Rise of Anti-Semitism and Anti-Christianity Globally

Overview

Two of the world’s oldest religions are facing persecution in ways and means not seen in decades. Christians and Jews all across the world are experiencing violence at home, at their places of worship, at their businesses and places of employment, and in other locations only for their faith. Much of this violence against these two faiths come from other faiths, be it radical Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism. Some of the push-backs come from secular sources, with governments reaching out to suppress the free expression of these Abrahamic religions.

In some cases, it comes from extreme political biases, from people with money and influencing deploping the free expression of faith. This topic guide is meant to raise awareness surrounding the issues that Jews and Christians face around the world but is not meant to incite further violence against other religions. The current status of religion in the modern era is complex and deeply rooted in thousands of years of history. If you do not have a solid foundation in the history of Christianity and Judaism, I recommend that you conduct additional research. At the end of this topic guide, there will be links to suggested readings for those that may require it.

Historical Background
In a topic such as this one, it is possible to go back thousands of years and discuss the various instances of discrimination against Jews and Christians. From the Jewish enslavement at the hands of the Egyptians in Biblical times to the times of persecution against Christians in pre-Constantine Rome. However, for the sake of simplicity and relevance, the historical background for this topic will consist of incidents from the 1990s to around 2015, with the current situation detailing events that have occurred in the last five or so years.

Judaism has seen the worst examples of hatred against a specific religion. From the inception of the faith, Jews have faced persecution. A cursory glance at history reveals Jews routinely kicked out of various countries throughout Europe in the Middle Ages, suffering through the Pogroms in Russia in the late 1880s to early 1900s, which was severe of attacks against Jews, and the horrors of the Holocaust during the Second World War. The various attacks against the state of Israel since its creation in 1947 is also indicative of the hatred against Jews. In recent years these forms of attacks and distaste for the sons and daughters of Abraham have continued as well.

In the past 30 years, the world has seen numerous attacks against Jews and Jewish-owned businesses and Synagogues. In 2002, a series of bombings in Casablanca, Morocco, targeted Jewish centers of gathering. The bombers came from a poor suburb of Casablanca and attempted to kill Jews at a Jewish Cemetery, and a Jewish community center. They also targeted a Jewish owned Italian restaurant, among other targets like a restaurant. The attacks resulted in more than 40 deaths. Also in 2002, in Lyon, France, a group of men rammed two cars through courtyard gates at a synagogue and set the vehicles afame which caused severe damage to the synagogue. This was the first of a series of attacks against Jewish targets in France over a week, which also targeted synagogues in Marseille, Strasbourg, and in a Parisian suburb. In 2003, a series of car bombs in Istanbul, Turkey killed 23 people and injured more than 300 others. This attack was carried out by Al-Qaeda. The start of the 2008 Gaza War also resulted in a severe increase in anti-Semitic incidents around the world. In particular, Greece, Turkey, and The United Kingdom saw violence against synagogues, Jewish individuals, and businesses.

Christians in the past 30 years have also experienced discrimination and violence against them for their faith. These attacks occur for different reasons in different areas, but the hatred remains the same. In Chile, twelve churches have been burnt to the ground since 2015 in the southern region, as indigenous peoples have claimed to take their lands back. In China, Christians have

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faced numerous incidents of state-repression. China only allows churches to exist if they conform with the CCP’s message and official stances. China is also rewriting the bible so that it better fits with the message of the party. With at least 60 million Christians throughout China, this is serious repression of religious freedom.

**Sri Lanka** has seen some of the worst violence against Christians. On Easter Sunday in 2019, bombs ripped through churches and hotels that were popular with foreigners, killing over 200 on the holiest and most sacred day in the Christian faith. Sri Lanka has a long and complicated history with Christianity, due mostly in part to their colonial background with Europe, but any violence against people due to their faith is unacceptable. The events of the Arab Spring in 2011 and the subsequent backlash against rebellious sectors has left Christians in precarious situations across the Middle East. In **Iraq**, Christians have faced violence over the past twenty years. From the violence of the Iraq war which pushed thousands of Christians out, to the rise of ISIS, Christians have suffered. Over 100,000 Assyrian Christians were pushed out of their homes, forced to convert or be killed, and saw their cultural sites destroyed. Violence against Christians is not limited to countries in the East. In Europe, there have been incidents against violence against Christians. In **Norway** during the 1990s, there were several incidents of violence against Churches. In June, a church that was over 600 years old was burned to the ground and was celebrated by many in the alternative communities across Norway. A total of seven churches across Norway were attacked by arson throughout 1992. In 2013, OpenDoorsUSA reported that every month on average, 345 Christians are killed for faith-related reasons, 105 churches and Christian buildings are burned or attacked, and 219 Christians are detained without trial, sentenced and imprisoned. It is essential to consider that this article was written during the height of violence carried out by the Islamic State and the Levant (ISIS), but that the data should still be considered relevant in understanding the situation that Christians face. In the last thirty years, Christians have faced violence across the world.

**Current Situation**

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Currently, Jews and Christians across the world face levels of violence that is alarming. From attacks on worship sites to governments systematically denying rights to religious groups and individuals, their situation is dire. As before, attacks on Jews and Christians will be divided to understand the depth and severity of the incidents better. In the United States, shooters have targeted Jewish Synagogues. In 2018, an anti-Semitic shooter targeted the Tree of Life Congregation in Pittsburg, PA and killed 11 worshippers, and in 2019, a shooter attacked the Poway Synagogue in Poway, California, killing an older woman and injuring three others. Europe is facing a crisis where memories of the Holocaust are fading, and anti-Jewish sentiments are rising. CNN conducted a poll of more than 7000 Europeans, including more than 1000 people from some of the countries most impacted by the Holocaust, including Austria, Germany, Hungary, and Poland. The results were shocking. 1 in 20 Europeans surveyed had never heard of the Holocaust, 1 in 5 of those between the ages of 18-34 had never heard of it, 4 out of 10 Austrian adults knew only a little about the Holocaust, 1 in 3 Europeans said that Jews use the Holocaust to advance their positions or goals, among other shocking results. The Anti-Defamation League reported that in 2017, there were 1,986 incidents of Anti-Semitism in the United States to include verbal harassment, vandalism, and physical assault. This number represents a 57% increase over 2016. In Germany, Jews are being warned not to wear their kippas (Jewish skullcaps) after a rise in anti-Semitism. In 2018, the German government reported that 1,646 hate crimes were committed against Jews, an increase of 10% from the previous years. Some in Germany have attributed the rise in attacks to growing far-right groups that have been very active online in advocating for attacks against Jews and other minorities. France, a country known for its policy of laicité, which means secularity and separation of church and state, has seen a substantial rise in anti-Semitic incidents. During the first nine months of 2018, anti-Semitic attacks in France increased by 69% compared to the previous year. Attacks and incidents are on the rise all across the region. In particular, in the Middle East and North Africa, 74% of adults surveyed expressed a negative feeling toward Jews. This is especially dangerous because of the volatile nature of the two regions, and the lack of state control as the legitimate moderators of violence. The UN has noted these incidents and responded accordingly, highlighting the importance of tackling anti-Semitism as a priority for all societies. Secretary-General of the UN, Antonio Guterres has pledged that the UN will always lead the charge to

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fight against all forms of hatred\(^{15}\). Jews across the world face persecution and must be protected from the hatred that is widespread and growing ever more powerful.

Christians today are also experiencing hatred and discrimination because of their faith. The recent attacks in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday where noted above, but they represent merely the tip of the iceberg in a long-history of disturbingly anti-Christian behavior. In 2017, again on Easter Sunday, ISIS suicide bombers attacked two Coptic churches in Egypt, killing 45\(^{16}\). In Pakistan in 2016, 75 people were killed when a bomb packed with ball bearings exploded near a popular park in Lahore where Christians were celebrating Easter\(^{17}\). In Nigeria in 2012, 41 people were killed after a car bomb attacked a church in the city of Kaduna, an attack that was claimed by the Islamist group, Boko Haram\(^{18}\). On January 21\(^{st}\), 2019, on the island of Jolo in the Philippines, at least 21 people were killed in a double suicide bombing at a Catholic Cathedral. In 2016 in Yemen, 16 people were gunned down at a Catholic retirement home in Aden, including four nuns, the attack was blamed on ISIS\(^{19}\). Even in Italy, the bastion and seat of the Catholic faith, Catholic Churches have faced attacks. In Umbria, vandals sacked a Church, stealing statues, benches, and ripping wires from the Church\(^{20}\). Throughout the Middle East, the persecution of Christians is coming close to a genocide in the Middle East. The Christian population in the Middle East used to hover around 20%, but is now less than 4%, in the birthplace and homeland of the Christian faith\(^{21}\). In particular, the abduction and murder of clergy members across the Middle East are especially worrying, as this is aimed at dismantling the Church. In India, the country’s more than 30 million Christians are coming under increased persecution from rising Hindu extremism. An estimated 70% of the Christians belong to the Dalit caste, also known as the untouchables or the lowest level in the Caste system\(^{22}\). Christians across the world are currently facing rising levels of discrimination.


\(^{18}\) Ibid.

\(^{19}\) Ibid.


UN Resolutions and Activities

A/RES/50/183 - A resolution from the General Assembly dealing with the elimination of all forms of religious intolerance. It reminds all States of their obligation to promote religious freedom and to protect those who may otherwise be discriminated against. 

A/HRC/RES/6/37 - A resolution from the Human Rights Council that is focused on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief. It also remained concerned that the rise in religious extremism affects the rights of individuals and religious groups. http://ap.ohchr.org/Documents/E/HRC/resolutions/A_HRC_RES_6_37.pdf

Article 18 Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance.
https://www.humanrights.com/course/lesson/articles-12-18/read-article-18.html

Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief: The UN has appointed a special rapporteur on freedom of religion or beliefs, this position is dedicated to identifying existing and emerging obstacles to the enjoyment of the right to freedom of religion or belief and presents recommendations on ways and means to overcome such obstacles. The first appointment of someone to this position took place in 1986.

Involved Actors

Israel - The State of Israel was created to give the Jewish people home and to return them to their historic homeland. Since its inception as a country in 1948, Israel has faced several invasions and attempts to end their existence. Israel is the only state where more than 2% of the population is Jewish and thus has a special duty to protecting the rights of Jewish people.

Vatican City - A sovereign nation and seat of the Catholic faith, the Vatican City governs the world’s more than 1.3 billion Catholics. They have spoken out against discrimination against Christians worldwide and serves as the authority for the Catholic faith.

ISIS - Although noticeably weakened since the loss of all its territory, the terrorist organization is not defeated. They have committed some of the most egregious crimes against Christians, including murdering Yazidi Christians, destroying numerous cultural sites, and forcing Christians to convert to Islam or to be killed.

Open Doors - The largest NGO dedicated to documenting incidents of Christians facing discrimination across the world. Each year, they publish a list of the top 50 countries where
Christians have limited or no rights to exist. They advocate for solutions to problems like Christian persecution through a faith-based approach. 
https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/

Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF)- A Christian NGO that is dedicated to defending religious freedom abroad. It unifies more than 3000 attorneys across the United States to assist in religious freedom efforts.
https://www.adflegal.org/issues/religious-freedom

Anti-Defamation League (ADL)- An NGO that is dedicated to stopping the defamation of the Jewish people and to securing justice and fair treatment to all. They fight anti-Semitism both in the United States and across the globe. The ADL combats hate, protects communities, confronts discrimination, secures justice, and stands up for Israel. https://www.adl.org/

World Jewish Congress (WJC)- An international organization (IO) that represents Jewish communities and organizations in 100 countries across the world. It advocates on their behalf towards governments, parliaments, IOs, and other faiths. The WJC represents the plurality of the Jewish people and is politically non-partisan. They are also known as the diplomatic arm of the Jewish people. https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en

**First Person Account:**

**Christianity:**

“The long good-bye: The Atlantic describes the inevitable loss of Christian life in Iraq.”

I remember the Nineveh Plain well. I was being driven from the Kurdish city of Dohuk in far northern Iraq to the regional capital of Erbil further south and around me in all directions stretched a flat plain. To the west were low-slung hills and in my mind I could hear the footsteps of conquering Babylonian armies as they sought to overrun the city of Nineveh in 612 BC.

Irrigated by the Tigris River, it’s actually a fertile place with crops everywhere — assuming that they’re allowed to grow.

Several millennia later, it was the ISIS armies whose footsteps were heard on this plain back in 2014 when the events at the heart of this story take place.

I must say I envy The Atlantic’s Emma Green for getting sent to Iraq to do this fascinating piece along with a photographer or two. (My 2004 trip there was entirely self-funded).
The call came in 2014, shortly after Easter. Four years earlier, Catrin Almako’s family had applied for special visas to the United States. Catrin’s husband, Evan, had cut hair for the U.S. military during the early years of its occupation of Iraq. Now a staffer from the International Organization for Migration was on the phone. “Are you ready?” he asked. The family had been assigned a departure date just a few weeks away.

“I was so confused,” Catrin told me recently. During the years they had waited for their visas, Catrin and Evan had debated whether they actually wanted to leave Iraq. Both of them had grown up in Karamles, a small town in the historic heart of Iraqi Christianity, the Nineveh Plain.

But the 2003 invasion of Iraq had changed everything, including the impression that Christians had had it easy under Saddam Hussein. Once he was gone, it was payback time.

… More and more Christians in the region were deciding to leave. The graph of the religion’s decline in the Middle East has in recent years transformed from a steady downward slope into a cliff. The numbers in Iraq are especially stark: Before the American invasion, as many as 1.4 million Christians lived in the country. Today, fewer than 250,000 remain — an 80 percent drop in less than two decades.

The Almako family does decide to leave for Detroit. Less than three months later, the town was invaded by ISIS, just after all its Christian residents had fled for Erbil. It took the Kurdish and Iraqi militaries (with American help) two years to flush them out and this story deals with the decision each family must make as to whether to stay in Erbil, return to Karamles or seek refuge overseas.

What’s different with these Christian Iraqis is that, for once, an American president thinks about them. Or, perhaps it would be more accurate to say that religious freedom activists worry about them, like Johnnie Moore (who represents a key Donald Trump spiritual adviser, Paula White).

But the fate of Christianity in places like the Nineveh Plain has a geopolitical significance as well. Religious minorities test a country’s tolerance for pluralism; a healthy liberal democracy
protects vulnerable groups and allows them to participate freely in society. Whether Christians can survive, and thrive, in Muslim-majority countries is a crucial indicator of whether democracy, too, is viable in those places. In Iraq, the outlook is grim, as it is in other nations in the region that are home to historic Christian populations, including Egypt, Syria, and Turkey. Christians who live in these places are subject to discrimination, government-sanctioned intimidation, and routine violence.

They do, however, have an influential and powerful ally: the United States government, which, under President Donald Trump, has made supporting Christianity in the Middle East an even more overt priority of American foreign policy than it was under George W. Bush or Barack Obama. Since Trump took office, the Nineveh Plain has received significant amounts of investment from the U.S. government.

One thing Green reminds us of is that two years after the U.S. invasion, the Iraqis rewrote their constitution declaring Islam the country’s official religion and forbidding any law that contradicts the “established provisions of Islam” — which could be just about anything. A lot of Americans were furious at the time, asking why we’d invaded Iraq only to help the place become a theocracy, which it definitely wasn’t under Saddam.

The new constitution brought in all sorts of onerous things.

ID cards designate citizens as Muslim, Christian, Mandaeans, and Yazidi. Non-Muslim men cannot marry Muslim women. Children of mixed parentage are automatically classified as Muslims if one of their parents is Muslim, even if they are born of rape. For many Christians living in northern Iraq, discrimination is a part of life: Many non-Christians won’t hire Christians at their businesses. Families closely monitor their daughters out of fear that they’ll be targeted for sexual violence.
The story notes that the Trump administration wants Christians to stay in Iraq to keep up the religious balance of power; hence very few have been allowed to emigrate to the United States since Trump took over.

Meanwhile, the facts on the ground are getting grim and the Christians don’t want to linger in a place where their long-term survival is so poor. However, a lot of American dollars are flowing toward the Nineveh Plain.

The ideological bridge between the Nineveh Plain and Washington has undoubtedly worked to Christians’ benefit. In October, USAID announced even more funding: a new investment of $178 million, bringing the total U.S. government investment to nearly $300 million. …

Whether American support, and access to American largesse, will be sufficient to sustain Iraq’s Christians is an open question. One State Department official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn’t authorized to be interviewed by the press, told me that the U.S. efforts to help Iraq’s religious minorities are unprecedented, but may also be unsustainable.

In other words, the idea of a religiously pluralistic Iraq sounds like it could work, in practice, but it ain’t flying in the minds of these Chaldean Christians who simply want to be in a place where their daughters aren’t going to be kidnapped or harassed and where their fathers can find jobs. In the new normal that is today’s Iraq, many majority Muslims discriminate against Christians. In contrast to this optimistic National Catholic Register piece last fall about Christian resiliency, the Atlantic piece suggests the true situation is way more dire.

The article ends in the town of Al Qosh, birthplace of the Old Testament prophet Nahum and the site of a lovely monastery where I spent a few hours. It is now a solely Christian town.

Al Qosh, the piece points out, used to be partly inhabited by Jews but the atmosphere grew so tense post World War II, that every last Jew eventually moved to Israel. Will the Nineveh Plain likewise be bereft of Christians in a decade or two?

Do try to read this piece, as it illustrates why American ideas of religious pluralism don’t work, when they collide with the reality of life in the Muslim-majority areas of the Middle East.

Over the years, I’ve traced what’s been happening with minority religious populations in the East and it’s not a pretty picture. Whether it’s the Uiyghur Muslims of China or the Coptic Christians...
in Egypt, persecution of minority religions is way up. Naturally, people are clustering where they can find support and so the future looks more tribal, not less.


**Judaism:**

“Belgian antisemitism and anti-kosher laws”

Belgium’s Jewish community does indeed face intensified antisemitism ([Antisemitism: ‘In Belgian schools the biggest insult is Jew’, 10 May](https://www.theguardian.com/news/2019/may/15/belgian-antisemitism-and-anti-kosher-laws)). An additional factor making Jews question their future in Belgium has come not from the street, or from murderous Islamist attacks like that at the Jewish Museum in 2014, but from the legislature. The regional parliaments of both Flanders and Wallonia have passed laws banning kosher slaughter, an attack on religious freedom that sends an unwelcoming message to Jews and other minority faiths.

With the rise in antisemitic attacks, legislatures should seek to protect Jews, not attack them further. My organisation, The Lawfare Project, is therefore supporting the umbrella body for Belgium’s Jews, the Coordinating Committee of Jewish Organizations in Belgium, in its lawsuits against this discrimination. The matter is currently under review by the European court of justice, but overturning the ban on kosher meat production is a necessary step in reassuring Belgium’s Jews of their future in the country.

**Brooke Goldstein**  
*Executive director, The Lawfare Project*


**Questions to Consider**

What is the religious make-up of your country? Has your country ever exhibited anti-Semitic or anti-Christian behavior? Does your country support the existence of Israel? What is your country’s position on religious freedom and expression? How can the UN protect Jews and Christians across the world? How can Christian minorities in Muslim-majority countries be protected? Is it the role of the UN to advocate for religious freedoms? How can hate speech and discrimination be monitored and policed online? Where is the boundary between protecting victims of discrimination and respecting national laws?