventing Christian Amazigh activist *Slimane Bouhafs*—chair of the St. Augustine Coordination of Christians in Algeria—from leaving the country in March, nearly five years after abducting him from Tunisia, where he held refugee status, and subsequently jailing him for three years for his activism.

However, this broader climate of repression and intimidation has increasingly applied to the country’s small population of AROPL followers. In November 2025, the Algerian National Gendarmerie in Oum El Bouaghi summoned Marwan Melouk, an AROPL follower and convert from Sunni Islam, and required him to appear before judicial authorities for sharing his beliefs through social media platforms. Prior to his arrest, Melouk received voluntary financial assistance from fellow AROPL members during a period of personal hardship—support that authorities later characterized as illegal donation collection without prior authorization. Melouk’s summoning led to interrogation that reportedly focused on his religious beliefs and ties to other AROPL followers. Authorities subsequently charged him with collecting donations without authorization and money laundering within an organized criminal group under Article 389 bis (2) of the Penal Code and Articles 1 and 8 of the Law on the Collection of Donations. His arrest has heightened fear among the AROPL adherents, particularly as police have also questioned some individuals who had provided him with financial support and reportedly pressured them to renounce their religious affiliation. Melouk remained in pretrial detention as of April 2026.

### **Wider Repression Undermining Religious Freedom**

Beyond explicitly religious-centric laws, broader restrictions on civic space in Algeria significantly undermine FoRB in practice. Since the 2019 Hirak protest movement, authorities have carried out a sustained crackdown on freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, arbitrarily detaining activists, journalists, and human rights defenders. These measures disproportionately affect religious and ethnic minority individuals, including Christian and Amazigh activists who face surveillance, prosecution, and travel bans that restrict their ability to organize, advocate, or engage with international networks.

Administrative and security measures further compound these constraints. Authorities have imposed arbitrary travel bans without due process and prosecuted individuals under broadly defined charges such as “undermining national unity.” At the same time, restrictions on civil society space hinder religious communities’ ability to operate, access legal protections, and challenge discriminatory practices. Together, these dynamics create an environment in which FoRB is curtailed not only by targeted laws but also through the repression of the broader rights—expression, association, and movement—on which meaningful religious practice depend.

### **Conclusion**

Algeria’s legal and administrative framework, combined with social and customary pressures, has created a tightly controlled environment that limits religious freedom. From the routine detention of Christian religious materials at the Port of Algiers to prosecutions of converts and restrictions on places of worship, non-Muslim and Muslim minority communities face persistent and systemic barriers to practicing their religion. In its 2026 Annual Report, USCIRF recommended that Algeria be placed on the U.S. Department of State’s Special Watch List (SWL).



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The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) is an independent, bipartisan legislative branch agency established by the U.S. Congress to monitor, analyze, and report on religious freedom abroad. USCIRF makes foreign policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress intended to deter religious persecution and promote freedom of religion and belief.

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