



Jon Armajani, Ph.D., is Professor of Theology in the undergraduate Department of Theology at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University in Minnesota, USA. His books include *Shia Islam and Politics: Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon* (2020); *Modern Islamist Movements: History, Religion, and Politics* (2012); and *Dynamic Islam: Liberal Muslim Perspectives in a Transnational Age* (2004). He co-edited with Wilbert van Saane *Religion, Education, and Peace: Proceedings of an Online International Conference Held in March 2021* (2022), and with James E. Lindsay *Historical Dimensions of Islam: Pre-Modern and Modern Periods; Essays in Honor of R. Stephen Humphreys* (2009). Professor Armajani has also written chapters for several of the conference proceedings on the Armenian diaspora, sponsored by Haigazian University's Armenian Diaspora Research Center, which were published by Haigazian University Press. He teaches courses related to Islam, Christianity, interreligious dialogue, and the history and politics of the Middle East.

The book examines the relationships among the Armenian diaspora, constitutions, and political systems in twelve countries in the Middle East, Africa, and eastern Mediterranean which have significant Armenian populations. Within this framework, the book analyzes minority rights, cultural rights, freedom of press, speech, and religion as well as citizenship, residence status, immigration and emigration, and personal status laws related to marriage, divorce, and inheritance. At the same time, the book considers the histories of each of the constitutions, the contexts in which they were drafted, and the respective governments which relate to those constitutions, while analyzing the contexts in which Armenians, and other religious and ethnic minorities, relate to those constitutions and pertinent laws. The book also analyzes various aspects of diaspora Armenians' relationships with Armenian institutions as well as the people and institutions that comprise the dominant cultures of the countries, in which Armenians live. Much of this book is based on papers that the author presented at conferences on the Armenian Diaspora between 2015 and 2022, which were sponsored by the Armenian Diaspora Research Center at Haigazian University in Beirut, Lebanon.



**HU Press**

ISBN 978-9953-585-63-5

HU Press

THE ARMENIAN DIASPORA AND MODERN POLITICAL SYSTEMS Jon Armajani

**HAIGAZIAN UNIVERSITY**  
*Armenian Diaspora Research Center*

**ARMENIAN DIASPORA IX**

# THE ARMENIAN DIASPORA AND MODERN POLITICAL SYSTEMS

**JON ARMAJANI**

Haigazian University Press  
Beirut, 2026





HAIGAZIAN UNIVERSITY  
Armenian Diaspora Research Center  
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Original Title:  
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First Edition 2026

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Beirut, Lebanon

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*www.haigazian.edu.lb*  
ISBN 978-9953-585-63-5

For my parents, Mahvash Armajani and Robert Bahman Armajani,  
with love and gratitude.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Paul Haidostian for his friendship and support of many years, all our conversations, including those about Christian Theology and the Middle East, and all the opportunities, which he has enabled me to have at Haigazian University and Lebanon that include his having introduced me to many persons in Haigazian University's community. He provided the initial opportunities, which led to the writing of this book, among many other opportunities. I thank Antranig Dakessian for our conversations about the Middle East, commissioning me to write this book, and inviting me to present papers at conferences on the Armenian Diaspora, which were sponsored by Haigazian University's Armenian Diaspora Research Center (ADRC) that formed the basis of much of this book. He invested enormous amounts of time and effort reading and commenting on my conference papers, which were published as part of the ADRC's series of conference proceedings on the Armenian diaspora that are a significant basis for this book. He also conceived of the ideas and structure of this book, and our work on it has been profoundly collaborative and deeply enriching to me professionally and personally.

I thank Berge Traboulsi for the many conversations that we had about Middle East politics and other topics, all of which were enlightening and provided perspectives for this book. I thank Wilbert van Saane for his ideas in our many discussions about Christian Theology and the Middle East as well as our various collaborations, all of which have contributed to my teaching and scholarship, including the writing of this book. I thank everyone at Haigazian University, who has supported my work, including everyone who contributed to the establishment of the HU Repository (Haigazian University Repository), which is a rich and valuable resource for scholarly materials related to a variety of academic disciplines, including Armenian Studies and Middle East Studies. That repository has benefited me in the research and writing of this book, and its positive impact on everyone who utilizes it, including students and scholars, will continue to be significant.

I thank John Merkle for his support of this book and many other aspects of my professional life, all of which continue to inspire my work. I thank Ron Pagnucco for reading and commenting on the chapter on Sudan and Ethiopia for this book, our conversations about it and related topics, and his encouraging me in this endeavor and a variety of other endeavors, some of which relate to this book. I thank Louis Johnston and Susan Riley for our many conversations and their encouragement during the entire course of our friendship, including the years that I conducted research for and wrote this book.

I thank the Near East School of Theology in Beirut, Lebanon for hosting me for my many visits to Lebanon for research and other projects related to

this book, and the Center for Arab and Middle East Studies (CAMES) at the American University of Beirut for enabling me to be an Affiliate, which facilitated research and conversations that contributed to the writing of this book.

I thank Pamela Bacon, MaryAnn Baenninger, Brian J. Bruess, Terence Check, Karyl Daughters, Michael Hemesath, Mary Dana Hinton, Richard Ice, and Rita Knuesel for their support as well as the Faculty Development and Research Committee at the College of Saint Benedict / Saint John's University (CSB/SJU), which provided grant funding and a sabbatical that enabled me to conduct research for this book and write it.

I thank my brother Cyrus Armajani and sister-in-law Lili Farhang for their support and our many compelling conversations, several of which overlap with the topics in this book.

I thank the following persons, who had significant roles in enabling this book to come to fruition: Maruzella Abboud, the Abi Kheir family, Jeffrey Anderson, Johnny Awwad, Habib Badr, Juan E. Campo, Jonathan Carlson, Kevin Clancy, Kari-Shane Davis Zimmerman, Hamza A. Dudgeon, Arda A. Ekmekji, Nadia El Cheikh, Shant Estepan, Peter Ford, Samer Frangie, Shaké Geotcherian Koujryan Jackson, Norbert Hirschhorn, Waleed Hazbun, Richard D. Hecht, R. Stephen Humphreys, Hudda Ibrahim, Al Jergenson, Doug Jergenson, Katie Johnson, Anastasia Jreidini, M.K, Joseph Kassab, Najla Kassab Abousawan, Nabil Katbeh, Edmond Khoury, Kelly Kraemer, O.M., James E. Lindsay, Abdi Mahad, Jihane H. Marroush, Abdo Melki, Zaven Messerlian, Kingshuk Mukherjee, Cynthia Myntti, S.N., Rima Nasrallah van Saane, the Nuwayhid family, Imad Rahal, Dwight F. Reynolds, George Sabra, Elias Sahiouny, Aliya Saidi, the Samaha family, Andrea Shaker, Baria Sibai, Sucharita Sinha Mukherjee, Diana Symons, Yeghia Tashjian, Liza Titizian, and David Wuolu.

I express deep gratitude to my parents, Mahvash Armajani and Robert Bahman Armajani, for their lifelong support of all my projects including this book, which is dedicated to them.

## NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION

Generally, this book utilizes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*' (IJMES) guidelines for transliteration.<sup>1</sup> For example, this book utilizes IJMES guidelines related to the definite article (e.g., the Arabic al-). Ordinarily, this book follows IJMES's guidelines for accepted English spellings for names, except for certain cases where there is more than one spelling for a name such as Ahmad and Ahmed, and Mohammed and Muhammad, where this book will utilize the same spelling, whenever uniformity does not significantly abrogate the usual spelling.

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<sup>1</sup>*International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Journal Information, [https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-journal-of-middle-east-studies/information/author-resources/ijmes-translation-and-transliteration-guide#:~:text=publication%20in%20citations-,See%20the%20IJMES%20Word%20List%20\(opens%20in%20a%20new%20tab,possible%20to%20the%20IJMES%20system](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-journal-of-middle-east-studies/information/author-resources/ijmes-translation-and-transliteration-guide#:~:text=publication%20in%20citations-,See%20the%20IJMES%20Word%20List%20(opens%20in%20a%20new%20tab,possible%20to%20the%20IJMES%20system) (accessed December 7, 2025).



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## FOREWORD

Among the significant sociopolitical developments that took place in the Middle East after World War I were the emergence of a number of Arab states and the large-scale settlement of the uprooted Armenians. The arrival of the refugee Armenians did not pose any additional problems regarding the shaping of the relations between the state and its communities, not the least because the Armenians had been part and parcel of the Middle East socioethnic fabric for millennia. Besides, their arrival in the Eastern Mediterranean Arab countries (particularly Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Palestine) coincided with the establishment of these Arab states in the region.

The traditional leadership of these states and the mandating powers, France and Great Britain, proceeded in the long process of state crafting, including drafting their national constitutions.

The region and its inhabitants were neither ethnically nor religiously homogeneous. Indeed, they were as diverse as the Ottoman Empire, of which they were a part. Accordingly, in crafting the constitution, the legacy of the Ottoman *millet* system, which codified the relation of the state with its diverse communities, was adopted. However, the unique features of the demography, political culture and religious ideology of each emerging country shaped the constitutions, which converged simultaneously with and diverged from the Ottoman *millet* system to different extents.

This book by Professor Jon Armajani, an expert in politics and Islam mainly in the Middle East, is the compilation of his research papers presented during the conferences organized by the Haigazian University-based Armenian Diaspora Research Center between 2014 and 2022. They focused on the Armenian communities of Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, the Arab Gulf States, Cyprus and Greece. These papers have been updated in the light of recent developments in many of these countries.

In this context the papers examine the rights and status of these Armenian communities (and to a lesser extent of other minorities) and the amendments and adjustments that were introduced during the past 100 years, particularly during the last three decades of technological changes and sociopolitical developments both worldwide as well as in the region.

In each chapter the author contextualizes the presence of the Armenians in the said country in a historical framework as there have been small Armenian communities in all but the Arab Gulf States since the Middle Ages.

Through a self-devised framework, the author carefully examines the constitutional changes and shifts in each of these countries and assesses how these impacted the Armenian communities and other minorities. The author argues that these changes were due to domestic as well as regional and international economic, political, sociological and technological factors. Furthermore, he notes that the very disposition of the decision-making authoritative bodies played a pivotal role in the extent of the implementation of these constitutional provisions.

Professor Armajani lists a set of variables that include a) the ongoing changes in the region; b) the prevailing dynamics between traditional/conservative and liberal forces; c) local trends of nationalisation versus international necessities; d) the contest between religious extremists and moderates; e) domestic centripetal and centrifugal forces; f) the preoccupations (identity preservation, “survival, adaptation, and flourishing ... within pluralistic, and often fragile, socio-political landscapes”); g) the Genocidal trauma of the Armenian communities, and the worries of tiny minorities; h) the growing role and influence of Turkey in the region; i) worldwide technological developments. The author asserts that all of these (and other factors) have diverse impacts on the process of drafting new constitutions or updating the current ones. The author estimates that the process of shaping state-citizens-communities/minority groups relations through the constitution of the given state as well as its political system will continue in an everchanging context of variables that impact the mindset, economic conditions, expectations, political aspirations, current political instability, and the ambitions of the regional states have diverging impacts.

The author argues that “the improvement of the rights of Armenians, who are minorities in various contexts, may also often be reflected in the improvement of the rights of other religious and ethnic minorities in those contexts.” In studying the case of the Armenians in the region the author offers the reader a panoramic analysis of a transnational minority, its demographic ebb and flow, its socioeconomic and cultural contributions, its sociopolitical integration, its preoccupations and its efforts in continuously reshaping itself in a challenging and volatile region.

Haigazian University Press takes pride in publishing this seminal work by Dr. Armajani and offering it to the academic readership as it gives a panoramic and in-depth study of a minority group, the Armenians, maps their presence in the region and analyzes state-minority community relations across 12 MENA states.

Antranik Dakessian, Ph.D.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **PURPOSE**

This book examines the relationships among the Armenian diaspora, constitutions, and political systems in several countries in the Middle East, Africa, and eastern Mediterranean which have significant Armenian populations. Within this framework, the chapters analyze minority rights, cultural rights, freedom of the press, speech, and religion as well as citizenship, naturalization, residence permits and status, immigration and emigration, ownership, family law, and personal status laws related to marriage, divorce, and inheritance, as well as the purview of states, and population and demographics. The order, which these topics are discussed in the chapters may vary depending, in part, on the specific factors within each country and the status of Armenians and other minorities in those countries. At the same time, the chapters consider the histories of each of the constitutions, the contexts in which they were drafted, and the respective governments which relate to those constitutions, while analyzing the contexts in which Armenians, and other religious and ethnic minorities, relate to those constitutions and pertinent laws.

### **ARMENIANS**

The book also analyzes various aspects of diaspora Armenians' relationships with Armenian institutions as well as the people and institutions that comprise the dominant cultures of the countries, in which Armenians live. Armenians' churches, schools, organizations, institutions, post-Genocide presence, kinship ties, first arrivals, clubs, parties, cultural organizations, and political participation, and the Armenian persons or entities that the states recognize as the Armenians' community leaders and representatives are often crucial factors in understanding Armenians' lives, jobs, families, and futures within those contexts. Because the specific contexts, within which Armenians live and work in various countries can be quite different, this book's treatment of those subjects differs from one chapter to another. Tragically, the Armenian Genocide is in the foreground or background of each chapter, because that genocide forced almost all Armenians to be exiled, deported, and uprooted from their homeland in Anatolia and adjacent regions to the countries which are this book's focus. At the same time, in some regions, there have been Armenian communities, which have existed outside the historic lands of Armenia for hundreds of years. While this book's primary topic is not the Armenian Genocide, it takes that reality seriously as a horrific catalyst for much of the Armenian diaspora's formation and as a defining memory for

diaspora Armenians and those living in Armenia.<sup>1</sup> In any case, a number of the countries, which this book analyzes, particularly several in the Middle East, are continuing to undergo constitutional changes. The future of the ways that some of these constitutions will be applied is uncertain, especially in light of the fact that the Middle East is undergoing a tectonic shift.

### THIS VOLUME'S HISTORY

Most of this book's chapters are based on scholarly papers, which the author presented at conferences on the Armenian diaspora, that took place at Haigazian University in Beirut, Lebanon. The order of this book's chapters is influenced by the chronological order of the conferences' topics, the first of which was about the Armenians of Lebanon that took place in September of 2005. The second conference about that topic convened in May 2014. While I did not present papers at those conferences, the first chapter in this book's body is about the Armenians of Lebanon, in a manner consistent with the ordering of the conferences. While this book is based on the papers, which I presented during the conferences, I made extensive additions and revisions to those papers, due to the significant changes that have taken place in the relevant countries over time.

In terms of the chronological ordering of the countries, which were the focus of each conference, that ordering is based on Lebanon as a geographic center, with the topics of subsequent conferences moving outward from that center. That sequence is based on Haigazian University's location, and the prominence of Armenian Lebanese in the Armenian diaspora. The below list provides information about those conferences.

Dates and Topics of Conferences on the Armenian Diaspora, Organized by The Armenian Diaspora Research Center at Haigazian University in Beirut, Lebanon:  
Armenians of Lebanon, Part 1 - September 12-15, 2005<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Aleksandr V. Gevorkyan, "Armenian Diaspora," in *The Encyclopedia of Global Human Migration*, ed. Immanuel Ness, Blackwell Publishing, n.p., 2013; 2 DOI: 10.1002/9781444351071.wbeghm038 ; [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Aleksandr-Gevorkyan/publication/311536174\\_Armenian\\_diaspora/links/5e162d3f92851c8364bd3070/Armenian-diaspora.pdf?\\_cf\\_chl\\_tk=ETMn0D1osPmsLjUO9Xu9KHZOjJhUbs1DflpaisHoOI-1748179871-1.0U.1.1-ibP7CvivismDYCGRHOR1IDBrxlxc2zkRD2oLYS\\_IsCm2c](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Aleksandr-Gevorkyan/publication/311536174_Armenian_diaspora/links/5e162d3f92851c8364bd3070/Armenian-diaspora.pdf?_cf_chl_tk=ETMn0D1osPmsLjUO9Xu9KHZOjJhUbs1DflpaisHoOI-1748179871-1.0U.1.1-ibP7CvivismDYCGRHOR1IDBrxlxc2zkRD2oLYS_IsCm2c) (accessed May 25, 2025).

<sup>2</sup> *Armenians of Lebanon: From Past Princesses and Refugees to Present-Day Community, the Trilingual Proceedings of the Conference Held in Haigazian University, Lebanon, September 12-15, 2005*, [Armenian Diaspora I] Aida Boudjikianian, ed., Haigazian University, Beirut, Lebanon, 2009, <https://doi.org/10.62811/hup.001> (accessed May 20, 2025). The full texts of the volumes from this series on the Armenian Diaspora, which are numbered Armenian Diaspora II through VIII, are available for viewing and download at the HU Repository (Haigazian University Repository) at

Armenians of Lebanon, Part 2 - May 14-16, 2014<sup>3</sup>

Armenians of Syria - May 24-27, 2015<sup>4</sup>

Armenians of Jordan - May 22-24, 2016<sup>5</sup>

Armenians of Iraq - May 29-31, 2017<sup>6</sup>

Armenians of Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia, First Stage in Cairo, Egypt - April 12-13, 2018

Armenians of Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia, Second Stage, Beirut, Lebanon - May 29-30, 2018<sup>7</sup>

Armenians of Greece and Cyprus - May 30-31, 2019<sup>8</sup>

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<https://haigrepository.haigazian.edu.lb/collections/e60f70c3-a14b-407c-970e-4f080c285c88> (accessed May 20, 2025). The web addresses for the individual volumes in this series are included in the footnotes, which appear below.

<sup>3</sup> *Armenians of Lebanon (II): Proceedings of the Conference; 14-16 May 2014*, Antranik Dakessian, ed., Armenian Diaspora Research Center, Armenian Diaspora II, Haigazian University Press, Beirut, Lebanon, 2017, <https://haigrepository.haigazian.edu.lb/items/59e7ac7a-49ea-45e6-a7d8-3f81d005601e> (accessed May 20, 2025). “Antranig Dakessian” and “Antranik Dakessian” refer to the same person.

<sup>4</sup> *Armenians of Syria: Proceedings of the Conference; 24-27 May 2015*, Antranik Dakessian, ed., Armenian Diaspora III, Haigazian University Press, Beirut, Lebanon, 2018, <https://haigrepository.haigazian.edu.lb/items/48cafe75-7e0b-4ab4-8089-c49ca2186e54> (accessed May 20, 2025).

<sup>5</sup> *Armenians of Jordan: Proceedings of the Conference; 22-24 May 2016*, Antranik Dakessian, ed., Armenian Diaspora IV, Haigazian University Press: Beirut, Lebanon, 2019) <https://haigrepository.haigazian.edu.lb/items/eeab008f-4423-4a4b-af39-d5a1935fb562> (accessed May 20, 2025).

<sup>6</sup> Antranik Dakessian, ed., *Armenians of Iraq: Proceedings of the Conference; 29-31 May 2017; Armenian Diaspora V*, Haigazian University Press, Beirut, Lebanon, 2021, <https://haigrepository.haigazian.edu.lb/items/3f4b9a9e-cab3-43d5-aa45-9abaf2dc316c> (accessed May 20, 2025).

<sup>7</sup> *Armenians of Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia/1: Proceedings of the Conference; 12-13 April and 29-30 May 2018*, Antranik Dakessian, ed., Armenian Diaspora VI, Haigazian University Press, Beirut, Lebanon, 2022, <https://haigrepository.haigazian.edu.lb/items/c7151a39-db34-434c-babd-11a2c81adf4e> (accessed May 20, 2025); *Armenians of Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia/2: Proceedings of the Conference; 12-13 April and 29-30 May 2018*, Antranik Dakessian, ed., Armenian Diaspora VII, Haigazian University Press, Beirut, Lebanon, 2023, <https://haigrepository.haigazian.edu.lb/items/69f069ee-7887-4ab1-8550-b0bbd00f88d6> (accessed May 20, 2025).

The first stage of this conference was held in Cairo in collaboration with the Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church of Egypt and Haigazian University. The second stage of this conference was held on May 29-30, 2018 at Haigazian University (“International Conference on ‘Armenians of Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia’ at Haigazian University, May 29-30, 2018” <http://www.haigazian.edu.lb/2018/06/11/international-conference-armenians-egypt-sudan-ethiopia-haigazian-university-may-29-30-2018-2/>, accessed May 18, 2025). Jon Armajani presented papers at the second stage of this conference.

<sup>8</sup> At the time of this writing, the proceedings of the conference on the Armenians of Greece and Cyprus are forthcoming.

Analysis of Sudan and Ethiopia are in the same chapter in this volume because I presented one conference paper on both of those countries, they border each other, and analyzing them in the same chapter facilitates discussing comparisons and contrasts. Analysis of Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates are in the same chapter because I presented one conference paper on both of those countries, their governments have contrasting laws and policies with respect to expatriates, and both are Arab countries near the Persian Gulf.

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Along these lines, in some of the countries, which this book analyzes, newly acquired constitutions are in a stage where attempts are being made to apply provisions of those constitutions. Yet, in some cases, those constitutional provisions have not been completely applied. In this vein, in many of the countries, there are differences between what the constitutions say and how they are applied.<sup>10</sup> This is especially true in the case of human rights, whereas in some countries even though the constitutions uphold human rights, those rights are violated by some governments.<sup>11</sup> Generally, most of the Arab and Middle Eastern countries, which this book analyzes, are under authoritarian rule, and those countries are majority Muslim.<sup>12</sup> Yet, there are significant caveats. For example, Iraq and Lebanon have apparently democratic governmental institutions, and the extent to which those governmental institutions are democratic or approximate democracies constitute subjects of debate.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, the matter as to whether Syria

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<sup>9</sup> *Armenians of the Gulf Arab States, Proceedings of the Conference; 6-7 December 2022*, Antranik Dakessian, ed., Armenian Diaspora VIII (Beirut, Lebanon, Haigazian University Press, 2024, <https://haigrepository.haigazian.edu.lb/items/f58f80bc-19ac-41c3-b4f5-37b5d247a4e1> (accessed May 20, 2025).

<sup>10</sup> Mary Kathryn Healy, "Constitutional Incorporation of International Human Rights Standards: An Effective Legal Mechanism?" *Chicago Journal of International Law*, Summer:2023, <https://cjlil.uchicago.edu/online-archive/constitutional-incorporation-international-human-rights-standards-effective-legal> (accessed July 29, 2025).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Cathryn Grothe, "Freedom Improved in the Middle East, but Authoritarian Repression Persists," Freedom House, March 23, 2023 <https://freedomhouse.org/article/freedom-improved-middle-east-authoritarian-repression-persists> (accessed July 29, 2025).

<sup>13</sup> Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2022: Lebanon," <https://freedomhouse.org/country/lebanon/freedom-world/2022> (accessed July 29, 2025); Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2022: Iraq" <https://freedomhouse.org/country/iraq/freedom-world/2022> (accessed July 29, 2025).

is moving toward being democratic is uncertain.<sup>14</sup> Both within and outside the Arab world and Middle East, Armenians and some other minorities have been demographically minoritized. As a result, by and large, they cannot pose threats to the countries, in which they live.<sup>15</sup>

Before the Armenian Genocide, Armenians moved to various countries such as Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt for economic and career opportunities, among other reasons. At times, they may have moved from one country to another because they may have experienced oppression in the country, in which they had initially lived.<sup>16</sup> During and after the Armenian Genocide, many Armenians were forced to leave their home areas and move to other areas, which were outside the domain of the Ottomans. In some of those cases, such as the Armenians who went to Cyprus and Greece, during and after the Genocide, those Armenians settled in areas, where there had already been long-standing Armenian communities.<sup>17</sup> In countries, such as Cyprus and Greece, where Armenians lived before modern constitutions, the Armenians, who were living in those countries, where the modern constitutions were implemented, had to adapt themselves to the new governmental and political environments, which those constitutions created. In those and similar cases, all the persons living in the countries with new modern constitutions, including the Armenians, would have felt the need to familiarize themselves with those constitutions by reading them, following news reports about them, and/or receiving and education about those constitutions in schools, colleges, and universities, for example.<sup>18</sup>

## ARMENIAN MINORITIES, LEADERS, REPRESENTATIVES, AND GOVERNMENTS

As minorities, Armenians in various countries find themselves in different situations regarding whether the state recognizes them at all, and if it does, how they are recognized and who recognizes them. In Lebanon, five seats in that country's parliament are reserved for the Armenian Orthodox community, while one seat is reserved for the Armenian Catholic community.<sup>19</sup> In Syria, Armenians are considered a religious minority. The Armenian Church has a significant role in the organization of the Armenian community, Armenian

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<sup>14</sup> Naharnet and Agence France Presse, "Syria Sets Date for Selection of New Transitional Parliament," July 28, 2025 <https://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/314430-syria-sets-date-for-selection-of-new-transitional-parliament> (accessed July 29, 2025).

<sup>15</sup> Antranig Dakessian, message to author, July 7, 2025.

<sup>16</sup> Richard G. Hovannisian, "The Ebb and Flow of the Armenian Minority in the Arab Middle East" *Middle East Journal*, 28(1):1974, 19-32, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4325183> (accessed July 29, 2025).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Electoral Reform Society "Lebanon's Confessional System Keeps Change Just Out of Reach," September 2, 2020, <https://electoral-reform.org.uk/lebanons-confessional-system-keeps-change-just-out-of-reach/> (accessed July 28, 2025).

education, and the preservation of Armenian identity. The Syrian government considers the Christian church the administrative body of the given minority and its representative in state instances. There are the Damascus Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church (the seat of the primate is the St. Sarkis Armenian Apostolic Church in Damascus) and the Armenian Diocese of Peria (Aleppo) of the Great See of Cilicia (the seat of the primate is the St. Forty Martyrs Armenian Cathedral of Aleppo in Syria). There are also the Armenian Catholic and the Armenian Evangelical Churches with their Prelacies.<sup>20</sup>

In Jordan, the spiritual leader of the Armenian Apostolic Church is under the jurisdiction of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem. As a functioning minority, Armenians have been given the right to have a consulate. It is represented and recognized in the country's state institutions and deals with the national-ecclesiastical issues of the Armenian community.<sup>21</sup> In Iraq, the Armenian Apostolic Church in that country is one of the recognized religious institutions. The Armenian Catholic Archbishopric Church of Baghdad and the Armenian Evangelical Church in Baghdad are also recognized religious institutions in Iraq.<sup>22</sup> The Armenian community in Egypt is led by Bishop Ashot Mnatsakanyan, the Primate of the Armenian Diocese of Egypt. Additionally, Bishop Krikor Augustinos Kousa is recognized as the leader of the Armenian Catholic Church in Egypt. These two individuals are the primary leaders representing the Armenian community to the Egyptian government.<sup>23</sup>

The civil war in Sudan makes it difficult to address the matter of who in the Armenian community represents Armenians, with respect to the government, especially because there are two competing governments, one which is led by the leader of the Rapid Support Forces, and another which is led by the leader of the Sudanese Armed Forces.<sup>24</sup> The Ethiopian government's

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<sup>20</sup> Republic of Armenia, Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, "Syria," <http://diaspora.gov.am/en/pages/51/syria#:~:text=In%20Syria%2C%20Armenians%20are%20considered,the%20primate%20is%20the%20St> (accessed July 28, 2025).

<sup>21</sup> Republic of Armenia, Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, "Jordan," <http://diaspora.gov.am/en/pages/46/jordan> (accessed July 28, 2025).

<sup>22</sup> Robert Istepanian, "The Armenians of Iraq Since 2003: Two Decades of Progress or Regression" EISMENA, July 7, 2023, [https://eismena.com/en/article/the-armenians-of-iraq-since-2003-two-decades-of-progress-or-regression-2023-07-07#:~:text=From%20the%20ecclesial%20perspective%2C%20the,period%20\(2005%2D2008\)](https://eismena.com/en/article/the-armenians-of-iraq-since-2003-two-decades-of-progress-or-regression-2023-07-07#:~:text=From%20the%20ecclesial%20perspective%2C%20the,period%20(2005%2D2008).). (accessed July 29, 2025).

<sup>23</sup> The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, "Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's Official Visit to the Arab Republic of Egypt" March 5-6, 2024, [https://www.primeminister.am/en/foreign-visits/item/2024/03/05/Nikol-Pashinyan-visiting-Egypt#:~:text=The%20delegation%20led%20by%20Prime,Diaspora%20relations%20and%20other%20topics.&text=At%20the%20end%20of%20his,honored%20guests%20of%20the%20museum](https://www.primeminister.am/en/foreign-visits/item/2024/03/05/Nikol-Pashinyan-visiting-Egypt#:~:text=The%20delegation%20led%20by%20Prime,Diaspora%20relations%20and%20other%20topics.&text=At%20the%20end%20of%20his,honored%20guests%20of%20the%20museum.). (accessed July 29, 2025).

<sup>24</sup> Al-Jazeera Staff, "RSF Paramilitary-Led Coalition Forms Parallel Government in War-Torn Sudan," *Al-Jazeera*, July 26, 2025 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/7/26/rsf->

official recognition of the leader of the Armenian community in Ethiopia is centered on the Armenian Church Pastorate of Ethiopia.<sup>25</sup> The government of Greece does not officially recognize a single leader of the Armenian community in the way that a single individual might be recognized for a country. Instead, the Armenian community in Greece is represented by various religious and secular organizations. The Greek government interacts with several entities that represent the Armenian community in Greece, which include the Prelacy of the Armenian Orthodox Church of Greece, the Central Council of Orthodox Armenians, the Armenian National Committee of Greece, and cultural organizations such as the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU).<sup>26</sup> In Cyprus, that country's government recognizes the Armenian Prelate, as the leader of the Armenian community. The Prelate holds the position of Catholicos Vicar of the Great See of Cilicia. Additionally, the Armenian community elects a Representative to Cyprus's House of Representatives, who does not have the right to vote.<sup>27</sup> Because Saudi Arabia is a Muslim-majority country under Sharia, there are no officially-recognized Christian churches in that country. Therefore, it would be difficult to suggest that there is a formally recognized leader of the Armenian community as a distinct political or religious entity in Saudi Arabia. At the same time, governmental leaders of Armenia and Saudi Arabia show respect for Christianity and Islam.<sup>28</sup>

The government of Kuwait does not publicly designate a specific individual as the leader of the Armenian community. Instead, the Armenian community in Kuwait is primarily represented by its churches and various

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paramilitary-led-coalition-forms-parallel-government-in-war-torn-sudan (accessed July 29, 2025).

<sup>25</sup> Armenipedia, "Ethiopia,"

<https://www.armenipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopia#:~:text=ARMENIAN%20COMMUNITY%20OF%20ETHIOPIA,CHURCH%20IN%20ADDIS%20DABABA%2C%20ETHIOPIA> (accessed July 28, 2025).

<sup>26</sup> The Armenian Prelacy of Greece,

<https://www.armenianorthodoxchurch.org/en/archives/prelaices/the-armenian-orthodox-community-of-greece> (accessed July 28, 2025); Vahram Hovyan, "The Armenian Community of Greece at This Stage," *Noravank*, June 4, 2012,

[http://www.noravank.am/eng/articles/detail.php?ELEMENT\\_ID=6526#:~:text=The%20vital%20activity%20of%20the,groups%20can%20be%20singled%20out](http://www.noravank.am/eng/articles/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=6526#:~:text=The%20vital%20activity%20of%20the,groups%20can%20be%20singled%20out): (accessed July 28, 2025).

<sup>27</sup> Government of Cyprus, Office of the Presidential Commissioner, "Armenians,"

[https://www.presidentialcommissioner.gov.cy/ANTHROPOS/ANTHROPOS.NSF/pc07\\_en/pc07\\_en?opendocument#:~:text=Under%20the%20Constitution%20of%201960,tradere%2C%20professionals%20and%20craftsmen](https://www.presidentialcommissioner.gov.cy/ANTHROPOS/ANTHROPOS.NSF/pc07_en/pc07_en?opendocument#:~:text=Under%20the%20Constitution%20of%201960,tradere%2C%20professionals%20and%20craftsmen) (accessed July 28, 2025).

<sup>28</sup> Sulafa Alkhunaizi, "Armenia, Saudi Arabia Share Common Value of Respect for Diversity, Says Envoy," *Arab News*, February 22, 2024

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/2464841/saudi-arabia#:~:text=praises%20Vision%202030->

[Updated%202022%20February%202024,spiritual%20fulfillment%2C%E2%80%9D%20he%20added](https://www.arabnews.com/node/2464841/saudi-arabia#:~:text=praises%20Vision%202030-) (accessed July 28, 2025).

community organizations. The Armenian Apostolic Church, under the jurisdiction of the Great See of Cilicia, plays a central role in the community's religious and social life. Additionally, various community groups and organizations work to represent the interests and needs of the Armenian population in Kuwait. While there is not a single, universally recognized leader, the Armenian community in Kuwait is organized and has a presence through its religious institutions and community organizations.<sup>29</sup>

The United Arab Emirates recognizes the President of Armenia as the leader of the Armenian community within the UAE. While the UAE does not have a formal system of recognizing community leaders within its own structure, it acknowledges the Armenian President as the representative of the Armenian community, especially in diplomatic and official contexts. For instance, the UAE has hosted official visits from the Armenian President.<sup>30</sup>

This volume now turns to the Armenians in another part of the Arab world, namely Lebanon, a country which is significant in the Middle East's history and future, and whose mix of Christians, Muslims, and Druze has played a role in cooperation and conflict in that country.

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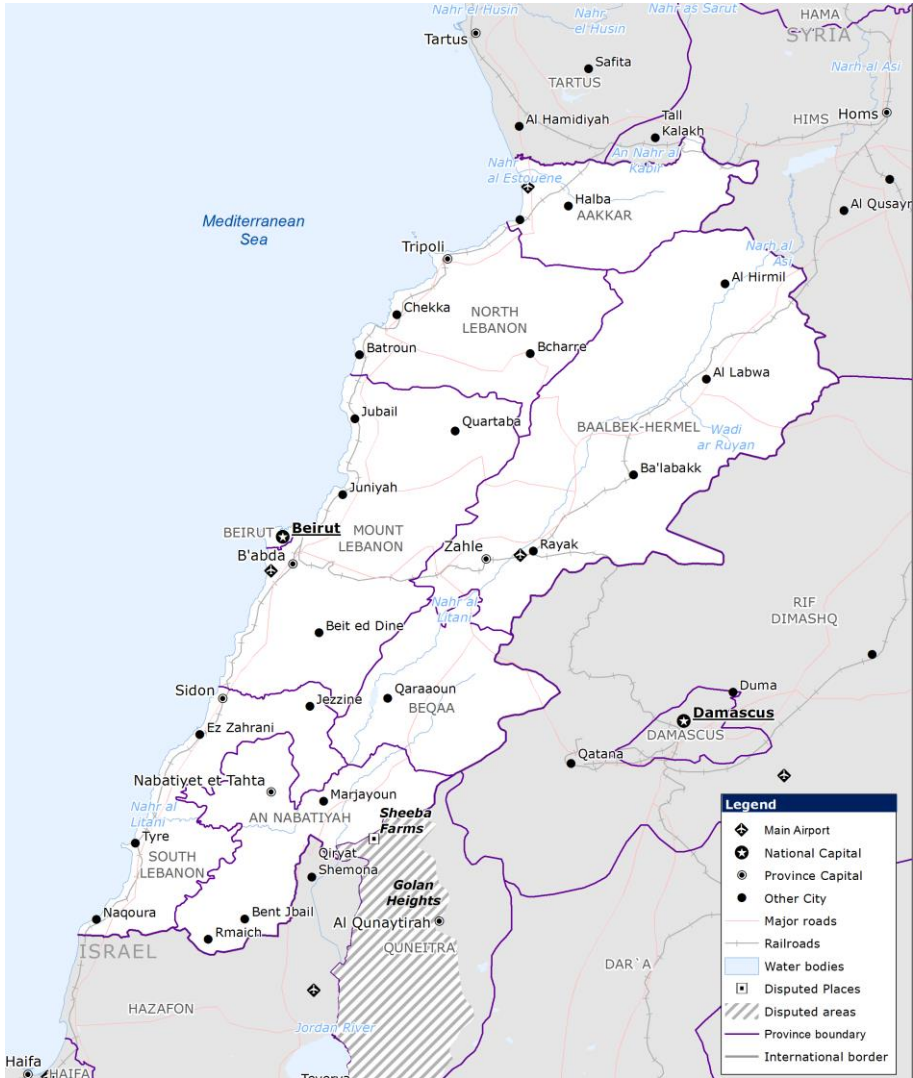
<sup>29</sup> Armenian Prelacy of Kuwait,

<https://www.armenianorthodoxchurch.org/en/archives/prelaices/prelacy-of-kuwait/#:~:text=The%20Diocese%20of%20Kuwait%20has,AI%2DJaber%20AI%2DSabah> (accessed July 28, 2025); Republic of Armenia, Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, "Kuwait,"

<http://diaspora.gov.am/en/pages/49/kuwait/#:~:text=The%20community%20is%20integrated%20into,Armenian%20Educational%20Union%20of%20Kuwait> (accessed July 28, 2025); Hagop Ohanessian, "Armenian Community of Kuwait," *Hye Sharzhoom / Armenian Action*, <https://hyesharzhoom.com/armenian-community-of-kuwait/#:~:text=Armenian%20Community%20of%20Kuwait%20%E2%80%93%20Hye%20Sharzhoom> (accessed July 28, 2025).

<sup>30</sup> The President of the Republic of Armenia, "President Armen Sarkissian's official visit to the United Arab Emirates," January 14, 2019, <https://www.president.am/en/foreign-visits/item/2019/01/14/President-Armen-Sarkissian-official-visit-to-Abu-Dhabi/#:~:text=President%20Armen%20Sarkissian's%20official%20visit,of%20the%20Republic%20of%20Armenia> (accessed July 28, 2025).

# LEBANON



## ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHICS

According to an estimate in 2024, Lebanon has a population of approximately 5.3 million. Ethnically, Arabs constitute 95% of the population, while Armenians and persons of other ethnic groups comprise 5% of the

country's population.<sup>1</sup> According to a 2020 estimate, Muslims constitute 67.8% of Lebanon's population (31.9% Sunni, 31.2% Shia, smaller percentages of Alawites and Ismailis); Christian 32.4% (Maronite Catholics are the largest Christian group), and Druze 4.5%.<sup>2</sup> The data represents estimates of the religious affiliation of the citizen population, and do not include Lebanon's sizable Syrian and Palestinian refugee populations. The government of Lebanon officially recognizes eighteen religious sects in Lebanon.<sup>3</sup> Approximately 100,000 to 120,000 Armenians reside in Lebanon today.<sup>4</sup>

## ARMENIANS IN LEBANON

Armenians have lived in the current territory of Lebanon (historically known as Phoenicia) since approximately the first century BCE. The flow of Armenians to Lebanon increased during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Near the end of the nineteenth century, the Lebanese-Armenians belonged to the most advanced strata of the Ottoman Empire's society.<sup>5</sup> The current Lebanese-Armenian community was mainly formed after the Hamidian massacres during the Armenian Genocide and in the following years, from 1915 to 1939, when thousands of survivors took refuge in the districts of Bourj Hammoud and Hadjin in Beirut, as well as Jounieh, Zahlé, Jbeil, Tripoli and other cities in Lebanon. Near the Lebanese-Syrian border, Armenians founded the Armenian rural town of Anjar in the Bekaa Valley, which is still inhabited by Armenians. Initially, Lebanese-Armenians were mainly engaged in trade and crafts as well as agriculture.<sup>6</sup> In this vein, thirteen thousand Armenian orphans were relocated to Lebanon in the period from 1919 to 1924.<sup>7</sup>

The Armenian community in Lebanon, as a leading center of the Armenians of the Near and Middle East, has traditionally occupied a pivotal place among the Armenian communities of the region. Armenians, who survived the Armenian Genocide and settled in Lebanon, created a prosperous Armenian community with diverse infrastructures and raised new generations of Armenian-speakers, due to their diligence and persistence. Armenians, thanks to the fraternal attitude of the Lebanese authorities and people, were able to preserve their rich national culture and values, while making

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<sup>1</sup> "Lebanon," *World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/lebanon/#people-and-society> (accessed August 6, 2025).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Government of Armenia, Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, "Lebanon," <http://diaspora.gov.am/en/pages/2/lebanon> (accessed August 6, 2025).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Personal communication from a scholar of Armenian Studies, December 6, 2025.

significant contributions to the development and prosperity of Lebanon in the political, socio-economic, and cultural spheres. Today, the principled position of the Lebanese authorities, parliament, and people is also evidence of the sincerity and strength of the friendship between Lebanon and Armenia. Lebanon is the first Middle Eastern country, the legislative body of which has passed two resolutions condemning the Armenian Genocide. The first resolution, which was passed on April 3, 1997, declares April 24 as the Memorial Day of the massacres perpetrated against the Armenian people. The second resolution, which was passed on May 11, 2000, condemns the massacre of 1.5 million Armenians in the Armenian Genocide.<sup>8</sup> In this vein, Armenians in Lebanon have smoothly naturalized and integrated into Lebanon's complex communal weave<sup>9</sup>.

Lebanon is one of the largest centers of the Armenian Church. Ever since the nineteenth century, the Lebanese-Armenians have been divided into three religious communities: Armenian Orthodox Christians (who are members of the Armenian Apostolic Church), Armenian Catholics, and Armenian Evangelicals. The Armenian Orthodox Church was recognized as a millet by the Ottoman Empire in 1461.<sup>10</sup> In 1831, the Ottoman State recognized an Armenian Catholic millet.<sup>11</sup> The Ottoman State recognized an Armenian Evangelical millet in 1850.<sup>12</sup>

The Armenian Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia or Great See of Cilicia is a nationwide structure, which, as one of the four Hierarchical Sees of the Armenian Apostolic Church, is considered a spiritual center of a significant part of the Armenian Orthodox Christians of the Armenian diaspora. The seat of the Catholicos is the Saint Gregory the Illuminator Cathedral in Antelias, Lebanon. After the Armenian Genocide, the Armenian

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Scott Abramson, "Lebanese Armenians; A Distinctive Community in the Armenian Diaspora and in Lebanese Society," *The Levantine Review*, 2, no. 2 (Winter 2013): 188-216.

<https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/levantine/article/download/5363/4822/0>  
(accessed December 6, 2025).

<sup>10</sup> Mark A. Lamport, ed., *Encyclopedia of Christianity in the Global South*, (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018), 42.

<sup>11</sup> Heather J. Sharkey, "History Rhymes? Late Ottoman Millets and Post-Ottoman Minorities in the Middle East," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 50, no. 4 (November 2018): 761, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26852719> (accessed December 6, 2025).

<sup>12</sup> "Ottoman Decree Regarding Protestants, 1850," *World History Commons*, [https://worldhistorycommons.org/ottoman-decree-regarding-protestants-1850?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com#doc\\_transcription](https://worldhistorycommons.org/ottoman-decree-regarding-protestants-1850?utm_source=chatgpt.com#doc_transcription) (accessed December 6, 2025).

Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia was directly involved in the formation and organization of the Armenian diaspora.<sup>13</sup>

The Armenian Catholic Patriarchate with the residence of the Catholicos-Patriarch of the Armenian Catholic Church, is a nationwide structure, which is considered the spiritual center of all Catholic Armenians. The Bzommar Monastery is the official seat of the Catholicos-Patriarch who is the ex-officio primate of the Catholic Armenians of Lebanon. This is why his residence is located in the Ashrafieh Patriarchate, next to the Church of Annunciation. The Armenian Catholic Cathedral Saint Elie and Saint Gregory the Illuminator, located at the heart of Beirut is the Prelacy of the Catholic Armenians in Lebanon. The Armenian Catholic Patriarchate is directly subordinated to the Vatican, due to which it has wide international connections and provides great support to pan-Armenian programs. The Union of the Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East (which has an office in Beirut), with the residences of the Chairman of the Council of Churches, includes the Armenian Evangelical communities of the six countries of the region: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, as well as Greece and Australia.<sup>14</sup>

The Armenian community in Lebanon has the status of a religious-constitutional community. The role and activity of the Lebanese-Armenian community in the diaspora is still preserved due to the charitable, cultural, and sports organizations, which operate in the community. These organizations include the Armenian General Benevolent Union, Hamazkayin, Armenian Relief Cross of Lebanon, the Tekeyan Cultural Association, Homenetmen, and the Armenian Youth Association, among others. Various departments of the Armenian General Benevolent Union have conducted various pro-Armenian activities in Lebanon. For example, in 1998 the building of the Armenian Embassy was constructed with the support of the Armenian General Benevolent Union. The branches of the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund and the Artsakh Fund are also located in Lebanon. There are also Armenian patriotic, student, and other organizations in Lebanon, as well as a number of vocational and trade unions.<sup>15</sup>

The only Armenian higher education institution in the Armenian diaspora, Haigazian University is located in Beirut. Under the auspices of Armenian religious institutions and organizations, there are daily and Sunday schools. In July of 2015, the Armenian Genocide Orphans' Aram Bezikian Museum was opened next to the Birds' Nest Orphanage in the city of Jbeil (Byblos) in Lebanon. The Armenian press has rich traditions in Lebanon. Numerous magazines, quarterly magazines, and newspapers are published, including the newspapers entitled *Aztag*, which is affiliated with the Armenian Tashnag

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<sup>13</sup> Government of Armenia, Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, "Lebanon," <http://diaspora.gov.am/en/pages/2/lebanon> (accessed August 6, 2025).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

political party; *Zartonk*, which is affiliated with the Armenian Ramgavar political party; and *Ararad* which is affiliated with the Armenian Hunchakian (Hunchag) political party.<sup>16</sup>

## CONSTITUTIONAL HISTORY OF LEBANON

Lebanon's constitution of 1924, an amended version of which is in effect today, was written when Lebanon was under a French colonial mandate. In terms of historical background, that constitution gives attention to the fact that Lebanon has been comprised of Shias, Sunnis, Christians, and Druze. As a result of the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916, France received colonial mandate over the territory that was later to be divided into the nation-states of Lebanon and Syria. On September 1, 1920, French General Henri Gouraud, who was representative of the French Government in the Middle East and commander of the French Army of the Levant from 1919 to 1923, proclaimed the creation of Greater Lebanon. That entity would become the Lebanese republic in May 1926, whose independence was declared in November 1943. Lebanon's 1932 census, which was the country's last official census, showed that in a total population of 861,399, Maronite Christians (who are Catholic and whose church has limited autonomy with respect to the Vatican) comprised 28.7% of Lebanon's population; Sunni Muslims comprised 22.4%; Shia Muslims comprised 19.5%; Greek Orthodox comprised 9.7%; Druze comprised 6.7%; Greek Catholics comprised 5.9%; Armenian Orthodox and Armenian Catholics, whose numbers were approximately 32,000, comprised 3% . According to that census, the following groups comprised a portion of the remainder of the population: Armenian Orthodox and Catholic numbers were around 32,000 which makes 3%, Chaldean Catholics, Chaldean Orthodox, Jews, Protestants, Syriac Catholics, and Syriac Orthodox. A category which the census termed "Miscellaneous" also constituted slightly less than 1% of the population.<sup>17</sup>

## FRENCH COLONIALISM AND CHRISTIANS

One of General Gouraud's goals was to protect the Maronite Christians (in what would later become the independent country of Lebanon) by preventing

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Rania Maktabi, "State Formation and Citizenship in Lebanon: The Politics of Membership and Exclusion in a Sectarian State," *Citizenship and the State in the Middle East: Approaches and Applications*, Nils A. Butenshon, Uri Davis, Manuel Hassassian, eds., Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, New York, 2000, 149-50; Rania Maktabi, "The Lebanese Census of 1932 Revisited. Who Are the Lebanese?" *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 26(2):1999, 219-41; Cedomir Nestorovic, *Islamic Marketing: Understanding the Socio-Economic, Cultural, and Politico-Legal Environment*, Springer International Publishing, Switzerland, 2016, 61.

them from becoming absorbed into the majority-Muslim population of what would later become the independent state of Syria.<sup>18</sup> Greater Lebanon was established, in part, in order to provide the Maronite Christians with a distinct political entity, in which they were the single largest minority but did not necessarily constitute over fifty percent of the population. The French added several predominantly Muslim areas to Greater Lebanon, thus reducing the Maronite Christians to approximately thirty percent of Greater Lebanon's population.<sup>19</sup> This action increased the likelihood that the Maronite Christians would depend on French support, if they wanted to maintain political dominance in Greater Lebanon. In other words, the French colonialists believed that if the Maronite Christians were to have comprised more than fifty percent of Lebanon's population, they could have acted much more independently of France than if they constituted the largest group as a statistical minority of Greater Lebanon's population.<sup>20</sup> This apportionment also helped ensure a situation where various religious groups in Greater Lebanon, including the Christians, would compete with each other for power. That kind of competition, and at times conflict, could have benefited the French colonialists, in that it would have enabled them to maintain their power as the Lebanese fought each other, verbally or physically. This French colonialist policy could be viewed as one of divide and rule. The peripheral territorial additions to Lebanon served the sustainability of Lebanon as compared to the hardships of the famine, which Lebanon had faced during World War I. However, these peripheral territorial additions shifted the demographic, in the direction of a Christian preponderance and toward a more balanced situation.<sup>21</sup>

Maronite Christians viewed Lebanon as their Christian homeland, and believed that they had a right to political and economic dominance. With the support of the French, Maronite Christians hoped that eventually the Lebanese nation-state would be a Christian territory, oriented culturally to France.<sup>22</sup> The Sunni Muslims became part of Lebanon by French decree, not necessarily by their own volition. Some of them demanded unity with majority-Sunni Muslim Syria and they looked toward Muslims there and other parts of the majority-Muslim world as one way of strengthening their religious and cultural identities. There is historical evidence suggesting that Shias, Druze, and Greek Orthodox communities in Lebanon resented being in a minority position relative to Maronite Catholics after the French established the borders of Greater Lebanon. Indeed, members of those groups did not want to be

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<sup>18</sup> William L. Cleveland and Martin Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 6th ed., Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 2016, 213.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 213-14.

<sup>21</sup> Personal communication from a scholar of Armenian Studies, December 6, 2025.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 214.

relegated to less powerful political and religious positions vis a vis the Maronite Catholics.<sup>23</sup>

The Syrian Revolt, which began in 1925, against French colonial rule was another aspect of the historical background for the writing of Lebanon's constitution. The Syrian Revolt directly shaped Lebanon's constitution.<sup>24</sup> That constitution was written in early 1926 in a climate of sectarian tensions in Lebanon which was increased as a result of the revolt's spread into Lebanon. A few months earlier, Druze had killed over one hundred Christians in the mountains, causing several months of violence between Muslims and Christians. At the same time, many Sunni leaders supported the Syrians' revolt and Lebanon being politically integrated into Syria. The new right-wing French government's dismissal of Maurice Sarrail, who was France's High Commissioner of the Levant and supported Lebanon having a secular non-sectarian governmental system, prevented the establishment of such a government.<sup>25</sup> Sunni support for the Syrian Revolt further alarmed the region's Maronite leaders, who were already angered by the Druze attacks on Christians and by Sarrail's efforts to marginalize them in government. As a result of these factors, plans for a non-sectarian government were abandoned. Sarrail's successor, Henry de Jouvenel, hurried to appease the Maronites and made their church a foundation of French rule. The French also hurried preparation of what was to become Lebanon's 1926 constitution in order to impress the League of Nations with a show of supposedly liberal policies in order to combat negative news reporting of France's violent suppression of the Syrian Revolt.<sup>26</sup>

## DEVISING CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY

Jouvenel charged the Representative Council to compile a list of leaders who would be polled about their constitutional preferences for a future state. Bowing to pressure from France's government and the Maronite church, the Representative Council sent 75 of the 210 questionnaires, which it distributed in early 1926, to religious patriarchs. One hundred and thirty-two responded to the poll. Thirty-two Sunni leaders refused to participate because they believed that the Syrian Revolt would enable Syria and Lebanon to unite as a single country. Those Sunnis' non-participation in the poll was crucial

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<sup>23</sup> Judy El Baba, "Roots of Lebanon's Sectarian Politics: Colonial Legacies of the French Mandate" *POLITIKON: The IAPSS Journal of Political Science* 58(November):2024, 26-49, <https://doi.org/10.22151/politikon.58.2> .

<sup>24</sup> Meir Zamir, *The Formation of Modern Lebanon*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1985, 199ff; Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1999, 50.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

because many Sunnis supported a non-sectarian state.<sup>27</sup> In contrast, the persons, who responded to the poll, supported a republican form of government based on sectarian representation. Under pressure to meet a May 1926 deadline, a committee supervised by the French quickly wrote Lebanon's constitution. Jouvenel and the Representative Council approved the constitution's text on May 23, 1926, and the next day the Republic of Lebanon was proclaimed.<sup>28</sup>

The constitution declared that Lebanon's boundaries would be fixed in place. It provided for a parliamentary government dominated by the French high commissioner, who would have the power to dismiss Lebanon's parliament, annul laws, and suspend the constitution, while retaining control of the military, police, and foreign affairs. The president, whose main power was to appoint the prime minister, was to be chosen directly by a bicameral legislature elected by males. While the constitution assured the right of every Lebanese citizen to hold office, based on merit, it also guaranteed the equitable representation of all sects in the cabinet, the parliament, and civil service. It stipulated respect for each sect's personal status laws and religious schools. These provisions limited the state's power, which was compromised of the state's domestic sovereignty, while increasing that of religious leaders. The provisions established sectarianism as a crucial basis for representation. When the Maronite church worked to have a Maronite elected as Lebanon's president, members of Lebanon's other sects objected.<sup>29</sup> In this context of real or imagined Maronite domination, Sunni leaders abstained from political participation well into the 1930s. At the same time, because sectarian feuds paralyzed Lebanon's government, the French imposed constitutional amendments in 1927 and 1929 which reduced the legislature to one chamber and increased the president's power.<sup>30</sup>

One significant challenge, which Lebanon faced during the 1930s, was the need to reconcile the differing interests of the Christians as well as the Shias and Sunnis, while creating a political structure that would enable members of all those groups to work together constructively. The positions of two high-profile Maronite Christian politicians, Emile Edde and Bishara al-Khuri, on the issue of Muslim-Christian relations in Lebanon manifest a few of the reasons that some Muslims resisted accepting the Lebanese state, in that those Muslims felt threatened by the possibility of Maronite Christians dominating the state. During the French colonial mandate period in Lebanon, Edde, who was a lawyer trained in France, served in Lebanon's legislature in 1922, as Prime Minister from 1929 until 1930, and as Lebanon's President from 1936

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

until 1941.<sup>31</sup> Edde was somewhat empathetic to France's colonial mandate in Lebanon because he believed that France's presence in that country would benefit Lebanon's Christians, in light of what appeared to be France's support of them. For Edde, the idea of Lebanon as a Maronite Christian homeland was significant, and he believed that one purpose of Lebanon was to preserve the Maronite Christians.<sup>32</sup>

Bishara al-Khuri, who was Edde's main political rival, was also a Paris-educated lawyer, who served in Lebanon's legislature in 1922 and established Lebanon's Constitutional Bloc political party in the early 1930s.<sup>33</sup> Although Khuri shared Edde's belief in Lebanon's place as a homeland for Maronite Christians, Al-Khuri was more sensitive to the needs of Muslim.<sup>34</sup> Al-Khuri was also more strident than Edde in demanding that France end its colonialist mandate in Lebanon. Al-Khuri tried to build alliances with Muslims based on their shared opposition to France's colonialist presence in Lebanon. His Constitutional Bloc party actively worked toward Lebanese independence from France. Al-Khuri hoped that by forming a united front against France, Muslims and Christians in Lebanon would bridge the gaps that separated them, and establish common goals in an independent Lebanon.

Yet, Emil Edde took a significant step in terms of helping to bring a Sunni Muslim to the center of political power in Lebanon. In 1936, Lebanese and French representatives agreed on the Franco-Lebanese treaty which stated that there should be representation of the country's religious groups in the government and high administration.<sup>35</sup> Lebanon's parliament, expecting independence from France to come soon, elected Edde as Lebanon's president, and he took office in 1936. Edde selected Khayr al-Din al-Ahdab, who was a Sunni Muslim, as Prime Minister, and he took office in 1937.<sup>36</sup> This was a pivotal decision in Lebanon's political history, in that it established the practice that Lebanon's president would be a Maronite Christian and the Prime Minister would be a Sunni Muslim.<sup>37</sup>

One important political purpose, which Lebanese President Emile Edde's appointment of Khayr al-Din al-Ahdab as Prime Minister served, was that it prompted some Shia and Sunni leaders to realize that they could obtain more advantages for themselves and their religious communities by working within

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<sup>31</sup> Cleveland and Bunton, 214-15; D. K. Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East, 1914-1958*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, 2006, 320.

<sup>32</sup> Cleveland and Bunton, 215.

<sup>33</sup> Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 2nd ed., Pluto Press, London, 2012, 94.

<sup>34</sup> Cleveland and Bunton, 215.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> R. Hrair Dekmejian, *Patterns of Political Leadership: Egypt, Israel, Lebanon* State University of New York Press, Albany, 1975, 36.

<sup>37</sup> Cleveland and Bunton, 215-16.

Lebanon's political sectarian system than remaining outside it.<sup>38</sup> This political system allowed for representation of Muslims and Christians. With a Sunni Muslim Prime Minister, some Sunni Muslim *zaims* had readier access to the high commissioner's office, acquired more opportunities to provide political patronage, and obtained increased governmental support for their business ventures.

While Greater Lebanon's political system allowed for participation by members of various religious groups, interreligious group tensions did not vanish. Throughout the 1930s and for some time afterward, Maronite Christians continued to regard Lebanon as a specifically Christian homeland. At the same time, these Christians emphasized their ties to France and other European countries in their attempts to secure themselves politically and culturally within Lebanon. Shia and Sunni Muslims resisted the ideas that Lebanon should be considered exclusively as a homeland for Christians and that its connections to Europe should be emphasized, in view of the fact that these viewpoints would have marginalized Shia and Sunni Muslims.<sup>39</sup>

#### LEBANON'S INDEPENDENCE

On November 8, 1943, Lebanon's Chamber of Deputies passed a series of constitutional changes which abolished the clause stating that the French colonialist authority was the only source of political authority and jurisdiction in Lebanon.<sup>40</sup> These constitutional changes also reinstated Arabic as that country's only official language and adopted a new design for Lebanon's flag. On November 9, 1943, Lebanon's President Bishara al-Khuri approved and ratified these changes. However, French colonialist delegate-general Jean Helleu declared the constitutional changes null and void. Helleu made that declaration in view of his and the French government's view that those changes were unilaterally executed by the Lebanese without prior consultation with the French authorities. On November 11, 1943, several Lebanese political leaders were arrested and imprisoned. In opposition to France's repressive actions against Lebanese independence, a country-wide general strike was decreed. At the same time, the Lebanese government officials, who supported independence and had not yet been arrested by the French, formed a temporary government, and called on the Lebanese to resist the French. Major political movements in Lebanon formed a united organization to resist the French, and demonstrators occupied Lebanon's parliament building demanding the liberation of the Lebanese resistance leaders who had been imprisoned. Helleu imposed a curfew and ordered French and Senegalese soldiers to repress the demonstrations which left eighteen protestors dead and sixty-six wounded.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Traboulsi, 108.

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill intervened with French General Charles de Gaulle who was the leader of Free France, which was that country's government in exile and military that opposed the Axis countries during World War II, who ordered a French general be sent to Lebanon in order to solve the crisis.<sup>41</sup> On November 19, British General Edward Spears, who was military mission chief for Britain in Lebanon and Syria and a high-level liaison officer between British and French military forces, took action in support of the Lebanese pro-independence activists.<sup>42</sup> He submitted an ultimatum from his government to the Free French in Lebanon demanding the liberation of all the Lebanese political officials, who had been imprisoned by the French. Otherwise, according to this ultimatum, British soldiers would liberate those persons. On November 22, 1943, French General Georges Catroux ordered the liberation of the Lebanese political leaders, who had been imprisoned, and declared the end of the French colonialist mandate in Lebanon.<sup>43</sup> One of several reasons Britain was able to exert its influence in this way was because of the enormous colonial, military, and political power, which it wielded in the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>44</sup> In addition, Germany's occupation of France during this World War II period substantially weakened France's power in Lebanon and other regions which France had colonized.

#### AN INDEPENDENT LEBANON AND THE NATIONAL PACT

Lebanon's independent republic was initially based on two founding documents. One was a formal constitution. The other was an informal verbal understanding, which is called the National Pact, to which Bishara al-Khuri and Riad al-Sulh, who was born into a Sunni family and was Lebanon's Prime Minister from 1943 until 1945, and again from 1946 until 1951, agreed.<sup>45</sup> One of the few written traces of that Pact appears in al-Sulh's ministerial declaration of October 7, 1943.<sup>46</sup>

According to practices related Lebanon's constitution, the President of Lebanon had to be a Maronite Christian and that person names cabinet ministers, chooses a prime minister, and has the authority to dismiss the cabinet.<sup>47</sup> The President also has the power to initiate and veto legislation, which is passed by parliament.<sup>48</sup> Although the President is elected by parliament, he can dissolve it and call for new elections.<sup>49</sup> In addition to those

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 105, 108.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Lebanon's Constitution of 1926 with Amendments through 2004, Article 53.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., Article 57.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., Article 55.

Presidential powers, Lebanon's constitution states, "While performing his functions, the President of the Republic cannot be accountable except in his violation of the Constitution, or in case of high treason," which is yet another provision of Lebanon's constitution that ascribes significant power to the President.<sup>50</sup> The constitution also stipulates apportionment of seats in Lebanon's parliament in such a way that provides for Christian and Muslim members of parliament.<sup>51</sup> Within this context, there was intracommunal conflict between Shias and Sunnis about the number of seats in Lebanon's parliament that were allocated to each of those groups. At the same time, there was intracommunal conflict among various Christian groups, such as Orthodox and Catholic, about the number of seats that were allocated to those and similar groups.<sup>52</sup> In other words, there has been a conflict of power sharing between the communities. By allocating each community a number of parliamentary seats, this conflict was transferred from inter-Muslim/Christian conflicts into a conflict within each community. In this context, the Armenians had to compete, within their own community, in order to decide who would take the seats, instead of competing with non-Armenian Christians and Muslims.<sup>53</sup>

The National Pact of 1943 supplemented Lebanon's constitution in several ways. It confirmed the power-sharing formula among the religious groups already established in the constitution while stating that Lebanon would have a Maronite Christian President, a Shia speaker of parliament, and a Sunni Prime Minister.<sup>54</sup> The Pact also defined Lebanon's identity, relations, and obligations with the outside world. Whereas Article 1 of Lebanon's constitution states "Lebanon is an independent state, with indivisible unity, and complete sovereignty,"<sup>55</sup> the National Pact suggests that Lebanon is a country with an Arab profile which assimilates the beneficial aspects of Western civilization.<sup>56</sup> The National Pact's use of the term "Arab profile" may have been intended to address the desire of some of Lebanon's Sunnis to unite with Syria, where they would have been part of a Sunni majority, instead of being part of a Sunni minority in Lebanon.<sup>57</sup> At the same time, the National

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 60.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 24.

<sup>52</sup> Zamir, 165 ff; El Baba, 26-49, <https://doi.org/10.22151/politikon.58.2>.

<sup>53</sup> Personal communication from a scholar of Armenian Studies, December 5, 2025.

<sup>54</sup> Traboulsi, 111.

<sup>55</sup> Lebanon's Constitution of 1926 with Amendments through 2004, Article 1 [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Lebanon\\_2004.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Lebanon_2004.pdf?lang=en) (accessed August 12, 2019). Constituteproject.org is part of the Comparative Constitutions Project which is a scholarly endeavor that produces comprehensive data about the world's constitutions. See "About the CCP" at <http://comparativeconstitutionsproject.org/about-ccp/> (accessed August 12, 2019).

<sup>56</sup> Traboulsi, 111.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

Pact's reference to "Western civilization" was intended to address Lebanon's Christians, who may have desired a French military presence in Lebanon or Western protection in general.<sup>58</sup> One of the National Pact's major principles, which related to foreign policy, suggests that Lebanon should not be a base or passageway for colonialist endeavors.<sup>59</sup> This principle addressed the deep concerns, which Lebanese had, about France or another colonialist country occupying Lebanon. The principles of Lebanon's constitution and the National Pact attempt to express the aspirations for political collaboration between and among Muslims and Christians within a democratic framework. Yet, the fact that the National Pact was not a written document and the fact it contained ambiguities and potential contradictions with respect to Lebanon's constitution while avoiding mentioning its religion and identity was a catalyst of conflict and tension in Lebanon's later years.<sup>60</sup>

### LEBANON'S CONSTITUTION AND MINORITY RIGHTS

Lebanon's constitution grants several rights which are advantageous to Armenians in Lebanon and other citizens of that country Article Seven of that constitution states "All Lebanese are equal before the law. They equally enjoy civil and political rights, and assume obligations and public duties without any distinction among them."<sup>61</sup> The constitution also guarantees personal freedom,<sup>62</sup> freedom of conscience, and freedom of religion, while respecting the "system of personal status and the religious interests of the people."<sup>63</sup> There are eighteen legally-approved religious sects in that country which include the Armenian Apostolic, Armenian Catholic, and Union of Armenian Evangelical Churches of the Near East, which is Protestant.<sup>64</sup> Lebanon's constitution also guarantees freedom of opinion, freedom of expression through speech and writing, the freedom of the press, the freedom of

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 111-12; Jon Armajani, *Shia Islam and Politics: Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon*, Lexington Books, Lanham, Maryland, 2020, 151-18.

<sup>61</sup> Lebanon's 1926 Constitution, Article 7. References to Lebanon's 1926 Constitution are from "Lebanon's Constitution of 1926 with Amendments through 2004" [https://adsdatabase.ohchr.org/IssueLibrary/LEBANON\\_Constitution.pdf](https://adsdatabase.ohchr.org/IssueLibrary/LEBANON_Constitution.pdf) (accessed July 20, 2025).

<sup>62</sup> Lebanon's 1926 Constitution, Article 8.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., Article 9. See also Articles 10, 19, and 22.

<sup>64</sup> Imad Salamey, *The Government and Politics of Lebanon*, Routledge, London, 2014, 28; Hratch Tchilingirian, "The Armenian Evangelical Union of the Near East: Coping with the Effects of the War," *Armenian International Magazine* (AIM), 11(1):2000, <https://oxbridgepartners.com/hratch/index.php/publications/articles/105-the-armenian-evangelical-union-of-the-near-east> (accessed June 13, 2020).

assembly, and the freedom of association.<sup>65</sup> Lebanon's constitution states, "Education is free so long as it does not disturb the public order, does not violate the morals, and does not touch the dignity of any religion or creed. The rights of communities to establish their own private schools cannot be violated, provided that they comply with the general requirements laid down by the State with respect to public education."<sup>66</sup> Lebanon's constitution also states that "balanced development of regions, culturally, socially, and economically, is a cornerstone of the State unity and the system stability."<sup>67</sup> This constitutional provision is a significant factor in the cultural autonomy, which has been granted to Lebanon's various communities. The constitution stipulates a right to public employment and the safeguarding of employees' rights<sup>68</sup> while asserting the inviolability of dwellings,<sup>69</sup> and protection of ownership.<sup>70</sup>

#### LEBANON'S CONSTITUTION AND THE TAIF AGREEMENT

The Taif Agreement which was signed in 1989 and helped conclude Lebanon's civil war has played a crucial role in that country's governance since that time. In some respects, Lebanon's 1926 Constitution was a basis for the Taif Agreement. At the same time, that Agreement modified aspects of Lebanon's governance in such way that may have been relevant to Lebanon after the civil war. After approximately three weeks of discussion in Taif, Saudi Arabia, the sixty-two members of Lebanon's parliament, which was elected in 1972 and was Lebanon's last parliament before the civil war, reached this agreement. These accords were based on a document that had been prepared largely by the Arab Tripartite Committee comprised of Algeria, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia after much consultation with various Lebanese leaders as well as the Syrian and American governments. The signing of the Taif Agreement, which was officially named the "Document of National Accord," by the warring Lebanese groups on October 22, 1989 and its ratification on November 4, 1989, under the auspices of the Saudi Arabian and Syrian governments, provided a significant basis for ending Lebanon's civil war and the eventual return to a measure of political stability.<sup>71</sup> Upon the Lebanese parliamentarians' return to Lebanon, they ratified the Taif Agreement on November 4, 1989 and they elected Rene Moawad, a Maronite Christian, as President the following day.<sup>72</sup> President Moawad was

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<sup>65</sup> Lebanon's 1926 Constitution, Article 13.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 10.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, Preamble.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 12.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 14.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 15.

<sup>71</sup> Salamey, 56.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

assassinated seventeen days after his inauguration and Elias Hrawi, a Maronite, was elected President and served until 1998.

The following are some of the ways that the Taif Agreement provided a foundation for Lebanon's political future:

1. It introduced into the preamble of the ratified constitution a clause asserting Lebanon as the final homeland of all its inhabitants, as an Arab, parliamentary, and democratic country based on the separation of powers and the declarations of human rights;<sup>73</sup>

2. It reallocated several presidential powers to the parliament, the cabinet, and the Prime Minister. The Maronite Christian President lost several of his presidential powers and retained certain symbolic roles. This was done in light of the fact that Shia and Sunni Muslims constituted a significantly higher percentage of Lebanon's population than they did when Lebanon's previous constitution was written;<sup>74</sup>

3. It attempted to redistribute important public offices, including those of parliament, the cabinet, general directors, and other high-level government officials somewhat evenly between Muslims and Christians;<sup>75</sup>

4. It recognized the potential instability of Lebanon's laws and constitution which utilized Lebanese citizens' religious affiliations as a basis for representation in government. Thus, it required the formation of a national committee to examine alternate ways to represent Lebanese in government, including Lebanon's parliament;<sup>76</sup>

5. It required taking all the steps necessary to liberate all Lebanese territories from the Israeli occupation (primarily in southern Lebanon), to spread the Lebanese state's sovereignty over all the territories, and to deploy the Lebanese army in the border area adjacent to Israel. It also required making efforts to reinforce the presence of the United Nation's forces in southern Lebanon in order to ensure Israeli withdrawal from that area and to provide the opportunity for the return of security and stability to the Israeli-Lebanese border area. These stipulations were in response to the fact that Israeli soldiers had been occupying a large segment of southern Lebanon since Israel had invaded Lebanon in 1982;<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> The Taif Agreement, I. General Principles, website of Permanent Missions to the United Nations, [https://www.un.int/lebanon/sites/www.un.int/files/Lebanon/the\\_taif\\_agreement\\_english\\_version\\_.pdf](https://www.un.int/lebanon/sites/www.un.int/files/Lebanon/the_taif_agreement_english_version_.pdf) (accessed May 24, 2025). That document has no page numbers; Salamey, 57.

<sup>74</sup> The Taif Agreement, II. Political Reforms, A. Chamber of Deputies, B. President of Republic.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, II. Political Reforms, A. Chamber of Deputies.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, II. Political Reforms, G. Abolition of Political Sectarianism.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, G. Information, Liberating Lebanon from the Israeli Occupation.

6. It gave the Syrian government and military a guardianship status within Lebanon for an unspecified period of time. It also provided de facto permission for Syrian military forces to remain in Lebanon for an unspecified period;<sup>78</sup>

7. It suggested the possibility of Lebanon's parliament passing "an election law free of sectarian restriction."<sup>79</sup> This provision was not implemented largely because of the deeply embedded nature of sectarianism, within Lebanon, in general, and its political systems, in particular.

8. The Taif Agreement states that "with the election of the first Chamber of Deputies [parliament] on a national, not sectarian, basis, a senate shall be formed and all the spiritual families shall be represented in it. The senate powers shall be confined to crucial issues."<sup>80</sup> The long-established unicameral system in Lebanon may have been one reason that the provision related to a senate was not implemented.

Acting Lebanese Prime Minister and military General Michel Aoun, a Maronite Christian, refused to accept the Taif agreement and denounced the election of Rene Moawad as President of Lebanon. One of Aoun's objections to the Taif Agreement involved the authority which it gave to the Syrian government and military in Lebanon.<sup>81</sup> Beginning in 1989, Aoun launched what became a two-year war of liberation against the Syrian military in Lebanon, hoping to completely eject Syria from that country. After a series of long and bloody battles, which killed over one thousand civilians and involved Lebanese Muslims and Christians in addition to the Syrian military. The last episode of Lebanon's civil war came to an end in October 1990 when Aoun took asylum in France's embassy in Lebanon, as the Syrian military took control of Beirut.<sup>82</sup> Aoun and his family then took exile in France.<sup>83</sup> Aoun returned to Lebanon in 2005 after Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon.<sup>84</sup> In 1990, the Taif Agreement, Aoun's departure, relative peace among Lebanon's militias, and other factors set the stage for Lebanon's post-war rebuilding process.<sup>85</sup> The Taif Agreement states that a "disbanding of all Lebanese and

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., G. Information, Lebanese-Syrian Relations.

<sup>79</sup> Taif Agreement, Section II. "Political Reforms", Subsection 5.

<sup>80</sup> Taif Agreement, Section II. "Political Reforms," Subsection 7.

<sup>81</sup> Cleveland and Bunton, 396-97.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Associated Press, "Aoun Family Goes to France," *The Journal Times*, October 20, 1990, [http://journaltimes.com/news/national/aoun-family-goes-to-france/article\\_6f46006e-89db-59db-a1b3-c204ef0cb6f1.html](http://journaltimes.com/news/national/aoun-family-goes-to-france/article_6f46006e-89db-59db-a1b3-c204ef0cb6f1.html) (accessed May 25, 2025).

<sup>84</sup> Marius Deeb, "The Christians of Lebanon: Surviving Amidst Chaos," *The Future of Religious Minorities in the Middle East*, ed. John Eibner Lexington Books, Lanham, Maryland, 2018, 187.

<sup>85</sup> Cleveland and Bunton, 397-98.

non-Lebanese militias shall be announced. The militias' weapons shall be delivered to the State of Lebanon... .”<sup>86</sup> Along these lines, in 1992, military conscription was resumed in Lebanon, and conscription was abolished in 2007.<sup>87</sup> In any case, Hezbollah has maintained a large stock of weapons, in violation of the Taif Agreement’s relevant provisions.<sup>88</sup>

Although the Taif Agreement calls for Lebanon’s parliament to have 108 seats, its parliament has 128, which are evenly distributed between Christians and Muslims. Within the quota for Christians, the Armenians have six fixed seats: five represent the Armenian Apostolic Christians and one represents the Armenian Catholics.<sup>89</sup> In theory, an Armenian Evangelical can hold one or two additional seats, one of which broadly represents Lebanese Protestants, and another of which is reserved for the country’s minority Christian denominations.<sup>90</sup> It is within this context that Lebanon’s citizenship and naturalization laws are embedded.

## CITIZENSHIP AND NATURALIZATION LAWS

In terms of Lebanon’s citizenship and naturalization laws, the Foundational Law: Decree No. 15 of January 19, 1925, as amended in subsequent years, is the core legal text, which governs those matters.<sup>91</sup> According to Article 1 of that law, the following categories of persons are Lebanese:

1. every person born of a Lebanese father;
2. every person born in the Greater Lebanon territory, who did not acquire a foreign nationality, upon birth, by affiliation; and

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<sup>86</sup> Taif Agreement, Section III: Other Reforms, Subsection A.

<sup>87</sup> United Nations RefWorld, “Child Soldiers Global Report 2001 - Lebanon” <https://www.refworld.org/reference/annualreport/cscoal/2001/en/65494#:~:text=National%20Recruitment%20Legislation%20and%20Practice,1101> (accessed July 20, 2025); AlJazeera, “Lebanon Scraps Military Service,” February 12, 2007. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2007/2/12/lebanon-scraps-military-service> (accessed July 2025).

<sup>88</sup> Philippe Abi Akl, “Hezbollah’s ‘Populist’ Posturing and the Call for Army Control of Weapons,” *This Is Beirut*, April 22, 2025, <https://thisisbeirut.com.lb/articles/1313448/hezbollahs-populist-posturing-and-the-call-for-army-control-of-weapons>

<sup>89</sup> Taif Agreement, Section II. Political Reforms, Subsection 6.

<sup>90</sup> Irina Papkova, “The Three Religions of Armenians in Lebanon,” *Armenian Christianity Today: Identity Politics and Popular Practice*, ed. Alexander Agadjanian Routledge, London, 2016, 175.

<sup>91</sup> Decree No. 15 on Lebanese Nationality including Amendments, Originally Ratified on January 19, 1925, RefWorld and United Nations High Commission for Refugees, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/1925/en/115994> (accessed May 27, 2025).

3. every person born in the Greater Lebanon territory of unknown parents or parents of unknown nationality.<sup>92</sup>

Article 3 of that law provides additional stipulations, which include the following:

A natural person may acquire the Lebanese nationality by virtue of an order issued by the Head of the State after fulfilling the following and submitting a request in this regard:

1. a foreigner, who proves having been living in the Lebanese territories for five consecutive years;

2. a foreigner, who marries a Lebanese woman and has been living in the Lebanese territories for one consecutive year as of the date of this marriage; and

3. a foreigner, who offers to Lebanon highly significant services. However, he shall be granted the nationality under an order for independent reasons.<sup>93</sup>

Article 4 of that law states,

The spouse of a foreigner, who has become a Lebanese citizen, as well as the children of full age of such a foreigner, may, if they so request, obtain the Lebanese nationality, without satisfying the residence condition, whether by virtue of the regulation giving this nationality to the husband, the father or the mother or in a special regulation. Likewise, the minor children of a father acquiring the Lebanese nationality, or a mother acquiring the said nationality and who remained alive after the death of the father, shall become Lebanese unless they reject this nationality within the year following their majority.<sup>94</sup>

According to Article 5, “The foreign woman married to a Lebanese shall, upon her request, become Lebanese after one year from the date of registration of the marriage in the Civil Status Office.”<sup>95</sup>

The Lebanese nationality law stipulates differences between Lebanese men and Lebanese women in conferring their nationality to foreign spouses and children. A man grants his Lebanese nationality to his foreign wife and children without any restrictions. However, a Lebanese woman cannot pass

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., Article 1.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., Article 3.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., Article 4.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., Article 5.

on her Lebanese nationality to her foreign spouse or children unless her children are illegitimate.<sup>96</sup>

## FAMILY LAW

Family law in Lebanon is based on communal identity and religious group. There are eighteen recognized religious communities in Lebanon: twelve Christian, four Muslim, one Druze, and one Jewish. Those groups have legal autonomy in regulating communal rights, including family law. Within this context, several types of family law are in force in Lebanon and are administered by separate religious courts. In Lebanon, one can only undertake a religious marriage in a church or at an Islamic court. Some Christian religious bodies share the same law, while others have specific family laws that are applicable only to the citizens belonging to that Christian religious body.<sup>97</sup>

Civil marriages are not valid if they occur in Lebanon, but are recognized and registered by the Lebanese state if they take place abroad. In the latter case, issues and disputes relating to the family are brought before a civil court, where a judge applies the law of the country where the civil marriage took place. If a couple has had both civil and religious wedding ceremonies, the marriage and its legal consequences are subject only to religious law. In addition, if both spouses are Shia, Sunni, or Druze, their foreign civil marriage will not be recognized in Lebanon. Shia, Sunni and Druze courts will apply their own rules in these instances.<sup>98</sup>

## INHERITANCE LAW

In Lebanon, inheritance law is interpreted in terms of religious doctrines. For most Lebanese, succession disputes and estate planning fall under the purview of religious courts, which translate religiously-based rules into enforceable judgments. Religious affiliation significantly shapes estate planning in Lebanon. Personal status laws, including inheritance, hinge on an individual's religion. The religious communities in Lebanon enforce unique inheritance regulations and specific estate planning procedures. This religious

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<sup>96</sup> National Commission for Lebanese Women, "Nationality not Naturalization: The Rights of Lebanese Women to Full Citizenship, and to Confer their Nationality to their Children," n.p.: National Commission for Lebanese Women, 2021, 4, [https://nclw.gov.lb/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/2021\\_Nationality-not-Naturalization\\_Policy-Brief\\_Eng.pdf](https://nclw.gov.lb/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/2021_Nationality-not-Naturalization_Policy-Brief_Eng.pdf) (accessed May 27, 2025).

<sup>97</sup> Women's Learning Partnership, "Family Laws of Lebanon," <https://learningpartnership.org/resource/family-laws-lebanon-documents-arabic> (accessed May 27, 2025).

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

diversity creates a complex legal environment where religious laws underpin inheritance rights.<sup>99</sup>

For Muslims, Islamic law governs inheritance, with Sunni and Shia communities following their interpretations of Sharia. Meanwhile, various Christian religious bodies apply their distinct religious laws. These religious laws influence asset distributions, heir legitimacy, and estate-planning processes. Consequently, an individual's religious affiliation determines both the applicable inheritance laws and the religious court with jurisdiction over personal status matters. Navigating this dual system requires consulting both civil and religious legal sources.<sup>100</sup>

## ARMENIANS IN LEBANON

Armenians have lived in the current territory of Lebanon (historically known as Phoenicia) since ancient times (1st century BC), but the flow of Armenians to Lebanon increased during the seventeenth through eighteenth centuries. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Lebanese-Armenians belonged to the most advanced strata of the Ottoman Empire's society.

The current Lebanese-Armenian community was mainly formed after the Hamidian massacres during the Armenian Genocide and in the following years (1915-1939) when thousands of survivors took refuge in the districts of Bourj Hammoud and Hadjin in Beirut, in Jounieh, Zahlé, Jbeil, Tripoli, and other cities in Lebanon. In the same area (near the Lebanese-Syrian border) Armenians founded the Armenian rural town of Anjar (Musa Dagh) in the Bekaa Valley, which is still inhabited by Armenians. Initially, Lebanese-Armenians were mainly engaged in trade, crafts, as well as agriculture.<sup>101</sup>

The Armenian community in Lebanon, as a leading center of the Armenians of the Near and Middle East, has traditionally occupied a pivotal place among the Armenian communities of the region. Armenians, who survived the Armenian Genocide and settled in Lebanon, in a very short period of time created a prosperous Armenian community with various and diverse infrastructures, raised Armenian-speaking new generations due to their diligence and persistence. Armenians, thanks to the fraternal attitude of the Lebanese authorities and people were able to preserve their rich national culture and values, and being full-fledged citizens, made a significant contribution especially to the development and prosperity of Lebanon in the political, socio-economic and cultural spheres. Today, the principled position

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<sup>99</sup> Raea Khan, "International Estate Planning in Lebanon: A Clear Overview for High Net-Worth Families," PBL Law Group, May 2, 2025, <https://pbl.legal/insights/international-estate-planning-in-lebanon-a-clear-overview-for-high-net-worth-families/> (accessed May 27, 2025).

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Government of Armenia, Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, "Lebanon" <http://diaspora.gov.am/en/pages/2/lebanon> (accessed July 30, 2025).

of the Lebanese authorities, parliament, and people is also a proof of the sincerity and strength of the friendship between the two nations.<sup>102</sup>

Lebanon is the first Middle Eastern country, the legislative body of which has passed two resolutions condemning the Armenian Genocide. The first resolution to declare “April 24 as the Memorial Day of the massacres perpetrated against the Armenian people” was passed on April 3, 1997, and the second is the resolution of May 11, 2000, that condemns the massacre of 1.5 million Armenians carried out in the Ottoman Empire. Until the mid-1970s, the Lebanese-Armenian community had around 250,000 to 300,000 members. According to various sources, about 100,000 to 120,000 Armenians reside in Lebanon today, due to the protracted Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) and the resulting need and lasting economic crisis. As a result of the Syrian war, most Armenians left their second homeland, Syria. Around 15,000 of them settled in Lebanon.<sup>103</sup>

#### ARMENIAN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN LEBANON

Within the context of Lebanon’s constitution, National Pact, and Taif Agreement, Armenian political parties in Lebanon have a crucial role in the lives of Armenians in that country.<sup>104</sup> Most of the Armenian-Lebanese community’s administrative bodies, churches, schools, cultural and media organizations, particularly of the Armenian Orthodox community, are under the influence of the Armenian Huntchag, Tashnag or Ramgavar political parties. The Huntchag and Tashnag parties were founded between 1887 and 1890 with the goal of securing independence for Western Armenia within the Ottoman Empire. As the Armenians settled in Lebanon, the Lebanese government provided these parties *de facto* recognition, and later the Armenians registered their parties with the Lebanese government. These political parties’ activities relate directly to Armenian churches and cultural activities, while the parties are deeply involved in Lebanon’s elections and political life.<sup>105</sup>

The political parties have branches in almost all Armenian diaspora communities, except Turkey. According to Zaven Messerlian, during the existence of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (1920-1991), the

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Zaven Messerlian, *Armenian Participation in the Lebanese Legislative Elections: 1934-2009*, Haigazian University Press, Beirut, Lebanon, 2014, 17-19. Strictly speaking, Lebanon’s political parties are sectarian, which is the case with most of that country’s parties. This fact is a violation of the Taif Agreement’s suggestion for Lebanon implementing an election law which is free of sectarian restriction (Taif Agreement, II. Political Reforms, Subsection 5).

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 17; Tsolin Nalbantian, *Armenians Beyond Diaspora: Making Lebanon Their Own*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2021, 176-79.

Armenian political parties differed mainly in their attitudes toward Soviet Armenia.<sup>106</sup> All of the parties viewed Soviet Armenia as the “only basis of hope for the Armenian people,” yet they disagreed on a major point.<sup>107</sup> Members of the Tashnag Party believed that Armenia should have been completely independent of Soviet rule, while members of the Huntchag and Ramgavar parties were interested in the security of Armenia under strong protection. Members of the Ramgavar party argued that the goal of complete Armenian independence could be achieved only through an internal revolution in the Soviet Union or a third world war. The Ramgavar party maintained that in either case the outcome could have been an unprecedented catastrophe for Armenians.<sup>108</sup>

In this vein, the Huntchag and Ramgavar parties had stances which were anti-Tashnag and pro-Soviet Armenia, particularly prior to World War II (1925-1939), during that War’s early period (1939-1943), and in the early phase of the Cold War (1947-1965).<sup>109</sup> However, after the fifty-year commemoration of the Armenian Genocide and particularly after 1975, there was a significant decrease in tensions among the Armenian political parties. Those parties cooperated intensively during Lebanon’s civil war (1975-1990), when all those parties took a position of positive neutrality and formed joint committees. The parties maintained less frequent contacts after that war. After the Soviet Union’s demise, when Armenia became an independent state in 1991, the Huntchag, Tashnag, and Ramgavar parties cooperated more with each other, especially after Armenian President Levon Der-Bedrossian’s (1991-1998) presidency concluded. Within this context, an overview of the Armenian-Lebanese political landscape is relevant.<sup>110</sup>

## THE HUNTCHAG PARTY

The Sotsial Temograd Huntchagian (Social Democrat Huntchag) Party was founded in 1887 in Geneva, Switzerland, with the goal of liberating Armenians and restoring Armenian statehood on the basis of a socialist government. In order to achieve those goals, the party’s by-laws stipulated two stages: the first and immediate goal was to achieve autonomy for Western Armenia through the reforms, which the Ottoman Empire had agreed to implement in the six Armenian vilayets (Ottoman provinces) through Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin of 1878, which concluded the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878.<sup>111</sup> The second and ultimate goal was the reunification of the

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<sup>106</sup> Messerlian, 18.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> D.G. Kherlopian, “Armenians Today,” *Middle East Forum* 37(3):1961, 15.

<sup>109</sup> Messerlian, 19.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> “Treaty between Great Britain, Germany, Austria, France, Italy, Russia, and Turkey for the Settlement of Affairs in the East: Signed at Berlin, July 13, 1878”

Armenian people and territories (which were under the Ottoman Empire, Russia, and Iran) when the necessary economic conditions for the establishment of a socialist government had been created.<sup>112</sup>

In the period from 1921 until 1991, members of the Huntchag Party considered the security of Soviet Armenia as a national necessity which was more important than all other ideological matters. The party maintained that without safeguarding the territory of Soviet Armenia, the reunification of the Armenian people and territories could not be achieved.<sup>113</sup> Although according to the Huntchag party's by-laws, it is Marxist, conditions within the Armenian diaspora have forced it to act differently, adapting itself to prevailing conditions. In the diaspora, the Huntchag party campaigned to keep Armenians attached to their homeland and national ideals. Within limits, the party attempted to have close contacts with the indigenous citizens of Armenians' adopted countries and to assist those countries in the realization of their political goals.<sup>114</sup> The Huntchag Party is a pro-Russian advocate in Armenian political life, regardless of Russia's government, as the party argues that Armenia needs the protection of a strong, friendly neighbor against its adversary, Turkey. From the Huntchag Party's perspective, Western countries have often betrayed the Armenians, with the most glaring example being the Treaty of Lausanne which provided Turkey its modern borders and recognized that country as a nation-state, all at the Armenians' expense.<sup>115</sup>

In Lebanon, the Huntchag Party is administered by an Executive Body headed by its Secretary General, and has chapters in Beirut, Bourj Hammoud, Tripoli, Jounieh, and Zahle. Members of the Huntchag Party in Lebanon are usually workers, middle class professionals, and intellectuals. Since 1921, the Huntchag Party has had different political stances toward other Armenian

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[Treaty of Berlin, 1878], Article LXI, *The American Journal of International Law*, 2(4), Supplement: Official Documents (October 1908), 422  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2212670?seq=1> (accessed May 24, 2025).

<sup>112</sup> Messerlian, 19-20.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>114</sup> The Social Democratic Huntchag Party and the Progressive Socialist Party in Lebanon have a complex relationship, marked by both cooperation and differences during their histories. While both parties are socialist, left-leaning, and advocate for social justice, their specific ideologies and focus areas have sometimes led to divergence, particularly in the context of Lebanese political dynamics and sectarianism (Dr. Yeghia Djeredjian, "Hunchakians [Huntchags] Are an Armenian Democratic Socialist Party" *Socialist Armenia*, November 8, 2022, <https://www.socialist-armenia.org/politicaldetail/186/Armenian-Socialist-Democratic-Hunchaian-Party-Yeghia-Djeredhian> (accessed July 20, 2025); Joshua Landis "A Look Back at Kamal Jumblatt and the Progressive Socialist Party," *Syria Comment*, March 16, 2019, <https://joshualandis.com/blog/a-look-back-at-kamal-jumblatt-and-the-progressive-socialist-party/> .

<sup>115</sup> Messerlian, 20.

political parties in Lebanon. Although the Huntchag Party is ideologically different from the Ramgavar Party (whom members of the Huntchag Party regard as supporting private enterprise and neglecting class struggle), the Huntchag party has generally cooperated with the Ramgavar Party in national political matters about which they had similar attitudes.<sup>116</sup> The Huntchag Party's influence is strong in the Armenian sections of Nor Hadjin and Khalil Badawi at Beirut's eastern entrance. That party also has influence on the church councils of Saint Kevork in Nor Hadjin and Saint Haroutune in Khalil Badawi.<sup>117</sup> The Huntchag party's mouthpiece, *Ararad*, was published in 1937, and continues to be active.<sup>118</sup>

### THE TASHNAG PARTY

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Hay Heghapokhagan Tashnagsutioun), which is usually called the Tashnag Party was formed in 1890 in Tbilisi (Tiflis), Georgia.<sup>119</sup> An ultimate goal of that party has been the political independence of Armenians in an Armenian homeland. The Tashnag Party is a national socialist party, and its members view socialism as an elaborate form of democracy. Party members believe that socialism can be realized within an independent state and in an atmosphere of political freedom. Yet, the Tashnag Party is anti-Communist and anti-Marxist as those political ideologies view nation-states as temporary stages on the road to a classless, stateless society which is an ultimate goal of Communism and Marxism. The Tashnag Party has branches in the Republic of Armenia and other countries which have large Armenian populations, except Turkey. That Party's central administrative office is in the Republic of Armenia. Indeed, all Armenian political parties have transnational branches in the Armenian diaspora and in Armenia after its independence.<sup>120</sup>

The Tashnag Party's branches in Lebanon are in Beirut, Bourj Hammoud, Tripoli, Zahle, Jounieh, and Anjar. The Tashnag Party has members from all classes including intellectuals and professionals, while the majority are workers and artisans. Many of the Tashnag Party's members are young persons. That party in Lebanon has consistently supported governmental authorities including Lebanon's President. The Tashnag Party has played a leading role in Lebanese politics, and is the mainstream Armenian party.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>118</sup> Miatsir, "Ararad Daily Newspaper," <https://www.miatsir.net/services/ararad-daily-newspaper> (accessed July 20, 2025).

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. Georgia refers to the country in the Caucasus, not the state of Georgia in the United States.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 23

## THE RAMGAVAR PARTY

The Ramgavar Azadagan (Democratic Liberal) Party has its roots in the nationalist Armenagan Party founded in 1885 in Van, Western Armenia. It also has its roots in the Veragazmial Huntchagian (Reformed Huntchag) Party, also known as the Azadagan (Liberal) Party and the Sahmanatragan Ramgavar (Constitutional Democrat) Party founded in 1908 by members of the Armenagan Party and a dissident group of the Veragazmial Huntchagian Party. The Ramgavar Azadagan Party assumed its name by the unification of the Sahmanatragan Ramgavar and Azadagan parties in Istanbul on October 1, 1921.<sup>122</sup> The party supported Soviet Armenia, which existed from 1920 until 1991, despite reservations about the government there. After Armenia gained its independence in 1991, the Ramgavar Party established branches in Armenia under the name of the Ramgavar Azadagan Party of Armenia (HRAG), and had some successes in the early years. Later, because of internal disputes, its influence declined.<sup>123</sup>

The Ramgavar Party is a national party patterned after western liberal democratic parties.<sup>124</sup> It is ideologically anti-Marxist in accordance with the very principles of its fundamental laws, but desires to remain outside international politics because the Ramgavar Party's members believe that the party's involvement in international politics could endanger Armenians, who live in many parts of the world. At present, a major goal of the party is the preservation of Armenian communities. The Ramgavar Party also emphasizes Armenians being loyal citizens of their adopted countries.<sup>125</sup> For many years after World War II, the Ramgavar Party's central council was in Beirut. The party is administered in Lebanon by its district committee, which is elected by the annual party convention for a term of one year. The party has a network of newspapers wherever it has branches.<sup>126</sup>

The Ramgavar Party's membership is comprised mainly of intellectuals and middle-class persons. For many years, the party had close relations with a number of persons, who were members of the Armenian elite. Most of them were affluent businesspersons, capitalists, industrialists, and members of highly-skilled professions. From 1923 until 2000, the Ramgavar Party influenced the Armenian General Benevolent Union and its youth organization. After Armenia's independence, cooperation between the Ramgavar and Huntchag Parties continued with some interruptions. The Ramgavar Party Lebanon District Committee (RPLDC), the Huntchag Party, and the Tashnag Party continued their meetings with each other. The meetings intensified beginning in 1974, and those parties occasionally signed joint press

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<sup>122</sup> Messerlian, 25.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

releases on matters of Armenian national interest. For example, those parties advocated positive neutrality during Lebanon's civil war. After that war, the Ramgavar Party made an alliance with the late Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri and later with the March 14 alliance, which includes the Sunni Future Movement (which is the party of which Hariri was a member), as well as Lebanese Forces, and Kataeb (both of which are Maronite Christian). Their influence weakened because of internal disputes and discord during Lebanon's civil war.<sup>127</sup> Indeed, the structure of all three Armenian parties has basic similarities.

#### ARMENIAN GENERAL BENEVOLENT UNION (AGBU)

While the AGBU is apolitical according to its constitution, a substantial number of its leaders and rank-and-file members were leaders or members of the Ramgavar Party.<sup>128</sup> The AGBU, which has branches in much of the Armenian diaspora, has a district committee in Lebanon appointed by the Central Board that resides in New York. In 1962, the AGBU had thirty-seven branches with three thousand members in Beirut, its suburbs, Tripoli, and Zahle. Of those, seven were functioning in 2011. Because a substantial number of the AGBU's leaders were members of the Ramgavar Party, many considered the AGBU's organizations and educational institutions as anti-Tashnag and pro-Ramgavar. The AGBU emerged as an independent organization in the post-Lebanese Civil War period, particularly after 2000.<sup>129</sup> The AGBU sponsors cultural centers, schools, theaters, youth associations, and similar organizations inside and outside Lebanon, and heavily in Armenia.<sup>130</sup>

#### ARMENIAN INDEPENDENTS

The majority of Lebanese Armenians are not official members of a political party. Rather, they find themselves supporting one or another of the Armenian parties, without being official members. These individuals are called independents.<sup>131</sup> Often, they will side with one or another political party which is close to their own political perspective. During the pre-Lebanese Civil War period, the Lebanese Veradznunt (Renaissance) organization, which intended a rapprochement of the Armenian and Arab cultures, was an independent anti-Tashnag organization. It operated a club in Beirut, a sports organization, and a choir of Armenian singers. In 1956 after the elections of the Catholicos of Cilicia, a group of anti-Tashnag independents formed the "Rally of Armenian Orthodox Independents for the Defense of the Cilician See." They contested

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 27-28.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 29.

the legality of the election of the Catholicos and campaigned to this end. This body, later called the Rally of Independents, had, as its leaders, wealthy capitalists and persons of high professional distinction.<sup>132</sup> The independent organizations which had been anti-Tashnag from 1956 to 1963 constituted, along with the Ramgavar and the Huntchag Parties, the Lebanese Armenian National Rally (LANR, Lipanahanahay Azkayin Hamakhmpum) which was a mediator, until 1972, in the event of major problems in the Armenian community.<sup>133</sup> After the Lebanese Civil War, with many notable independent Armenians having passed away, the LANR ceased to exist as such. However, there were many independent Armenians in Lebanon who maintained their links with the AGBU and the Armenian Youth Association (known as the Antranik Youth Association in Lebanon), whose main objective is to preserve and promote Armenian identity and mutual understanding among various Lebanese and Armenian youth associations and groups. This goal is realized through various athletic, scouting, social, and cultural activities that take place in various parts of Lebanon. All the parties have sports and cultural affiliates.<sup>134</sup>

#### THE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY IN LEBANON

Articles 9, 10, 19, and 22 of Lebanon's constitution contain stipulations related to religious freedom, and Armenian-Lebanese have exercised that freedom in robust ways. In Lebanon, there are several Armenian Evangelical (Protestant) churches, Armenian Apostolic, and Armenian Catholic Churches, all of which are vibrant components of Lebanon's religious landscape.<sup>135</sup> The majority of Armenians belongs to the Armenian Apostolic Church.<sup>136</sup> That church is sometimes called "Armenian Orthodox." However, "Armenian Apostolic" is more accurate. That church is governed by the Armenian National Constitution of 1863, which was recognized by a *firman* (decree) of Ottoman Sultan Abdul Aziz (who ruled from 1861 to 1876) and the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923. The Armenian National Constitution is comprised of 150 articles which were drafted by Armenian intellectuals, intelligentsia and

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid. See also Antranik Youth Association on the website of AGBU Lebanon District <https://agbulebanon.org/about/aya/> (accessed May 24, 2025).

<sup>135</sup> Popkova, 171-96; Vahram Hovyan, "Armenian Protestant Community in Lebanon," Noravank Foundation, May 3, 2010 [http://www.noravank.am/eng/articles/detail.php?ELEMENT\\_ID=4729](http://www.noravank.am/eng/articles/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=4729) (accessed May 24, 2025). See also Lebanon's 1926 Constitution, op. cit., Articles 9, 10, 19, 22.

<sup>136</sup> Messerlian, 6-7.

define the powers of patriarch (who held a position in Ottoman Millet) and the Armenian National Assembly.<sup>137</sup>

As a result of the Armenian Genocide, in 1921 and 1922, more than twenty-thousand Armenians settled, mostly in tents, at an eastern entrance of Beirut, which later became a suburb of that city. At the time, the Armenian Apostolic community was not fully organized. There were internal disputes and many religious, moral, health, educational, economic, and administrative problems had to be resolved. At that time, Lebanon was governed by French colonial officials and local authorities while there was no official organization representing most Armenians in what was to become Lebanon and Syria.<sup>138</sup> The only two Armenian churches in Beirut belonged to two different institutions. The Church of Saint Nshan was administered by the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem, and that of the Holy Cross in the refugee camp was administered by the Catholicosate of the Cilician See. Both church representatives constituted a dual authority within the Armenian Apostolic community, which created confusion with respect to the government and among Armenians. Furthermore, the French colonial officials and local authorities recognized Dr. Baghdassar Melkonian, an Armenian Catholic, as the representative of Armenians of all denominations. However, he was the President of Armenian National Union Lebanon branch, which was the de facto Armenian administration in Cilicia and had ceased to exist after the Lausanne Treaty.<sup>139</sup> Dr. Melkonian served as representative without being accountable to anyone. The Armenian camps in eastern Beirut were supervised by three Armenian administrators who had been appointed by the French colonists. The Lebanese Armenian community's situation was uncertain until September 1924 when the French colonial administration granted Lebanese citizenship to all Armenians living in Lebanon who accepted it, in accordance with the relevant stipulations of the Treaty of Lausanne. As sectarianism is a core aspect of Lebanon's political system, and as some administrative autonomy (which was within the Ottoman millet system) has continued from the Ottoman period to contemporary times, the Armenian Apostolic community organized itself, established administrative bodies, and elected representatives to them.<sup>140</sup>

With the approval of General Gouraud, the Catholicos of the Great See of Cilicia, Sahag II began administering to the needs of his parish and took the first steps toward organizing the community. In 1925, he appointed a seven-member National Council, with the intention of creating legal constitutional bodies to administer the community. In elections which were held in 1926, three clerical and eighteen lay representatives were elected to the Communal

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 8.

Council (Kavaragan Joghov), by members of the Apostolic Armenian church, to administer the community. According to the updated version of the 1863 Armenian National Constitution, the members of this Communal Council were to be elected periodically by the Armenian Apostolic community at large. The Council would then elect the members of the civil and religious councils.<sup>141</sup>

The Communal Council also established the amount of the national dues, stipulating that only persons, who paid their dues were entitled to vote in community elections. In 1929, the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem ceded jurisdiction over the dioceses of Beirut, Damascus, and Latakia to the Catholicosate of Cilicia with the consent of the Catholicos of All Armenians in Etchmiadzin, Armenia, Kevork V. The French High Commissioner, Henri Ponsot, was advised of this change and officially approved it in May 1929. This act ended the duality of religious authority, and permitted the Cilician See to be definitively instituted at Antelias in Lebanon in 1930. These events were crucial in establishing the administrative groundwork for the Armenian Apostolic Church in Lebanon for the twentieth century and beyond.<sup>142</sup>

Moving forward to modern and contemporary times, the Catholicosate of Cilicia has its theological seminary in the Bikfaya monastery grounds, in Lebanon, where the Catholicosate's summer residence is located.<sup>143</sup> The Catholicosate also sponsors the Church of Armenia University Students Union as well as a choir, a printing house, and periodicals. The Armenian Apostolic community is administered according to the stipulations of the Constitution of 1863 and the 1941 Constitution of the Cilician See, with its subsequent amendments.<sup>144</sup> All members of the Armenian Apostolic community, who are over twenty-one years of age, elect the members of the Community Council. It is composed of forty-two members: six are clerics, and thirty-six are laypersons from church parishes in Lebanon. Then, the Communal Council elects the Religious (Gronagan) and Civil (Kaghakan) Councils, each composed of seven members. The Civil Council elects the Prelate of the Diocese, usually a bishop, and the members of the Educational and Economic Committees, as well as the members of the personal status courts of First Instance and of appeals. The Prelate presides over all those entities.<sup>145</sup>

The fifteen Apostolic churches are governed by local councils elected for a period of four years by the congregation of the particular church. The election of the local councils is approved by the Civil Council of the Prelacy.<sup>146</sup> The local council elects a five-member board to administer the

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 12-13.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

local schools. The Armenian Apostolic prelacy of Lebanon manages a network of four secondary, intermediate, and elementary schools in Beirut, Bourj Hammoud, Tripoli, and Anjar. It also has twelve Sunday Schools.<sup>147</sup>

#### THE ARMENIAN CATHOLIC COMMUNITY IN LEBANON

The Armenian Catholic Patriarchate of the Great See of Cilicia was established in 1742 by the Catholicos-Patriarch, Apraham Bedros I Ardzivian. The monastery of Bzommar in Mount Lebanon was built in 1749, the church in 1771, and the theological seminary in 1810. The patriarchate had developed good relations with the Maronite and other Catholic patriarchates of Lebanon since 1742, which was helpful in arranging the settlement of Armenians in Lebanon in 1921 and 1922. During winter, the Armenian Catholic patriarch resides in the patriarchate of Ashrafieh, which is a neighborhood in Beirut. The patriarch of the Armenian Catholic rite, who has jurisdiction over twenty-three Armenian Catholic dioceses, is elected by the Synod of Bishops of the Armenian Catholic Church, and his election is approved by the Pope.

The Lebanese Armenian Catholic community and its officially recognized personal status courts are administered by church authorities. Each local church (of which there are seven) is administered by a priest who appoints laypersons to assist him in directing the religious or educational needs of the church.<sup>148</sup> The patriarchate supervises the priests, who are accountable to the patriarch.<sup>149</sup> The patriarchate is responsible for three charitable Catholic organizations in Beirut and Bourj Hammoud, and the Union of Armenian Catholic Youth. The latter has three branches in Lebanon that organize cultural activities within the Armenian Catholic community.<sup>150</sup>

#### THE ARMENIAN PROTESTANT COMMUNITY

The Lebanese government considers all Lebanese Protestants as members of one community. Lebanon's Protestants are represented by the Supreme Council of the Lebanese and Syrian Evangelical Communities.<sup>151</sup> This Supreme Council represents the Protestants and works to safeguard that community's interests with respect to Lebanon's government.<sup>152</sup> That council does not interfere in the internal affairs of its member churches. The Armenian Protestant communities of Lebanon and Syria are each represented in that

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>151</sup> In Lebanon and Syria, for example, the term "evangelical" refers to several kinds of Protestants. In contrast, many Americans view the term evangelical as referring almost exclusively to conservative Protestants. Ordinarily, this book will use the term "evangelical" in a manner consistent with Lebanese and Syrian usage.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 16.

council by four delegates. The Armenian Evangelical Church, established in 1846 in Istanbul, is democratic in its polity, and emphasizes the evangelical movement more than denominational or sectarian policy. It is a member of the World Council of Churches. All the Armenian Evangelical Churches of the Near East as well as the Syrian Evangelical Church are members of the Union of Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East (UAECNE). Delegates elected by active members of the member churches of the Union elect, in annual conventions, the president of the union, and members of a central council of twelve members. Seven of the elected members are from Lebanon and five are from Syria.<sup>153</sup> That council has a total of fifty-three members, who represent seventeen Protestant church bodies in Syria and Lebanon.<sup>154</sup>

The UAECNE's Central Executive Council appoints the judges, clerics, and laypersons for matters of personal status for the Armenian Evangelical Community of Lebanon and the first instance judicial court as well as the appeals court.<sup>155</sup> The UACNE's bylaws provide local churches the right of self-governance. Individual congregations have annual meetings where church members elect church officials to the church board and to the committee or committees which are responsible for financial and other matters related to the congregation's work.<sup>156</sup> The Armenian Evangelical community in Lebanon has five churches, a seminary, which is the Near East School of Theology that is administered by four Protestant denominations including the UAECNE. Haigazian University in Beirut has the UACNE as one of its sponsors and is a vibrant institution of higher education which offers a wide range of majors and minors, and includes the Armenian Diaspora Research Center is a global leader in the study of the Armenian diaspora.<sup>157</sup> Haigazian also plays an important role in Armenians' cultural life by sponsoring conferences, seminars, and public lectures, and through Haigazian University Press which publishes books on several topics including the Armenian Diaspora. The *Haigazian Armenological Review* is a major peer-reviewed journal in the fields of Armenian Studies and Armenian Diaspora Studies.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> "Supreme Council of the Evangelical Community in Syria and Lebanon," 3, [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DopVZt1sSf2Qio2L11QB9LUUhnMT7d9K/view?fbclid=IwY2xjawKu9thleHRuA2F1bQIxMAABHk8FogUaYj24JXcYNC4WqYXHNrM7xEEuBIjV\\_pEFwcrkpBBg9O4-AnwWk5TT\\_aem\\_sp0k4zodMB-Z9f192\\_-luw](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DopVZt1sSf2Qio2L11QB9LUUhnMT7d9K/view?fbclid=IwY2xjawKu9thleHRuA2F1bQIxMAABHk8FogUaYj24JXcYNC4WqYXHNrM7xEEuBIjV_pEFwcrkpBBg9O4-AnwWk5TT_aem_sp0k4zodMB-Z9f192_-luw) (accessed July 27, 2025). See also The Middle East Council of Churches, "What is the Supreme Council of the Evangelical Community in Syria and Lebanon?" <https://www.mecc.org/news-en/2025/6/6/what-is-the-supreme-council-of-the-evangelical-community-in-syria-and-lebanon> (accessed July 27, 2025).

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 35.

## ARMENIAN LEBANESE COMMUNITY

The Armenian Lebanese community continues to be vibrant in many ways: politically, religiously, culturally, educationally, and professionally. Its institutions are deeply rooted in Lebanese society and are integral to Lebanon's landscape. Yet, Armenians in Lebanon face some of the same threats and challenges in Lebanon as others, who live in that country. These threats relate to Lebanon's economy; hardships arising from the coronavirus; the possibility of conflict within Lebanon; potential instability associated with the large number of Syrian refugees in that country; and Israel's attacks on Lebanon, which resumed after Hamas's attack on Israel on October 7, 2023.<sup>159</sup> At the same time, some Armenians have been emigrating from Lebanon, and resettling in other countries.<sup>160</sup>

## LEBANON'S ECONOMY

In terms of Lebanon's economy, the Lebanese Lira lost more than 98 percent of its value between 2019 and 2024. According to the United Nations, the country's income poverty rate increased from 25 percent in 2019 to 74 percent in 2021. Lebanon's financial sector accumulated more than \$72 billion in U.S. dollar (USD) losses since the 2019 economic crisis. Many Lebanese citizens, who relied on hard currency savings, have fallen into poverty due to capital controls, as banks have restricted dollar withdrawals.<sup>161</sup> Many

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<sup>159</sup> Kareem Chehayeb, "Battered by War and Divisions, Lebanon Faces a Long List of Challenges after Ceasefire Deal," Associated Press, November 28, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/lebanon-hezbollah-israel-ceasefire-crisis-be0df65fa96162ca5ca02da73f172614> (accessed May 25, 2025).

<sup>160</sup> Vera Yacoubian, "Rooted Yet Resilient: How Armenian Communities in the Middle East Can Navigate a Changing Region," *Armenian Weekly*, April 16, 2025, <https://armenianweekly.com/2025/04/16/rooted-yet-resilient-how-armenian-communities-in-the-middle-east-can-navigate-a-changing-region/> (accessed May 25, 2025). DREF and IFRC (Disaster Response Emergency Fund, and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies), "DREF Operational Update: Armenia: Population Movement 2024," Published: December 16, 2024; Posted: March 4, 2025, pp. 2-3, <https://reliefweb.int/report/armenia/armenia-population-movement-2024-dref-operational-update-mdram014-03-march-2025> (accessed May 25, 2025).

<sup>161</sup> "Lebanon Protests Escalate as Currency Dives," BBC News, June 12, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-53020014#:~:text=In%20Beirut%2C%20some%20of%20the%20protests%20turned%20violent&text=Anger%20has%20surged%20as%20the,the%20value%20of%20the%20currency> (accessed May 24, 2025). U.S. Department of State, "2024 Investment Climate Statements: Lebanon," <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-investment-climate-statements/lebanon/#:~:text=Lebanon%27s%20currency%2C%20the%20Lebanese%20pound,to%2074%20percent%20in%202021> (accessed May 24, 2025).

Lebanese have experienced difficulties paying for food and housing. Unemployment has been high.<sup>162</sup> Financial assistance from the IMF could mitigate some of Lebanon's economic difficulties. If the IMF were to approve financial assistance for Lebanon, the IMF conditions for that assistance could include Lebanon's government eliminating its subsidy to the country's electricity sector, raising Lebanon's Value Added Tax from eleven to twenty percent, increasing taxes on gasoline, reducing the public sector to half, and privatizing some of the state's assets. At least some of these potential IMF conditions may be unpopular among some Lebanese. The outcomes of the negotiations for IMF financial assistance to Lebanon remain to be seen.<sup>163</sup>

The World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook for Lebanon, which was published in April 2025, states that Lebanon's real GDP was estimated to have contracted by 7.1 percent in 2024, bringing Lebanon's cumulative decline since 2019 to nearly 40 percent. In 2025, following the resolution of Lebanon's political paralysis, and positive developments, which included the election of a new president and prime minister, real GDP was projected to grow by 4.7 percent, the first positive growth since 2017. That growth will be driven by anticipated reforms, recovering tourism, improved consumption, limited reconstruction inflows, and a base effect from the sharp prior contraction. Within this context, the reconstruction of significant portions of south Lebanon will be a costly enterprise.<sup>164</sup>

However, several risks could weigh on this outlook. A deterioration in Lebanon's security situation may affect sentiment, tourism, financial flows, and consumption. Additionally, the impact of rising global trade uncertainty on Lebanon remains unclear. Although direct effects may be limited, given

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<sup>162</sup> Lina Sinjab, "Driven by Despair," BBC News, June 12, 2020  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-53020014#:~:text=In%20Beirut%2C%20some%20of%20the%20protests%20turned%20violent&text=Anger%20has%20surged%20as%20the,the%20value%20of%20the%20currency> (accessed June 22, 2020); "Lebanon," International Monetary Fund, <https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/LBN#whatsnew> (accessed May 24, 2025); Ben Hubbard, "Lebanon's Economic Crisis Explodes, Threatening Decades of Prosperity," *New York Times*, May 12, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/10/world/middleeast/lebanon-economic-crisis.html> (accessed May 24 2025).

<sup>163</sup> International Monetary Fund, "Lebanon: Staff Concluding Statement of the 2019 Article IV Mission," July 2, 2019, <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2019/07/02/mcs070219-lebanon-staff-concluding-statement-of-the-2019-article-iv-mission#:~:text=A%20credible%20medium%2Dterm%20fiscal,to%20build%20bank%20capital%20buffers.> (accessed May 24, 2025).

<sup>164</sup> World Bank, Macro Poverty Outlook, "Lebanon," April 15, 2025  
<https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/65cf93926fdb3ea23b72f277fc249a72-0500042021/related/mpo-lbn.pdf> (accessed May 23, 2025).

that exports to some large markets account for a modest four percent of Lebanon's total goods exports, the indirect effects will depend on how recent policy shifts affect the global economy.<sup>165</sup>

Israel's large-scale attacks on Lebanon, which began soon after Hamas's attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, have had a profoundly negative impact in many ways on Lebanese, including Armenians in that country. Tens of thousands of Lebanese have been killed and injured, hundreds of thousands have been displaced, tens of thousands of residential units have been damaged or demolished, crucial infrastructure, including roads, bridges, and public buildings, have been severely damaged or destroyed, and essential services, including health, water and education, have become less available and significantly more difficult to access.<sup>166</sup>

### THE ELECTIONS OF JOSEPH AOUN AND NAWAF SALAM IN 2025

In this context, on January 9, 2025 Lebanon's parliament elected Lebanese General Joseph Aoun as Lebanon's President, which came after a vacancy of approximately two years in Lebanon's presidency.<sup>167</sup> On February 26, 2025, the government of Lebanon's Prime Minister Nawaf Salam won a vote of confidence in Lebanon's parliament.<sup>168</sup> This Lebanese government may attempt to

1. Strengthen Lebanon's currency;
2. Reduce Lebanon's public debt;
3. Reform and restore Lebanon's banking system;
4. Reduce unemployment;
5. Repair Lebanon's electrical system, so as to reduce or eliminate blackouts;
6. Reduce or eliminate corruption in government and related areas;
7. Reduce poverty;
8. Properly manage Lebanon's waste, so it will not constitute a threat to public health

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA), *The Multidimensional Impact of Israeli Attacks on Lebanon*, 2024 <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/pubs/pdf/multidimensional-impact-israeli-attacks-lebanon-english.pdf> ; Hoory Minoyan, "Lebanese Armenian Community Feels Effects of Regional Escalation," *Armenian Weekly*, October 2, 2024 <https://armenianweekly.com/2024/10/02/lebanese-armenian-community-feels-effects-of-regional-escalation/> (accessed March 7, 2025).

<sup>167</sup> Will Todman, "Lebanon Finally Elects a President," Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 10, 2025 <https://www.csis.org/analysis/lebanon-finally-elects-president> (accessed March 7, 2025).

<sup>168</sup> "Lebanon's Government Wins Confidence Vote, Says Only Armed Forces Should Defend Country in War," *Arab News*, February 26, 2025, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2591739/middle-east> (accessed March 7, 2025).

9. Monopolize Lebanon's weapons; and
10. Reconstruct southern Lebanon.<sup>169</sup>

## LEBANON'S DIFFICULTIES

The one to two million Syrian refugees in Lebanon may also pose a threat to various Lebanese, including Armenian Lebanese. Many Lebanese identify Syrian refugees in that country as a main security challenge. Despite many Lebanese' sympathy for Syrians, many Lebanese feel threatened and express increasing intolerance to the repercussions of Syria's prolonged crisis on Lebanon. The Lebanese' most pressing concerns have been the fear of becoming a victim of crime and the risks of falling into poverty, threats to Lebanon's sectarian balance resulting from the prolonged stay of a large number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, service shortages being further exacerbated by the Syrian refugees' presence, and environmental risks stemming from dilapidated water and sewerage networks. Lebanese have also expressed serious concerns that Syrian refugee camps could create an enabling environment for some refugees becoming militants, increasing the probability of these individuals' violent actions in Lebanon.<sup>170</sup> At the time of this writing, it is difficult to assess the impact that the Syrian government, under the leadership of Ahmed Hussein al-Sharaa, also known as Abu Mohammad al-Julani, will have on Lebanon and Armenians in that country. The following are some areas, where the effects of his government on Lebanon remain to be seen: internal politics within Lebanon and that countries relationship with other countries including Syria, security on the borders between Lebanon and

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<sup>169</sup> Abir Al Fakih, "Joseph Aoun's Presidency: A Turning Point for Lebanon," The Organization for World Peace, January 26, 2025 <https://theowp.org/joseph-aouns-presidency-a-turning-point-for-lebanon/> (accessed May 7, 2025); Nicholas Blanford, "Can Lebanon's New President Stabilize a Country in Crisis?" The Atlantic Council, January 9, 2025, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/can-lebanons-new-president-stabilize-a-country-in-crisis/> (accessed May 7, 2025); Philippe Massoud, "The Presidency of Joseph Aoun in Lebanon Must Set a New Precedent for the Country," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 29, 2025. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/presidency-joseph-aoun-lebanon-must-set-new-precedent-country> (accessed February 8, 2025); John Nagle and Drew Mikhael, "Lebanon's New President Faces Uphill Struggle to Steer Country Away from Brink of Collapse," *The Conversation*, January 14, 2025 <https://theconversation.com/lebanons-new-president-faces-uphill-struggle-to-steer-country-away-from-brink-of-collapse-247151> (accessed May 7, 2025).

<sup>170</sup> "Citizens' Perceptions of Security Threats Stemming from the Syrian Refugee Presence in Lebanon," Background Paper, February 2015, *International Alert*, 1-10 (May 7, 2025), <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/45500> (accessed May 7, 2025); The World Bank, "The World Bank in Lebanon: Overview and Context," <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/overview> (accessed May 7, 2025).

Syria, Syrian refugees in Lebanon, and relations among and between religious groups in Lebanon.<sup>171</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while the historic and current circumstances for Armenians in Lebanon is strong, Armenians in that country face threats, which are similar to those as their fellow-Lebanese. On the whole, the strong educational, financial, and educational situations of Armenian-Lebanese provide a strong, yet circumscribed, buffer against various threats which they may confront in the face of an uncertain future for Lebanon and the Middle East more broadly.

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<sup>171</sup> Christopher Crowson, “Young Syrian Armenians in Yerevan: Assad has fallen, what next?” *CIVILNET*, January, 27, 2025  
<https://www.civilnet.am/en/news/814032/young-syrian-armenians-in-yerevan-assad-has-fallen-what-next/> ; “Syria, Lebanon Pledge ‘Long-Term Strategic Relations’ after Assad ouster,” *France 24*, January 11, 2025  
<https://www.france24.com/en/middle-east/20250111-syria-lebanon-pledge-long-term-strategic-relations-after-assad-ouster> ; Georges Saad, “Syria’s New Regime: What Impact on Lebanon?” *By The East*, January 6, 2025,  
<https://www.bytheeast.com/2025/01/06/syrias-new-regime-what-impact-on-lebanon/> .

# SYRIA



## ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHICS

Ethnically, Syria is approximately 65% Arab (which includes Alawites); 10%, Kurd; 10%, Levantine; and 15% other, which includes Druze, Ismailis, Imamis, Nusairis, Assyrians, Turkomans, and Armenians.<sup>1</sup> There are approximately 30,000 Armenians in Syria.<sup>2</sup> Religiously Syria is 87% Muslim (which includes 74% Sunni, and 13% Alawi, Ismaili, and Shia), 10% Christian, 3% Druze.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Syria,” *World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/syria/#people-and-society> (accessed August 7, 2025).

<sup>2</sup> The Government of Armenia, Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, “Syria,” <http://diaspora.gov.am/en/pages/51/syria> (accessed July 30, 2025).

<sup>3</sup> “Syria,” *World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/syria/#people-and-society> (accessed August 7, 2025).

## ARMENIANS IN SYRIA

There has been an Armenian presence in Syria for thousands of years. According to the existing testimonies, Armenians appeared on the territory of historical Syria (Asorik) in the first century BCE, during the reign of Tigranes the Great. In Syria, coins bearing the name and image of the Armenian king were even issued. The first mention of the Armenian community in Damascus dates to the seventh century when the city became the capital of the Umayyad Caliphate. The number of Armenians in Syria began to increase especially in the ninth through eleventh centuries, as a result of the forced immigration of a considerable number of Armenians to Northern Syria carried out by the Byzantine Empire, the fall of the Bagratuni Kingdom (1045), the Seljuk-Turkish raids (mid-eleventh century), and the fall of Cilician Armenia (1375). During the rule of the Ottoman Empire, emigrations of Armenians to various northern areas of Syria, with the center being Aleppo, took place for various military-political and economic reasons. Armenians, who settled there before the Genocide, are known as “*Arman kadim*” (old Armenians), who are mainly Catholic and Arabic speaking.<sup>4</sup>

The current Armenian community in Syria was mostly formed between 1915 and 1920 following the Armenian Genocide. According to various sources, prior to the start of the Syrian war (2011), about 100,000 Armenians lived in Syria, most of whom were concentrated in Aleppo (where there were approximately 60,000). The rest were in Damascus (where there have been approximately 6,000 to 7,000 Armenians), Latakia, Kessab, Qamishli, Homs, Raqqa, Hasakah, Deir al-Zor and other regions (where there have been more than 30,000). As a result of the Syrian war, more than 60,000 Armenians left Syria. Today, there are about 30,000 Armenians in Syria, most of whom live in Aleppo. Since the beginning of the Syrian war, Armenia has received about 25,000 Syrian-Armenians.<sup>5</sup>

Among the Syrian authorities and society, Armenians have always held a high reputation, as diligent and honest people. Armenians significantly contributed to the revitalization of the social-economic and cultural life of Syria. In Damascus, Armenians were mainly involved in industry. They were craftsmen, merchants, factory owners, government officials, teachers, doctors, musicians, and architects. In Aleppo, Hasakah, and the coastal areas, Armenians were mainly involved in trade, industry, agriculture, and service sectors. They had stores, small and medium industrial enterprises, and restaurants.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The Government of Armenia, Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, “Syria,” <http://diaspora.gov.am/en/pages/51/syria> (accessed July 30, 2025).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Since 1928, there has been an Armenian presence in the legislative body of Syria, and high-ranking Armenian officers have served in the Syrian army. On February 13, 2020, the Syrian Parliament unanimously adopted a resolution on recognizing and condemning the Armenian Genocide. The resolution brought on to the agenda of the Syrian parliament by the Syria-Armenia Parliamentary Friendship Commission confirms the recognition and condemnation of the genocide committed by the Ottoman Empire against the Armenian people in the early twentieth century. Today, Syria is the second Arab country after Lebanon to have recognized the Armenian Genocide. The People's Council of Syria convened a special session on March 17, 2015, to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the Armenian Genocide and to pay tribute to the memory of more than one and a half million victims.<sup>7</sup>

In Syria, Armenians are considered a religious minority. The Armenian Church has a significant role in the organization of the Armenian community, Armenian education, and the preservation of Armenian identity. The Syrian government considers the Christian Church the administrative body of the given minority and its representative in state instances. There are the Damascus Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church (the seat of the primate is the Saint Sarkis Armenian Apostolic Church in Damascus) and the Armenian Diocese of Peria (Aleppo) of the Great See of Cilicia (the seat of the primate is the Forty Martyrs Armenian Cathedral of Aleppo in Syria). There are also the Armenian Catholic and the Armenian Evangelical Churches with their Prelacies.<sup>8</sup>

The Armenian Diocese of Peria is the second-largest and oldest diocese of the Great See of Cilicia. The Pontifical Vicarage of Jezireh is functioning there, and the rest of the Armenian-populated areas and the districts of Aleppo are managed by the district councils. The Damascus Diocese was formed in the middle of the fifteenth century by the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem and worked under its management until 1929. In that year, in order to reform the Armenian Catholicosate of the Great See of Cilicia, the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem assigned the Damascus Diocese, together with the Dioceses of Beirut and Cyprus, to the Catholicosate of Cilicia. In 1956, the Diocese did not agree with the appointment of the Catholicos, refused to subordinate to the Armenian Catholicosate of the Great See of Cilicia, and joined the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.<sup>9</sup>

The Armenian Evangelical Community in Syria, the center of which is located in Aleppo, was formed in the middle of the nineteenth century. There are also other Armenian Evangelical communities in such mostly Armenian-populated settlements of Syria, as Damascus, Kessab, Homs, and

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

elsewhere. As a separate structure and ecclesiastical see, the Armenian Catholic Church was formed in 1740, in Aleppo. The Armenian Catholic community in Damascus began to form in the 1760s. In 1946, the People's Leader of the Catholic community was given the title of the patriarchal vicar.<sup>10</sup>

The local bodies of the three traditional Armenian parties, ARF, SDHP, and ADL, are operating in Syria. However, due to the ban on national parties in Syria, they operate under the name of cultural organizations. The national organizations, that are mainly concentrated in Aleppo (AGBU, National Cultural Union, Armenian Catholic Union), have contributed to the organization and development of the spiritual, cultural, national, and social life of the Armenian community in Syria. There are cultural and youth unions, dance groups, choirs, orchestras, theater groups, sports institutions, and clubs (Homenmen, Homenetmen, AYA) in many of the Armenian-populated areas. The Institute for Armenian Studies in Aleppo, libraries and hospitals, the national shelter and orphanage, an Armenian nursing home, the Armenian and Syrian Writers' Union are also in Syria. The local bodies of the AGBU, the ARS (Armenian Relief Cross of Syria-ARC), the Howard Karagheuzian Association, and the Jinishian Memorial Charitable Foundation operate within the framework of charitable activities.<sup>11</sup>

The official newspaper of the National Prelacy, *Gandzasar*, is published in Aleppo. The radio station "Radio Yeraz" is broadcasting in Aleppo. There are also Armenian educational institutions under the auspices of the Armenian churches, national parties, charitable, patriotic, educational, and cultural organizations. Even in difficult war conditions, the above-mentioned structures and organizations, including the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia to the Syrian Arab Republic (Damascus) and the Consulate General of the Republic of Armenia in the Syrian Arab Republic in Aleppo, continued their activities.<sup>12</sup>

Prior to the 2011 war, there were more than thirty churches, monasteries and chapels, and about thirty schools in the Armenian community in Syria. The war affected the Armenian community and heavily Armenian-populated areas of Syria, causing enormous irreversible human and material losses. Despite the efforts of national organizations, it was impossible to prevent the large-scale emigration of Armenians from Syria. The regions of Raqqa and Deir al-Zor are nearly emptied of Armenians. The Honorary Consulate of the Republic of Armenia in Deir al-Zor was closed, a number of Armenian public buildings, factories, shops, cultural centers, schools, cemeteries, churches, numerous and diverse monuments were partially or

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

completely looted, destroyed or demolished, particularly in Aleppo, Kessab and elsewhere. Moreover, on September 21, 2014, the Armenian Genocide Martyrs' Memorial Church in Deir al-Zor, which stored the relics of the martyrs of the Armenian Genocide, was destroyed. Unfortunately, neither the material nor the human losses of the community have been completely assessed.<sup>13</sup>

Since the first days of the Syrian crisis, supporting organizations for the Syrian-Armenians have been founded in the Diaspora, and donations have been organized. Armenia has sent several airplanes with humanitarian aid to Syria. In the mostly Armenian-populated cities of Syria, the “Syrian-Armenian Relief Fund” was founded with the participation of the representatives of all community organizations. In contemporary times, the somewhat stabilized peace and the partial restoration of the country's basic infrastructures, have given Armenians an opportunity to return to Syria. In turn, the Syrian authorities, as well as the Armenian Catholicosate of the Great See of Cilicia, the Armenian Protestant Church in Syria and the Catholic Armenian Church in Syria undertook the urgent mission of the immediate recovery of the Syrian-Armenian community.<sup>14</sup>

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SYRIA'S CONSTITUTIONS

In trying to understand Syria's most recent constitution, which is the Constitutional Declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic that was signed on March 13, 2025, it would be helpful to analyze of some of the history which preceded it.<sup>15</sup>

One of the many subregions within the Middle East and North Africa, which was ruled by the Ottoman Empire, was the subregion which eventually came to be the modern -state of Syria.<sup>16</sup> The Ottomans ruled the subregion of Syria from approximately 1516 until the end of World War I in 1918, which was the year that Syria and a few other subregions within the Middle East and North Africa came under French and British rule as a result of the 1916 Sykes-

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Constitutional Declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic, March 13, 2025, 1, 15. <https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/2025-03/2025.03.13%20-%20Constitutional%20declaration%20%28English%29.pdf> (accessed May 4, 2025); Jon Armajani, “Syria’s Constitutions and Their Relationships to Minorities,” *Armenians of Syria*, 241-60, <https://haigrepository.haigazian.edu.lb/items/48cafe75-7e0b-4ab4-8089-c49ca2186e54> (accessed May 20, 2025).

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Avedis K. Sanjian, *The Armenian Communities in Syria Under Ottoman Dominion*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1965, 1, 7, 9, 19-20, 50, 53-56, 141, 259.

Picot agreement and other related agreements, which the French and British secretly established with each other during World War I.<sup>17</sup>

As part of the *tanzimat* reforms that took place in the Ottoman Empire between 1839 and 1876, which in many respects constituted an attempt to modernize that Empire's laws and related practices, the Ottomans permitted the people living within the subregion of the Ottoman Empire, which included what was to become Syria, to have a written constitution. This constitution provided the subregion with an administrative council of elected and appointed officials, as well as municipal councils, whose members were chosen by religious leaders.<sup>18</sup> After the French made Syria one of their colonies in the Middle East and North Africa, in the aftermath of World War I, there was, within the subregion of Syria, a period of approximately fifty years of constitutional instability, characterized by the relatively frequent adoption, suspension, and restoration of approximately fifteen different constitutional charters. In 1930, France, as the colonial power, drafted a constitution for the subregion of Syria, which was modelled on that of the French Third Republic. This constitution, which provided for a president and a unicameral legislature, was suspended two months after it was first implemented, and Syria's parliament was dissolved. In 1943, that constitution was restored and remained Syria's basic law even after the country gained independence from France in 1946. In 1949, that constitution was suspended and replaced with a new one that was promulgated in 1950. This constitution expanded a bill of rights and included articles related to land and education. That document was, however, dissolved in 1951 following a military coup, which resulted in another constitution. The 1953 constitution mandated that instead of the President being elected by the parliament, she or he would be elected by a direct popular vote. However, the 1950 constitution was restored in 1954 after yet another coup. Syria's attempt in 1958 to join, with Egypt, in the United Arab Republic (UAR) effectively suspended that constitutional framework.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> David Commins and David W. Lesch, *Historical Dictionary of Syria*, Scarecrow Press, Lanham, Maryland, 2014, p. xxii.

<sup>18</sup> Amos J. Peaslee, *Constitutions of Nations: The First Compilation in the English Language of the Texts of the Constitutions of the Various Nations of the World, Together with Summaries, Annotations, Bibliographies, and Comparative Tables*, [M. Nijhoff], [The Hague], 1956, 402-3.

<sup>19</sup> CONSTITUTIONNET, "Constitutional History of Syria" (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), Strömsborg SE-103 34 Stockholm, Sweden), <http://www.constitutionnet.org/country/constitutional-history-syria> (accessed May 4, 2025); Syrian Center for Political and Strategic Studies, and Syria Expert House, *Syria Transition Roadmap*, Washington, DC, Syrian Center for Political and Strategic Studies, and Syria Expert House, 2013, 75-77, <https://www.scribd.com/document/160250887/Syria-Transition-Roadmap-Full-En> (accessed May 4, 2025).

When an army coup brought that period to an end in 1961, the 1950 constitution was again restored. In 1964, a constitutional referendum approved a provisional charter, which was immediately suspended when a new group of military leaders from Syria's Baath Party staged another coup, suspended the 1964 constitution, and established a regional command in which all of the executive and legislative powers were concentrated. In 1966, the Baath Party was taken over by a wing, which had not held the center of power, and this wing produced a new constitution in 1969. The party split in 1970 when a group of Baath Party members under General Hafiz al-Assad came to power. Assad was elected as the new president of Syria in 1971, and on March 14, 1973 he promulgated a different constitution, which is often called the Constitution of 1973.<sup>20</sup>

There are many reasons for the frequent adoption, suspension, and restoration of constitutional charters in the subregion which was to become the state of Syria from the period directly after World War I, when Syria became a French colony, until the establishment of Syria's constitution of 1973. Some of these reasons include:

1. attempts to adapt aspects of older Ottoman laws to the new modern Syrian context, even though the contexts within which some of those Ottoman laws were established predated the modern period;

2. the pressures which were placed on Syria by the French colonialists in the sense that those colonialists' perceptions of laws and their application was rooted more in the French colonialists' understandings of the West than their understandings of Syria and the Middle East;

3. Syria's frequent military coups and political transformations, each of which instituted significant changes in Syria through attempts by each set of leaders to legitimize their governance;

4. The shifting political and state maps of the Middle East and the very independence of the Arab states including the Gulf states, as well as the retreat of the UK and France from the region together with the USA's growing influence there;

5. the different ethnic and religious groups within Syria (including Alawites, Orthodox Christians, Arabs, Armenians, Assyrians, Kurds, Turkomans, Christians, Druze, Ismailis, Sunnis, and Shias, to name a few) and the desire on the part of such groups to either protect themselves and/or to expand their influence within Syria and its political structures;

6. the pressures which have been placed on Syria as a result of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the historic influx of Palestinians into Syria;

7. the hardships which have been placed on Syria as one of several countries where the Cold War conflicts between the USA, on the one hand, and the Soviet Union (and subsequently Russia), on the other, manifested

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

themselves historically and had continued to do so in the midst of Syria's civil war;

8. the transformation of Baathism from a secular political movement, which aspired to create unity in Syria and many other parts of the Arab world, to a tool used by the Assad family in order to increase their authority and control within Syria; and

9. a history of turmoil in Syria's parliamentary life, which resulted in both suspensions of the constitution and the rise of authoritarianism in Syria.<sup>21</sup>

In the context of this tumultuous history, the Constitution of 1973 was drafted under the guidance of Hafiz al-Assad and, like other constitutions in the Arab world and certain other parts of the Middle East and North Africa, has a nationalist and socialist character, which, while in theory projects itself as espousing democracy and freedom but in practice, affirmed Assad's authoritarian rule. While that constitution states "that the religion of the president of the republic of Syria has to be Islam"<sup>22</sup> and that "Islamic jurisprudence is a main source of legislation for the country,"<sup>23</sup> a number of aspects of that constitution also reflect a strongly Arab and secularist character, which manifest, among other influences, those of the Arab secularist socialist intellectuals Michel Aflaq (a Christian), Salah al-Din al-Bitar (a Sunni Muslim), and other secular Arab intellectuals who established the Baath Party, which became a formal party at the time of Syrian independence in 1946.<sup>24</sup> In addition, the 1973 constitution also conveys a secular pan-Arab consciousness, which was manifested in many ways during various periods in the twentieth century, including the period of the UAR, which lasted from 1958 until 1961.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> John McHugo, *Syria: From the Great War to the Civil War*, Saqi Books, London, 2014, 27-28; *Syria Transition Roadmap*, 75, <https://www.scribd.com/document/160250887/Syria-Transition-Roadmap-Full-En> (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>22</sup> *Syrian Arab Republic: Constitution, 1973*, Chapter 1, Part 1, Article 3, Point 1 <http://www.refworld.org/docid/44d8a4e84.html> (accessed May 4, 2025). Refworld.org is a website and database, which is sponsored and operated by the Refugee Status Determination Section of the Division of International Protection of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: The UN Refugee Agency in Geneva, Switzerland.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> William L. Cleveland and Martin Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, Fourth Edition, Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 2009, 325.

<sup>25</sup> CONSTITUTIONNET (accessed January 24, 2015); Razi A. Diab, Esq., "Religion and the Law in Syria" (Arab Center for International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Education (ACIHL) [https://www.acihl.org/articles.htm?article\\_id=26](https://www.acihl.org/articles.htm?article_id=26) (accessed September 2, 2017). See the fourth paragraph of that article. The article has no page numbers; *Syria Transition*, 75-77;

In terms of the aspects of Syria's constitution, which are secular and pan-Arab, an early portion of the 1973 constitution emphasizes five principles that stress the unity of the Arab world. The first of these principles states that the Syrian revolution (meaning by implication the "Corrective Revolution" in 1970 that brought Hafiz al-Assad to power) was part of a larger Arab revolution.<sup>26</sup> The second principle states that any threats to an Arab nation are threats to the Arab world as a whole. The third principle commits Syria to the fight against Zionism and imperialism, reflecting that nation's religious and historical heritage. The fourth principle states that freedom is a sacred right and democracy is an ideal form of government. The fifth and final principle states that the Arab revolution is part of a global movement, not an isolated phenomenon.<sup>27</sup> It also divides power between the President, the Prime Minister, the legislature, and the courts.<sup>28</sup>

## THE 2012 CONSTITUTION

With respect to the Constitution of 2012, in October of 2011, which was approximately seven months after the beginning of Syria's civil war, a committee, which was established by Bashar al-Assad, began work on that constitution that was issued on February 15, 2012 and was approved in a referendum on February 26, 2012.<sup>29</sup> That committee had been called into existence and the 2012 constitution had been implemented after extensive pressure was placed on Assad's government from pro-democracy activists, who were operating long before and during Syria's civil war.<sup>30</sup>

One significant result of these pro-democracy groups' actions was that the 2012 constitution omitted the 1973 constitution's reference to the Baath Party as the "leader of the nation and society" and the 2012 constitution opened the door to other more-or-less legal political parties in Syria, in addition to the

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<https://www.scribd.com/document/160250887/Syria-Transition-Roadmap-Full-En> (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>26</sup> Gareth Stansfield, "Political Life and the Military," *A Companion to the History of the Middle East*, Youssef M. Choueiri, ed., Blackwell Publishing, Malden, Massachusetts, 2005, 366.

<sup>27</sup> *Syrian Arab Republic: Constitution, 1973*, March 13, 1973, Preamble, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/44d8a4e84.html> (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 2, Parts 1, 2, 3; Chapter 3, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/44d8a4e84.html> (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>29</sup> *Syrian Arab Republic: Constitution, 2012*, February 26, 2012, Comments, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5100f02a2.html> (accessed May 4, 2025). For information on Syria's People's Assembly (parliament), see Inter-Parliamentary Union, IPU Parline, "Syrian Arab Republic: People's Assembly," <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/SY/SY-LC01/> (accessed May 7, 2025).

<sup>30</sup> Ignacio Alvarez-Ossorio, "Syria's Struggling Civil Society" *Middle East Quarterly*, 19(2):2012, 23+. Page numbers are not available on the electronic version of this article.

Baath Party.<sup>31</sup> One result of this opening in the new constitution involved the fact that in Syria's presidential election, which took place on June 3, 2014, there were two candidates in addition to Bashar al-Assad, one of whom was Hassan al-Nouri, a US-educated businessman,<sup>32</sup> who represented the party named the "National Initiative for Administration and Change in Syria," and the other candidate, Maher Hajjar, a member of the Syrian Communist Party and of Syria's Parliament,<sup>33</sup> who ran for Syria's presidency as an independent.<sup>34</sup> While it seems that Assad and the Baath Party played a significant role in influencing, who Assad's opponents would be, those elections constituted one manifestation of the new constitution's and Assad's limited openness to opponents of the Baath Party running in elections. Yet, even though Assad ran against limited opposition in that election, whichever changes may be manifested in the 2012 constitution are largely superficial in that, in reality, freedoms in Syria seem to be as limited under the new constitution as they had been under the previous constitution. This situation is still in its initial stages and one cannot make solid assessments at this time.

Other than the fact that Syria's 2012 constitution states that (1) the religion of the president of the republic of Syria has to be Islam and (2) Islamic jurisprudence is a main source of legislation for that country,<sup>35</sup> I could not find evidence to indicate that the Syrian constitution or laws place limits on offices to which Syrians can be elected or appointed based on their religion, ethnicity, language, and/or minority status. However, the two above statements related to Islam in Syria's constitution and the fact that Syria is a majority-Muslim

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Loveday Morris, "Hassan al-Nouri: The Syrian Presidential Candidate who is '100 Per Cent American-Educated': Businessman will Challenge Assad - But Does Not See Himself as Opposition" *The Independent*, June 1, 2014 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/hassan-al-nouri-the-syrian-presidential-candidate-who-is-100-per-cent-american-educated-9468473.html> (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>33</sup> "Who's Who: Maher Hajjar," *The Syrian Observer*, May 13, 2014, [https://syrianobserver.com/who/whos\\_who\\_maher\\_hajjar\\_presidential\\_candidate.html](https://syrianobserver.com/who/whos_who_maher_hajjar_presidential_candidate.html) (accessed May 4, 2025). According to the Wikipedia article entitled, Maher Hajjar, he was born into a Sunni Muslim family ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maher\\_Hajjar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maher_Hajjar) (accessed May 4, 2025)).

<sup>34</sup> Associated Press in Damascus, "Bashar al-Assad Wins Re-Election in Syria as Uprising Against Him Rages On," *The Guardian*, June 4, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/04/bashar-al-assad-wins-reelection-in-landslide-victory> (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>35</sup> *Syrian Arab Republic: Constitution, 2012*, Chapter 1, Article 3, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5100f02a2.html> (accessed May 4, 2025).

country could place *de facto* limits on political offices to which minorities in Syria could be elected or appointed.<sup>36</sup>

With respect to the related matter of military conscription, Syria's 2012 constitution states, "1. Compulsory military service shall be a sacred duty and is regulated by a law;" and "2. Defending the territorial integrity of the homeland and maintaining the secrets of state shall be a duty of every citizen."<sup>37</sup> While that constitution was in effect, military service was mandatory for all Syrian males over the age of eighteen;<sup>38</sup> they were required to serve for eighteen months, except for men who had not completed the fifth grade, who were required to perform twenty-one months of service.<sup>39</sup> There were also stipulations, in Syrian law, related to postponements and exemptions for military service related to whether one was undertaking postsecondary studies, was living abroad, had a deceased father, and/or had one or more brothers who serve in the Syrian military, for example.<sup>40</sup> Except for the fact that "Syrians (including U.S. citizens of either Syrian or Palestinian origin) [who were] born outside of Syria and resided abroad until the age of 18" could have received an exemption from military service for a fee,<sup>41</sup> I could not find any information indicating that there had been limits and/or constraints with respect to military service or promotion within the military based on an individual's ethnoreligious background, during the period of Bashar al-Assad's government. In any case, after Ahmed al-Sharaa became Syria's leader in December 2024, required military conscription in Syria came to an end, for the most part.<sup>42</sup> However, the March 10, 2025 agreement between Syrian President al-Sharaa's government and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) leaves unclear the matter of whether

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<sup>36</sup> For the significant role which Islam has played in Syria's political life, see Esther van Eijk, *Family Law in Syria: Patriarchy, Pluralism and Personal Status Law*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2016, 40-41. For statistics regarding the approximate percentage of various religious groups in Syria see "Syria," *World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/syria/> (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>37</sup> *Syrian Arab Republic: Constitution, 2012*, Chapter 1, Article 46, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5100f02a2.html> (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>38</sup> "Syria: Compulsory Military Service, Including Age of Recruitment, Length of Service; Occasions Where Proof of Military Service Status is Required; Whether the Government Can Recall Individuals Who Have Already completed their Compulsory Military Service; Penalties for Evasion (2008-July 2014)" "1. General Information," Archived on June 2, 2023, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/54042353a.html> (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, "2. Period of Service."

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, "3. Postponement of Service"; "4. Exemptions"; "4.1 Exemption Fees."

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, "4.1 Exemption Fees."

<sup>42</sup> Staff Writer with AFP, "Syria Leader Says 'Thousands' Joining New Army," *The Defense Post*, February 10, 2025, <https://thedefensepost.com/2025/02/10/syria-thousands-joining-army/> (accessed May 8, 2025).

Kurds will continue to be required to serve in any military forces in Syria.<sup>43</sup> It can be argued that there may be differences between what is written, and what is implemented. Over time, the effectiveness and durability of this agreement will become clearer. I would like to make a few additional observations about the constitutions of 1973 and 2012. First, the term “Arab” appears *sixty-two* times in the constitution of 1973, while the terms “Arab,” “Arabism,” and “Arabic” appear *thirty-two* times in the constitution of 2012.<sup>44</sup> In both constitutions, the term “Arab” and related words can, on the one hand, be *positive*, for Armenians and other religious minorities in Syria, while, on the other hand, it can also be *negative* for Armenians in Syria. On the positive side, although Armenians are definitely not Arabs, there have been times when Armenians living in Arab countries, have either directly or indirectly, *benefited* from legal and cultural emphasis on Arab identity, in the sense that this emphasis has at times tended to emphasize the *secular* aspects of Arab societies. Because Armenians are Christians, they have benefited from the secular aspects of assertions of Arab identity on the part of Arabs in the sense that it has given Armenians more freedom religiously and in other respects than the kind of emphasis on Islamic law, which Sunni Islamist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)<sup>45</sup> and related groups espouse.

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<sup>43</sup> Eyad Kourdi and Kareem El Damanhoury, “Syria’s New Government Strikes Deal to Integrate Powerful Kurdish Rival in Landmark Agreement” CNN, March 11, 2025, [https://www.cnn.com/2025/03/10/middleeast/kurdish-syria-sdf-deal-intl-latam/index.html#:~:text=As%20part%20of%20his%20broader,in%20a%20statement%20on%20X](https://www.cnn.com/2025/03/10/middleeast/kurdish-syria-sdf-deal-intl-latam/index.html#:~:text=As%20part%20of%20his%20broader,in%20a%20statement%20on%20X.). (accessed May 8, 2025); Ahmad Khalil and Karen Leigh, “YPG’s Mandatory Military Service Rattles Kurds: A New Law Stipulates that Young Men in the Cantons of Kobani, Ifrin and Al-Jazeera Must Enlist. Now, Some Have Begun to Flee.” *News Deeply: Syria Deeply*, August 27, 2014 <https://www.newsdeeply.com/syria/articles/2014/08/27/ypps-mandatory-military-service-rattles-kurds> (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>44</sup> *Syrian Arab Republic: Constitution, 1973*, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/44d8a4e84.html> (accessed May 4, 2025); *Syrian Arab Republic: Constitution, 2012*, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5100f02a2.html> (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>45</sup> The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), al-Qaida, the Nusra Front, and similar Sunni Islamist groups, although different from each other in certain respects, largely share a common goal of establishing Sharia (or Islamic law) in all the areas which they control and throughout the world. Typically, many members of those groups hope that eventually everyone in the world will convert to Islam and that Sharia will govern everyone, in view of these Islamists’ interpretation of Islam’s sacred texts and early Islamic history which indicate to them that Islam is the only true religion. For the members of these Islamist groups, there is no distinction in Sharia between the secular, on the one hand, and the religious, on the other, because in their minds God is all-knowing and he knows what is best for humans with respect to every aspect of their lives. In this context, all Muslims, who disagree with these Islamist groups, and all non-Muslims, whether or not they affiliate with a religion, have

While Arabs' assertions of Arab identity, in and of themselves, may not necessarily benefit Armenians, *the secular laws and practices*, which are often associated with assertions of Arab identity, can indirectly benefit Armenians.

On the negative side, whenever Arab identity is asserted as an *emphatic ethnic and cultural* category, which excludes and even perpetrates hostility against non-Arabs, this can pose a great danger to the lives and futures of Armenians. Thus, this kind of nuanced understanding of Arabism and Pan-Arabism can be helpful to Armenians and other ethnic and religious minorities in the Middle East, because to the extent that these minorities can influence the ways, which Arabism and Pan-Arabism are expressed, Armenians and other ethnic and religious minorities benefit most from its expressions which are secular and *inclusive* of non-Arabs.<sup>46</sup>

In a second and related matter, in both the 1973 and 2012 constitutions, the term Islam and related words can, under certain circumstances, be *positive* for Armenians and other religious minorities in Syria, while, under other circumstances, the term Islam can be negative for Armenians and other religious minorities in Syria. In the 1973 constitution, the terms Islam or Islamic are mentioned two times.<sup>47</sup> In the 2012 constitution of Syria, the terms "Islam" or "Islamic" are mentioned two times.<sup>48</sup> In this context, both constitutions state that the "religion of the President of the Republic [of Syria] must be Islam" and that "Islamic jurisprudence is a main source of

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fallen short of understanding the requirements which God has placed on humanity. In this vein, at certain times some of these Sunni Islamists have exhibited a limited amount of toleration toward Muslims who disagree with them and toward non-Muslims. At other times, these Sunni Islamists have exhibited outright hostility toward such persons by killing them, injuring them, and/or seizing or damaging their property. The following are some sources which provide information and analysis of various Sunni Islamist groups: Jon Armajani, *Modern Islamist Movements: History, Religion, and Politics*, Oxford, UK, Wiley-Blackwell, 2012; Fawaz A. Gerges, *ISIS: A History*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2016; Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*, Cambridge University Press, New Edition, New York, 2010; Joby Warrick, *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS*, Anchor Books, 2016, New York. For information on ISIS's persecution of Christians in Syria and Iraq, see Claire Giangravè, "Orthodox Leader Calls Moscow and Rome to Support Persecuted Christians," *Crux*, August 21, 2017 <https://cruxnow.com/global-church/2017/08/orthodox-leader-calls-moscow-rome-support-persecuted-christians> (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>46</sup> Nicola Migliorino, *(Re)Constructing Armenia in Lebanon and Syria: Ethno-Cultural Diversity and the State in the Aftermath of a Refugee Crisis*, Bergahn Books, New York, 2008, 118-121.

<sup>47</sup> *Syrian Arab Republic: Constitution, 1973*, Chapter 1; Part 1; Article 3, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/44d8a4e84.html> accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>48</sup> *Syrian Arab Republic: Constitution, 2012*, Chapter 1; Part 1; Article 3, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5100f02a2.html> (accessed May 4, 2025).

legislation.”<sup>49</sup> In my view, the fact that the President of Syria must be a Muslim is not necessarily harmful to Armenians, non-Armenian Christians, and other religious minorities in Syria as long as that President and his government administer the country in such a manner which truly guarantees religious freedom and the government’s protection of Christians, including Armenians, in Syria, for example.

In this regard, Syria’s Baath Party had a dominant role in Syria’s political life since at least 1963 when Amin al-Hafiz, who was a member of the Baath Party, became Syria’s President.<sup>50</sup> Every Syrian President from that time until the end of Bashar al-Assad’s presidency in 2024, has been a member of the Baath Party.<sup>51</sup> In this vein, while after Syria’s parliamentary election in 2012, certain other parties in Syria (such as the Socialist Unionists, two different factions of the Communist Party of Syria, the National Vow Movement, and the Arab Socialist Union, all of which are members of the Baath Party’s coalition) had held a small number of seats in the People’s Council of Syria, which was the name of Syria’s parliament, the majority of seats had been won by the Baath Party.<sup>52</sup> Thus, while minority political parties, virtually all of which are secular, may have had a small amount of influence in Syria’s political life, I could not find any evidence that any seats in the People’s Council of Syria had been specifically reserved for religious, ethnic, and/or linguistic minorities in that country, nor could I find any information about the ethnic, political, and religious affiliations of the members of that Council, until the end of Bashar al-Assad’s presidency. At the same time, the following table contains information about the results of the April 13, 2016 election for the People’s Council of Syria.

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<sup>49</sup> *Syrian Arab Republic: Constitution, 1973*, Chapter 1; Part 1; Article 3, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/44d8a4e84.html> (accessed May 4, 2025); *Syrian Arab Republic: Constitution, 2012*, Chapter 1; Part 1; Article 3, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5100f02a2.html> (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>50</sup> Richard Edwards, “Baath Party (Syria),” *The Encyclopedia of the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A Political, Social, and Military History, Volume 1: A-H*, Spencer C. Tucker ed., ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara, California, 2008, 183-85.

<sup>51</sup> “List of Presidents of Syria,” *Wikipedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Presidents\\_of\\_Syria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Presidents_of_Syria) (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>52</sup> “People’s Council of Syria,” *Wikipedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People%27s\\_Council\\_of\\_Syria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People%27s_Council_of_Syria) (accessed May 4, 2025).

Table of Results from Election Held on April 13, 2016 for the People's Council of Syria <sup>53</sup>	
Political Group	Seats
Baath Arab Party	172
Independents	62
Syrian Social Nationalist Party	7
Syrian Communist Party	4
Socialist Unionists	2
Socialist Unionist Party	2
Harakat al-Ahd al-Watani (National Vow Movement)	1

Distribution of Seats According to Gender <sup>54</sup>	
Males	217
Females	33
Percentage of Seats Comprised of Female Members of Parliament	13.20%

With respect to Syria's 2012 Constitution, that country's diverse ethnoreligious weave seems to have had an impact on that constitution in a few ways, including its emphasis on democratic principles. For example, the introduction of that constitution states:

The completion of this Constitution is the culmination of the people's struggle on the road to freedom and democracy. It is a real embodiment of achievements, a response to shifts and changes, an evidence of organizing the march of the state towards the future, a regulator of the

<sup>53</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union Database (IPU Parline Database: Syria), *Syrian Arab Republic: Majlis Al-Chaab (People's Assembly)*, under the subheading "Last Election," <http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2307.htm> (accessed May 4, 2025). The address of the headquarters of the Inter-Parliamentary Union is 5, chemin du Pommier; Case postale 330; CH-1218 Le Grand-Saconnex; Geneva, Switzerland, and the Inter-Parliamentary Union has a Permanent Observer in the United Nations. See also Jon Armajani, "Syria's Constitutions and Their Relationships to Minorities," *Armenians of Syria*, 247, <https://haigrepository.haigazian.edu.lb/items/48eafe75-7e0b-4ab4-8089-c49ca2186e54> (accessed May 20, 2025).

<sup>54</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union Database (IPU Parline Database: Syria), *Syrian Arab Republic: Majlis Al-Chaab (People's Assembly)*, under the subheading "Last Election," <http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2307.htm> (accessed May 4, 2025). The address of the headquarters of the Inter-Parliamentary Union is 5, chemin du Pommier; Case postale 330; CH-1218 Le Grand-Saconnex; Geneva, Switzerland, and the Inter-Parliamentary Union has a Permanent Observer in the United Nations. See also Jon Armajani, "Syria's Constitutions and Their Relationships to Minorities," *Armenians of Syria*, 247, <https://haigrepository.haigazian.edu.lb/items/48eafe75-7e0b-4ab4-8089-c49ca2186e54> (accessed May 20, 2025).

movement of its institutions and a source of legislation. All of this is attainable through a system of fundamental principles that enshrines independence, sovereignty and the rule of the people based on election, political and party pluralism and the protection of national unity, cultural diversity, public freedoms, human rights, social justice, equality, equal opportunities, citizenship and the rule of law, where the society and the citizen are the objective and purpose for which every national effort is dedicated. Preserving the dignity of the society and the citizen is an indicator of the civilization of the country and the prestige of the state.<sup>55</sup>

The 2012 constitution's emphasis on Islam, on the one hand, and its emphasis on inclusion and democracy, on the other, were some manifestations of Syria's diverse ethnoreligious weave. At the same time, during the presidency of Bashar al-Assad, there had been an asymmetrical plurality in Syria's laws and constitutions in the sense that those entities gave a privileged position to Islam, on the one hand, while attempting to affirm democracy and inclusion, on the other.<sup>56</sup> To a certain extent, these and some other elements of Syria's 2012 constitution are present in the Constitutional Declaration of the Syrian Republic, which was signed on March 13, 2025 and went into effect on that date.<sup>57</sup>

#### OVERTHROW OF THE GOVERNMENT OF BASHAR AL-ASSAD

On December 8, 2024, the Islamist group, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, and other opponents of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad overthrew his government, causing him to leave the country. On that date, a new government, under the leadership of Ahmed al-Sharaa, who was the Emir (or leader) of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, took control of Syria's government and began establishing a new government for that country. He was inaugurated as that country's president on January 29, 2025.<sup>58</sup> On that day, the Syrian

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<sup>55</sup> *Syrian Arab Republic: Constitution, 2012*, Introduction, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5100f02a2.html> (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>56</sup> Van Eijk, 209-10.

<sup>57</sup> Constitutional Declaration of the Syrian Republic, March 13, 2025, 1, 15. <https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/2025-03/2025.03.13%20-%20Constitutional%20declaration%20%28English%29.pdf> (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>58</sup> Marsin Alshamary, Asli Aydintasbas, Vanda Felbab-Brown, Jeffrey Feltman, Sharan Grewal, Steven Heydemann, Mara Karlin, Kemal Kirisci, Suzanne Maloney, Itamar Rabinovich, Bruce Riedel, Natan Sachs, Angela Stent, and Shibley Telhami, "The Assad Regime Falls. What Happens Now? Brookings Experts Weigh In," The Brookings Institution, December 9, 2024 <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-assad-regime-falls-what-happens-now/> (accessed May 5, 2025); Al-Jazeera Staff, "President al-Sharaa and No More Baath Party: What Else has Syria Announced? Ahmed al-Sharaa Has Been Syria's

government declared that Syria's Baath party, which was the political party of Bashar al-Assad, and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham were dissolved.<sup>59</sup> Under al-Sharaa's leadership, Syria's Constitutional Declaration of the Syrian Republic was signed and went into effect.<sup>60</sup>

The following factors, among others, led to the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad and his government.

1. Israel's targeted assassinations of leaders of Hezbollah and attacks on its military assets, beginning after Hamas's large-scale attack on Israel on October 7, 2023; Israel's actions weakened Hezbollah's and Iran's abilities to support Assad's government;<sup>61</sup>

2. Israel's frequent bombings of the military assets of Hezbollah, Iran, and Syria within Syria since the beginning of Syria's civil war in 2011, which damaged all of those entities' abilities to defend Bashar al-Assad's government;<sup>62</sup>

3. Weakening of Russia's ability to support Bashar al-Assad militarily and in other ways because of Russia's war in Ukraine;<sup>63</sup>

4. Weakening of Syria's military because of that country's long civil war and sanctions against Bashar al-Assad's government and related entities;<sup>64</sup>

5. Opposition within Syria to Bashar al-Assad's government because of its oppressive actions against its adversaries within Syria;<sup>65</sup>

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de facto Leader Since the Ouster of Bashar al-Assad in December," *al-Jazeera*, January 29, 2025 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/1/29/president-al-sharaa-and-no-more-baath-party-what-else-has-syria-announced> (accessed May 5, 2025).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Constitutional Declaration of the Syrian Republic, March 13, 2025, 1, 15, <https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/2025-03/2025.03.13%20-%20Constitutional%20declaration%20%28English%29.pdf> (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>61</sup> Bethan McKernan, "Hezbollah's War with Israel Left the Assad Regime Fatally Exposed," *The Guardian*, December 8, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/dec/08/hezbollah-war-with-israel-left-the-assad-regime-syria-fatally-exposed> (accessed May 5, 2025).

<sup>62</sup> Zena Al Tahhan, "Why Does Israel Keep Attacking Syria?" *Al-Jazeera*, October 23, 2017 <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/10/23/why-does-israel-keep-attacking-syria> (accessed May 5, 2025).

<sup>63</sup> Anton Troianovski "Bogged Down in Ukraine, Russia Pays a Price in Syria," *New York Times*, December 8, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/08/world/europe/russia-syria-assad-putin.html>

<sup>64</sup> Gabija Leclerc, "Impact of Sanctions on the Humanitarian Situation in Syria," European Parliamentary Research Service, June 2023, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/749765/EPRS\\_BRI\(2023\)749765\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/749765/EPRS_BRI(2023)749765_EN.pdf) (accessed May 5, 2025).

<sup>65</sup> Al-Jazeera Staff, "What Happened in Syria? How did al-Assad Fall?" *Al-Jazeera*, December 8, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/12/8/what-happened-in-syria-has-al-assad-really-fallen> (accessed May 5, 2025).

6. Eventual disloyalty of members of Syria's military against Bashar al-Assad because of his government's oppressive policies and actions;<sup>66</sup> and

7. The organizational and military strength of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), with Turkey's support, and HTS's rapid military victories in Syria in November and December of 2025, which concluded in their conquest of Damascus that led to the demise of Bashar al-Assad's government.<sup>67</sup>

This was the context which led to Ahmad al-Sharaa's rise to power and the writing of the Constitutional Declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic of 2025.<sup>68</sup>

That document was prepared by a small committee of seven Syrian members who were appointed by Ahmad al-Sharaa.<sup>69</sup> They drafted the constitutional declaration relatively quickly, finalizing the text in approximately two weeks. The writers of that document are generally viewed as professional and independent, although they could not propose anything that al-Sharaa would reject. In principle, they were supposed to be guided by the outcomes of Syria's national dialogue conference, which took place on February 25, 2025.<sup>70</sup> However, because the results of that conference were vague, they did not have a significant impact on the constitutional committee's deliberations. The

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<sup>66</sup> "Why the Assad Regime Collapsed in Syria - and Why So Fast," France 24, December 8, 2024, <https://www.france24.com/en/middle-east/20241208-why-the-assad-regime-collapsed-in-syria-and-why-so-fast> (accessed May 5, 2025).

<sup>67</sup> Sinan Ciddi and Sophia Epley, "Turkey and HTS: A New Era of Extremism in Syria?" Foundation for Defense of Democracies, January 15, 2025 [https://www.fdd.org/analysis/op\\_edds/2025/01/15/turkey-and-hts-a-new-era-of-extremism-in-syria/](https://www.fdd.org/analysis/op_edds/2025/01/15/turkey-and-hts-a-new-era-of-extremism-in-syria/) (accessed May 5, 2025); Muaz Al Abdullah and Hanane Sallam, "Actor Profile: Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)," July 26, 2024, <https://acleddata.com/2023/07/26/actor-profile-hayat-tahrir-al-sham-hts/#:~:text=HTS%20remains%20the%20most%20powerful,in%20its%20areas%20of%20operation> (accessed May 5, 2025); Lauren Frayer, "Who's Been Funding the HTS Rebels Now in Control of Syria?," NPR (National Public Radio in the USA), December 20, 2024, <https://www.npr.org/2024/12/19/nx-s1-5232809/syria-hts-funding#:~:text=In%20October%202023%2C%20HTS%20expanded,the%20drones%2C%22%20Gerges%20says> (accessed May 6, 2025).

<sup>68</sup> Nadim Houry, "Discussing Syria's Constitutional Declaration: Interview with Zaid Al-Ali," Arab Reform Initiative, April 10, 2025, <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/discussing-syrias-constitutional-declaration-interview-with-zaid-al-ali/#:~:text=ZA:%20It%20was%20prepared%20by,2005%20constitution%20in%20that%20regard> (accessed May 5, 2025).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.; Ibrahim Al-Assil, "The National Dialogue in Syria: A Step Forward or a Concerning Trajectory?" Middle East Institute, March 5, 2025, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/national-dialogue-syria-step-forward-or-concerning-trajectory> (accessed May 5, 2025).

constitutional declaration was not subject to formal processes of public discussion or review.<sup>71</sup> That draft was submitted to President Al-Sharaa who signed it on March 13, 2025.<sup>72</sup>

## CONSTITUTIONAL DECLARATION OF THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC OF 2025

Most of Syria's laws, which were in effect during Bashar al-Assad's rule continue to be in place during the presidency of Ahmad al-Sharaa. In that regard, Article 51 of the Constitutional Declaration of the Syrian Republic of 2025 states, "Legislation already in force shall remain in effect unless amended or appealed."<sup>73</sup> Consistent with that constitutional principle, according to a March 2025 article in *The Economist* magazine, Ahmad al-Sharaa "has held back from applying Islamic law. The old regime's judges -- male and female, Muslim and non-Muslim, veiled and unveiled -- still uphold its laws. Damascus's criminal court has even retained its unisex loos [restrooms]."<sup>74</sup>

In that context, there are several principles in Syria's 2025 Constitutional Declaration which are relevant to Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities in that country. For example, that constitutional declaration's introduction emphasizes "building a state of citizenship, freedom, dignity and the rule of law" while Article 2 states the importance of Syria's political system "guarantee[ing] freedom and dignity for the citizen."<sup>75</sup> While the constitutional declaration states that the "religion of the President of the Republic is Islam, and Islamic jurisprudence is the principal source of legislation," freedom of "belief is protected."<sup>76</sup> At the same time, the constitutional declaration states, "The personal status of religious sects is protected and respected in accordance with the law."<sup>77</sup>

The constitutional declaration's principles related to cultural and linguistic rights may also be beneficial to Armenians and other ethnic minorities in

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<sup>71</sup> Houry.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Constitutional Declaration of the Syrian Republic, March 13, 2025, Article 51. <https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/2025-03/2025.03.13%20-%20Constitutional%20declaration%20%28English%29.pdf> (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>74</sup> "New Regime, Old Problems. Syria Has Got Rid of Bashar al-Assad, but Not Sectarian Tensions: Its New Rulers Seem Torn between Reassuring Minorities and Appeasing their Jihadist Base," *The Economist*, March 6, 2025 <https://www.economist.com/briefing/2025/03/06/syria-has-got-rid-of-bashar-al-assyad-but-not-sectarian-tensions> (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>75</sup> Constitutional Declaration of the Syrian Republic, March 13, 2025, Introduction and Article 2.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., Article 3.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

Syria. Article 7 stipulates, “The State guarantees the cultural diversity of Syrian society in all its components, and the cultural and linguistic rights of all Syrians.”<sup>78</sup> Article 8 of the constitutional declaration addresses matters related to reconstruction, refugees, and extremism, all of which may be helpful to Armenians in Syria. For example, that article stipulates, “The state seeks to coordinate with relevant countries and entities to support the reconstruction process in Syria.”<sup>79</sup> Concomitantly, “The State shall work in coordination with relevant countries and international organizations to overcome obstacles to the voluntary return of refugees, displaced persons, and all forcibly displaced persons.”<sup>80</sup> That provision can be potentially useful to the Armenians, who have left Syria and would like to return to that country, as well as Armenians, who are in Syria, and hope that Syrians, whom they know, will return to that country. The constitutional declaration’s stipulation related to combatting extremism can be helpful to Armenians, especially if it is used to combat the anti-Christian perspectives and actions of Islamist groups such as al-Qaida, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). According to that constitutional stipulation, “The state is committed to combating all types and forms of violent extremism, while respecting rights and freedoms.”<sup>81</sup>

Those constitutional principles align with Article 10 of Syria’s 2025 constitutional declaration, which states, “Citizens are equal before the law in rights and duties, without discrimination based on race, religion, gender or lineage.”<sup>82</sup> That provision has the potential of benefiting Syria’s Armenians because they are ethnic and religious minorities in that country. Chapter Two of the constitutional declaration, which is entitled “Rights and Freedoms,” contains several articles that relate to those topics.<sup>83</sup> The constitutional declaration protects rights to expression, privacy, movement, political participation, assembly, and work.<sup>84</sup> It also protects Syrians’ rights to possess private property, while making statements that are intended to safeguard due process, human dignity, families, children, women, and the inviolability of homes.<sup>85</sup>

According to Article 52 of the constitutional declaration, that document will be in effect for an “interim period,” which will be “five calendar years, commencing from the date of entry into force of [the] Constitutional Declaration [which was March 13, 2025]. It shall end after the adoption of a

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., Article 7.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., Article 8.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., Article 10.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., Chapter 2, Articles 12-23 and p. 15.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., Articles 12-15.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., Articles 16-23.

permanent constitution for the country and the holding of elections in accordance therewith.”<sup>86</sup> During that five-year interim period and possibly after it, according to the constitutional declaration, “Legislative power is exercised by the People’s Assembly.”<sup>87</sup> During that period, “The President of the Republic [Syria] shall form a higher committee to select members of the People’s Assembly.”<sup>88</sup> At the same time, “The Supreme Committee shall supervise the formation of electoral sub-committees, and these shall elect two-thirds of the members of the People’s Assembly.”<sup>89</sup> In addition, “the President of the Republic appoints one-third of the members of the People’s Assembly to ensure fair representation and efficiency.”<sup>90</sup> Syria’s President may appoint the members of the People’s Assembly within sixty days of the implementation of the constitutional declaration.<sup>91</sup> Along those lines, “the People’s Assembly shall assume legislative authority until a permanent constitution is adopted and legislative elections are organised in accordance with that constitution.”<sup>92</sup> In addition, “The term of the People’s Assembly is thirty months, renewable.”<sup>93</sup> The People’s Assembly’s responsibilities include proposing and approving laws; amending or repealing previous laws; ratifying international treaties; approving the state’s general budget and general amnesty; accepting or rejecting the resignation of one of its members or lifting that person’s immunity, in accordance with its internal regulations; and holding hearings for ministers.<sup>94</sup>

In terms of the responsibilities of Syria’s President, according to Syria’s 2025 constitutional declaration, that person is the supreme commander of the army and armed forces,<sup>95</sup> while having the responsibility of appointing ministers, dismissing them from their positions, and accepting their resignations.<sup>96</sup> Syria’s President and other members of the executive branch are also responsible for implementing approved laws, plans, and programs;

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., Article 52.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., Chapter Three: The System of Government During the Transitional Phase; First - The Legislative Authority.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., Article 24.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> The New Arab Staff, “Syria’s New Constitution: Key Changes, Muslim President Rule, and Kurdish Exclusion,” *The New Arab*, March 3, 2025 <https://www.newarab.com/news/syrias-new-constitution-what-we-know-so-far#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Arabic%2Dlanguage%20publication%2C%20Syria's%20president,60%20days%20of%20issuing%20the%20constitutional%20declaration> (accessed May 24, 2025).

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., Article 26.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., Article 30.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., Article 32.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., Article 35.

managing state affairs and implementing public policies that achieve stability and development; preparing general plans for the state; managing the state's public resources and ensuring their effective and transparent use; rebuilding public institutions and strengthening the rule of law and good governance; building the security institutions to ensure the strengthening of internal security and stability and the protection of citizens' rights and freedoms; building a professional national army whose mission is to defend the country's borders and sovereignty; and strengthening international relations and cooperation with international organizations, in order to achieve Syria's national interests.<sup>97</sup>

In addition to the legislative and executive authorities (or branches of government), Syria's constitutional declaration calls for a judicial authority (or branch of government). According to that document, "the judiciary is independent, and judges are subject only to the law."<sup>98</sup> Also, "the Supreme Judicial Council shall ensure the proper functioning of the judiciary and respect for its independence."<sup>99</sup> If Syria's 2025 constitutional declaration is implemented in accordance with its apparently democratic, free, and fair principles, it could provide Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities in that country significant protections. It could also establish a situation, where their interests may be represented in the People's Assembly and judiciary.

Indeed, on March 29, 2025, President al-Sharaa announced the appointment of twenty-three new government ministers, which included a Christian as social affairs and labor minister, an Alawite as transportation minister, a Druze as agriculture minister, and a Kurd as education minister.<sup>100</sup> This government is intended to rule for five years beginning in March 2025, until a permanent constitution is implemented.<sup>101</sup>

## THE KURDS

Within this milieu, the Kurds in Syria hold a unique, yet somewhat marginalized status.<sup>102</sup> While a majority of the Kurds in Syria are Muslims, Syrian political leaders have been deeply suspicious of the desire, which many Kurds have, to establish an independent state. Historically, Syrian

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., Article 42.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., Article 43.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Alex MacDonald, "Syria Reveals New Religiously Diverse Interim Government," *Middle East Eye*, March 30, 2025, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/syria-reveals-new-religiously-diverse-interim-government> (accessed May 6, 2025).

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Kerim Yildiz, *The Kurds in Syria: The Forgotten People*, Pluto Press, London, UK, 2005, 91-93; Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurds: A Modern History*, Markus Wiener Publishers, Princeton, New Jersey, 2016, 87-132.

governments have utilized a variety of policies in their attempts to marginalize Kurds and block them from establishing an independent state.<sup>103</sup> In this effort, in 1962 the Syrian government undertook a census in the Jazira province in north-eastern Syria, where there is a large Kurdish population, in view of that Syrian government's concern that non-Syrian Kurds had immigrated illegally into Syria from Turkey. Kurds, who were in Syria, had to prove that they had lived in Syria since at least 1945. As a result of that 1962 census, approximately 120,000 Kurds, who were living in Syria, were deemed by the Syrian government as not qualifying for Syrian citizenship. Then, in 1963, the Syrian government began pursuing a policy which encouraged Arabs to resettle in areas where large numbers of Kurds had traditionally lived and to create an "Arab belt" in order to separate the Kurds in Syria from the Kurds in Turkey for the purpose of suppressing Kurdish nationalism.<sup>104</sup>

In the early 1970s, the Syrian government began undertaking a resettlement plan in the Jazira province that involved establishing model farms and villages, which were populated by Arabs. The Syrian government transferred the lands on which it had built the model farms from Kurdish owners to Arab owners, with the justification that the Kurds, from whom the lands were being transferred, had not proved their Syrian citizenship and/or residency in accordance with the government policies under the 1962 census.<sup>105</sup> In 1975, the Syrian government resettled an estimated four thousand Arab families, whose lands had been submerged by the construction of the Tabqa dam on the Euphrates, to forty-one model farms within Syria's Kurdish region. The Syrian government suspended the Arab belt project in 1976, and did not dismantle the model villages nor return ownership of the land to the Kurds.<sup>106</sup>

At the same time, various Syrian presidential administrations have attempted to repress Kurdish identity by restricting the use of the Kurdish language in public, in schools, and in workplaces; these administrations have also banned Kurdish-language publications and prohibited celebrations of Kurdish festivities such as Nowruz, which is the traditional Kurdish New Year. Hafez al-Assad's government's restrictions on the Kurdish language stood "in contrast to Syria's treatment of its other non-Arab minorities, such as the Armenians and Assyrians, who are allowed to have private schools, clubs, and

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<sup>103</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Group Denial: Repression of Kurdish Political and Cultural Rights in Syria*, Human Rights Watch, New York, 2009, 10. [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/syria1109webwcover\\_0.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/syria1109webwcover_0.pdf) (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>104</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Group Denial*, 10; Jordi Tejel, *Syria's Kurds: History, Politics and Society*, Routledge, London, 2009, 51-52; Yildiz, 33-41.

<sup>105</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Group Denial*, 11.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

cultural associations, where their respective languages are taught.”<sup>107</sup> In 1967, school geography texts in Syria excluded references to Kurds in Syria, and “government registry officials began pressuring Kurds not to give their children Kurdish first names.”<sup>108</sup> The Syrian government under Hafez al-Assad “also renamed Kurdish regions and villages to give them an Arab identity, many through an administrative ordinance in 1977.”<sup>109</sup> Within this context, because Armenians in Syria have not had political aspirations and demands, they have not been antagonized or looked upon with suspicion by Syria’s governments, unlike the Kurds, who have been oppressed by various Syrian administrations.<sup>110</sup> At the same time, Christians in Syria, including Armenians, have had a tendency to support Syria’s governments, albeit nervously, under the Assads and al-Sharaa for several reasons, including the fact that those Christians have viewed those governments as potential safeguards against Sunni Muslim dominance. Concurrently, Armenians and other Christians in Syria are suspicious of al-Sharaa and his former leadership position in HTS, because of its Islamism.<sup>111</sup>

#### AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE SYRIAN DEMOCRATIC FORCES (SDF) AND THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT

Regarding subsequent developments related to Syria’s Kurds, on March 10, 2025, al-Sharaa’s government and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which is a Kurdish-led coalition of United States-backed groups, reached an agreement for the SDF to integrate all civil and military institutions in northeastern Syria into the new Syrian state.<sup>112</sup>

That agreement states the following:

1. There will be an ensuring of the rights of all Syrians in representation and participation in the political process and all the state’s institutions on the basis of competency, regardless of their religious and ethnic backgrounds;

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Marco Werman and Marine Olivesi, “Syrian Armenian Refugees Back President Assad,” PRI’s *The World*, August 15, 2013, <https://theworld.org/stories/2013/08/15/syrian-armenian-refugees-back-president-assad> (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>111</sup> Van Eijk, 208; Shant Khatcherian, “Aleppo’s Armenians in a Changing Syria,” *Armenian Weekly*, March 28, 2025, <https://armenianweekly.com/2025/03/28/aleppos-armenians-in-a-changing-syria/> (accessed May 24, 2025).

<sup>112</sup> Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, “The SDF-Syrian Agreement: Translation and Overview,” *Middle East Forum*, March 10, 2025, <https://www.meforum.org/mef-online/the-sdf-syrian-agreement-translation-and-overview> (accessed May 6, 2025).

2. The Kurdish community is an indigenous community in the Syrian state and the Syrian state ensures its rights in citizenship and all constitutional rights;

3. There will be a ceasefire over all the Syrian lands;

4. There will be a merging of all the civil and military institutions in northeast Syria within the Syrian state's administration, including the border crossings and airport, as well as oil and gas fields;

5. There will be an ensuring of the return of all displaced Syrians to their localities and villages and an ensuring of their protection by the Syrian state;

6. There will be support of the Syrian state in its fight against all the threats to its security and unity;

7. There will be a rejection of calls for division and hateful rhetoric, and attempts to spread internal strife between all the components of Syrian society; and

8. Executive committees will work and strive to implement the agreement by the end of 2025.<sup>113</sup>

In some respects, that agreement could be a positive step in the potentially long and difficult process of unifying Syria, while including Kurds in that process.<sup>114</sup> In this context, relations between Armenians and Kurds in Syria remain complex. Armenians and Kurds in Syria are non-Arab minorities, in a country with an Arab majority. At the same time, Armenians and Kurds are deeply suspicious of Turkey because of highly aggressive actions that Ottomans and Turks have taken against both groups. Yet, reasons for suspicions between Armenians and Kurds relate to the fact that they are of different ethnicities and religions. At the same time, Armenians and Kurds are suspicious of Ahmad al-Sharaa because of his Islamist past, and because HTS received support from Turkey. The specific dynamics of the relationships between Armenians and Kurds under Syria's post-Assad government(s) remain to be seen.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid; "Syria Merges Kurdish-Led Syrian Democratic Forces into State Institutions," *Al-Jazeera*, March 10, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/3/10/syria-merges-kurdish-led-syrian-democratic-forces-into-state-institutions> (accessed May 6, 2025).

<sup>114</sup> "A Glimmer of Peace in Syria's North East," International Crisis Group, March 28, 2025, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/east-mediterranean-mena/syria-iraq-turkiye-united-states/glimmer-peace-syrias-north-east#:~:text=The%20agreement%20outlines%20several%20principles,and%20oil%20and%20gas%20fields%E2%80%9D>. (accessed May 6, 2025).

<sup>115</sup> Tigran Yegavian, "Armenians and Kurds: A Complex and Strategic Relationship," *EVN Report*, January 16, 2023, <https://evnreport.com/politics/armenians-and-kurds-a-complex-and-strategic-relationship/#> (accessed May 6, 2025); Alissa J. Rubin, "Kurdish Distrust of Syria's New Government Runs Deep," *New York Times*, April 29, 2025,

## FAMILY LAW AND RELATED MATTERS

In this context, it is worth considering family law, marriage and divorce law, bequest and inheritance law (all of which are typically categorized under the category of “personal status law”) as they relate to Armenians and other minorities in Syria.<sup>116</sup> These and related laws remain unchanged at the time of this writing.<sup>117</sup> In view of the fact that Syria is a state, where different Syrians are affiliated with different religions, over the years Syrian parliaments have provided for specialized court systems for major religions in Syria, in order to try cases related to personal status laws with respect to each community.<sup>118</sup> Two such courts are Islamic courts (also known as “Sharia courts”), which hear cases involving personal status, family and inheritance disputes among

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/28/world/middleeast/kurds-syria-government.html> (accessed May 6, 2025); Christina Goldbaum, Ben Hubbard, Raja Abdulrahim, and Hwaida Saad, “What to Know About Syria’s Minorities and Sectarian Violence,” *New York Times*, May 1, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/01/world/middleeast/syria-druse-alawites-kurds.html#:~:text=The%20Kurds%2C%20who%20make%20up,population%20of%20Arabs%20and%20Kurds>. (accessed May 6, 2025).

<sup>116</sup> Maurits S. Berger, “The Legal System of Family Law in Syria,” *Bulletin d’Études Orientales* 49:1997, 118.

<sup>117</sup> Muriel Rozelier, “Syria’s New Regime Moderates Religious Policy to Strengthen Its Rule,” *La Croix International*, April 2, 2025, <https://international.la-croix.com/world/syrias-new-regime-moderates-religious-policy-to-strengthen-its-rule#:~:text=Religious%20freedom%20in%20the%20new,just%20one%20source%20among%20others> (accessed May 8, 2025); Constitutional Declaration of the Syrian Republic, March 13, 2025, Article 51.

<https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/2025-03/2025.03.13%20-%20Constitutional%20declaration%20%28English%29.pdf> (accessed May 4, 2025); “New Regime, Old Problems,” *The Economist*, <https://www.economist.com/briefing/2025/03/06/syria-has-got-rid-of-bashar-al-assad-but-not-sectarian-tensions> (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>118</sup> Diab, “Religion and the Law in Syria,” in the section of that article entitled “1.4. Summary of the Syrian Judicial System,” [https://www.acihr.org/articles.htm?article\\_id=26](https://www.acihr.org/articles.htm?article_id=26) (accessed May 4, 2025). That article is not dated. However, it was published during or after 2009 in view of the fact that 2009 is the most recent publication date, which that article cites for several of its sources. The address of ACIHL’s office in Lyon is 29, rue Arago; 69100 Villeurbanne-Lyon; France. The address of ACIHL’s office in Strasbourg is 6, avenue Charles de Gaulle; 67800 Bischheim-Strasbourg. France. For another explanation of the concept of personal status law, see Camilo Gómez-Rivas, “Women, Sharia, and Personal Status Law Reform in Egypt After the Revolution,” Middle East Institute, October 1, 2011, <http://www.mei.edu/content/women-shari%E2%80%98and-personal-status-law-reform-egypt-after-revolution> (accessed May 4, 2025). Although that article focuses on Egypt, its conceptualization of personal status law is applicable for Syria and other majority-Muslim countries.

Syrian Muslims and non-Syrian Muslims, who adhere to personal status laws in their own countries.<sup>119</sup> Religious courts (also known as “ruhiyya courts”) settle cases and other difficulties related to personal status for Christians who belong to different rites (or branches of Christianity).<sup>120</sup> The five legally-recognized Christian groups in Syria are Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Protestant (also known as “Evangelical” in countries such as Syria and Lebanon), and Catholic.<sup>121</sup> According to Razi Diab, the Catholics are divided into Uniate churches which are Greek (Melkite), Syrian Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Chaldean (Nestorian), and Maronite as well as the Latin rite.<sup>122</sup> Diab states that most churches have a court of “first instance in every diocese and an appeal court in the city where the seat of the Patriarch is located.”<sup>123</sup>

On June 18, 2006, President Bashar al-Assad, based on what had been decided by the Syrian Parliament in its session on June 13, 2009, issued Law Number 31, year 2006 known as the “2006 Catholic Law of Personal Status” (CLPS) published in the *Syrian Official Gazette* Number 26, first part, July 2006.<sup>124</sup> This law granted total autonomy for the Catholic Christian community in matters of personal status.<sup>125</sup> Article 280 of the new law, which is No. 33, year 2006, expressly modified the Syrian Law of Personal Status (SLPS) and stopped the application of the latter on Catholics in Syria. Article 281 of Law Number 33, year 2006 gave Catholic courts the exclusive right to look into matters of the personal status of its members.<sup>126</sup> That law contained many innovations such as (1) granting equal inheritance rights to women and men; (2) allowing adoption, which is not possible in Islam; and (3) providing

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<sup>119</sup> Diab, in the section of that article entitled “1.4. Summary of the Syrian Judicial System,” [https://www.acihl.org/articles.htm?article\\_id=26](https://www.acihl.org/articles.htm?article_id=26) (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>120</sup> Diab, in the section of that article entitled “1.4. Summary of the Syrian Judicial System,” [https://www.acihl.org/articles.htm?article\\_id=26](https://www.acihl.org/articles.htm?article_id=26) (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>121</sup> Berger, “The Legal System of Family Law in Syria,” 119, n. 18.

<sup>122</sup> Diab, in the section of that article entitled “1.4. Summary of the Syrian Judicial System,” [https://www.acihl.org/articles.htm?article\\_id=26](https://www.acihl.org/articles.htm?article_id=26) (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, in the section of that article entitled “3.3. Application of The CPS [which stands for ‘Code of Personal Status’],” [https://www.acihl.org/articles.htm?article\\_id=26](https://www.acihl.org/articles.htm?article_id=26) (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, in the section of that article entitled “3.4. Return to the Origin: Law No. 31 Year 2006,” [https://www.acihl.org/articles.htm?article\\_id=26](https://www.acihl.org/articles.htm?article_id=26) (accessed May 4, 2025); Rozelier, <https://international.la-croix.com/world/syrias-new-regime-moderates-religious-policy-to-strengthen-its-rule#:~:text=Religious%20freedom%20in%20the%20new,just%20one%20source%20among%20others> (accessed May 8, 2025).

<sup>125</sup> Diab, in the section of that article entitled “3.4. Return to the Origin: Law No. 31 Year 2006.”

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

new rules for bequests and inheritance, among other matters.<sup>127</sup> According to Esther van Eijk, that 2006 law was considered revolutionary because it “granted the Catholic courts full jurisdiction in all matters of personal status.”<sup>128</sup> The CLPS and SLPS remain unchanged at the time of this writing.<sup>129</sup>

Van Eijk states that the “exceptional position of the Catholics vis-à-vis the other Christian groups was subject to criticism.”<sup>130</sup> In this vein, many non-Catholic Christians, in particular, were discontented because that 2006 law, in the view of many non-Catholic Christians, provided Catholics with a certain level of autonomy, which the non-Catholic Christians did not have, thus creating discrimination between different Christian communities in Syria.<sup>131</sup>

As a result of this discontent among non-Catholic Christians about the 2006 law, the Catholics’ distinctive status was changed, at the expense of the Catholics, when an amendment was made on September 29, 2010 to Article 308 of the Syrian Law of Personal Status (SLPS).<sup>132</sup> The second article of the 2010 amendment states that provisions of the Syriac Orthodox Personal Status Law, Greek Orthodox Personal Status Law, and the Catholic Personal Status Law, pertaining to matters of personal status “other than those listed in the revised Article 308 are abrogated by the amendment.”<sup>133</sup> As a result, “the amendment rendered a substantial part of the 2006 CLPS inoperative,” which means that its special exceptions for Catholics with respect to “adoption, legal guardianship, paternity (or descent), for example, are no longer applicable.”<sup>134</sup> Due to this amendment, the Catholics again fall under the scope of Article 308 and thus are back within the competence of the Islamic sharia courts, and the Catholics can no longer rely on their own courts to resolve those matters as was the case between June 18, 2006 and September 29, 2010.<sup>135</sup> In view of these and other contradictions between the 2006 and 2010 amendments, the status of the 2006 CLPS “remains unclear.”<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.; Van Eijk, 175; Ibrahim Ghabour’s, Esq., *Introduction to Syrian Personal Status and Family Law: Syrian Legislation and Jurisprudence on Marriage, Divorce, Custody, Guardianship and Adoption for the Purpose of Immigration to the United States*, n.p.: Jura Law, an imprint of TellerBooks, 2017, also provides helpful information related to personal status and family law in Syria.

<sup>128</sup> Van Eijk, 175.

<sup>129</sup> Rozelier.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Diab, in the section of that article entitled “3.4. Return to the Origin: Law No. 31 Year 2006,” [https://www.acihl.org/articles.htm?article\\_id=26](https://www.acihl.org/articles.htm?article_id=26) (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>132</sup> Van Eijk, 175.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

In a related matter, the significance of the SLPS becomes especially apparent when the jurisdictions of different religions intersect.<sup>137</sup> According to van Eijk, “When a non-Muslim woman marries a Muslim man, the SLPS will be applicable; when a Druze woman marries a Sunni Muslim man, again the SLPS will be applicable. A Christian or Jewish woman, that is, a woman who belongs to the *ahl al-kitab* (the recognized monotheistic religions) can marry a Muslim man, but it is not possible for a non-Muslim man to marry a Muslim woman, [in view of the fact that] Article 48.2 of the SLPS states that a marriage between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man is considered invalid (*batil*).<sup>138</sup>” If a non-Muslim man “wants to marry a Muslim woman, he must convert to Islam.<sup>139</sup> A Christian or Jewish woman who marries a Muslim man is not required to change her religion, but the children will be automatically Muslim and the wife cannot inherit from her husband because Article 264 sub B of the SLPS states that a non-Muslim cannot inherit from a Muslim.”<sup>140</sup> However, according to van Eijk, “when a woman converts to Islam and the husband does not, the marriage will be considered invalid and will be dissolved due to Article 48 paragraph 2.”<sup>141</sup> At the same time, “legally impossible marriages (such as a marriage between a Muslim woman and a Christian man) or socially unacceptable marriages can be circumvented by contracting a civil marriage abroad” (in Cyprus, for example).<sup>142</sup> One reason that these provisions within the SLPS manifest pro-Muslim preferences and contours is because they are strongly influenced by similar Ottoman laws, which preceded them.<sup>143</sup>

In this vein, the Sharia courts, which implement the SLPS, function “as national state courts and have full jurisdiction over all personal status matters involving Muslims and limited exclusive jurisdiction with regard to proof of paternity and legal guardianship over all Syrians, irrespective of their religion.”<sup>144</sup> According to van Eijk, “Syria’s plurality in family law is thus an unbalanced or asymmetrical plurality because the SLPS and the sharia courts clearly enjoy the upper hand over the other laws and courts.”<sup>145</sup> This affects in particular non-Muslim minorities, “most notably Christians, especially when these jurisdictions intersect, for example in the event of interdenominational or interreligious marriages or when one of the (Christian) spouses converts to

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid. 64.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 64-65.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 19-25.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

Islam ....”<sup>146</sup> When a spouse converts to Islam “the SLPS becomes the applicable law” and the Sharia courts “are considered the competent courts.”<sup>147</sup> This also means that “when a non-Muslim father or mother converts to Islam the religious identity of the converted parent automatically devolves upon the children.”<sup>148</sup> Consequently, the converted Muslim parent “can demand full custody over the children and the sharia courts have generally granted such requests in favor of the Muslim parent.”<sup>149</sup> The supremacy of the Muslim faith over other faiths, and with that the supremacy of the SLPS and the Sharia courts over other laws and courts are a manifestation of the asymmetrical plurality in Syria’s family law.<sup>150</sup>

## CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC RIGHTS

On the subject of cultural and linguistic rights with respect to religious and ethnic minorities in Syria, although Arabic is the country’s official language, the government permits the teaching of Armenian, Hebrew, Syriac, Aramaic, and Chaldean as “liturgical languages.”<sup>151</sup> At the same time, “all schools in Syria are overseen by the [Syrian] government and are non-sectarian.”<sup>152</sup> However, at least some Christians and Druze operate their schools in such a manner, which are consistent with the state’s curriculum.<sup>153</sup> At the same time, there is religious instruction in Syria’s schools with government-approved teachers and curricula.<sup>154</sup>

## ARMENIANS IN A POST-ASSAD SYRIA

While there is much uncertainty for Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities in Syria after the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad, there is cautious optimism among some Armenians, who live in Syria. In this regard, on March 20, 2025, a journalist with the *Armenian Weekly*, interviewed Armenian Archbishop Magar Ashkarian and Jiriar Reisian, an ex-member of Syria’s parliament who continues to be a political leader in the Syrian-Armenian community.<sup>155</sup> Archbishop Ashkarian expressed his hope that the

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2006, *Volume II: Report Submitted to Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate and the Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives by the Department of State in Accordance with Sections 116(d) and 502(b)B of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 as amended April 2008*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 2008, 2172.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Khatcherian.

situation in Syria will continue improving. He also stated that within approximately a year and a half from the time of the interview, the job market in Syria may reach a point where people can sustain themselves and have financial security. From the Archbishop's perspective, Syrians are hard-working people, and the country's economy will recover very quickly once basic necessities such as electricity and fuel become widely available again.<sup>156</sup> For his part, Jirair Reisian spoke positively of Christian-Muslim relations in Syria. He also noted that unemployment and security are the most significant concerns of Armenians in Syria, while stating his hope that, with time, the situation regarding those matters will improve.<sup>157</sup>

While Archbishop Askhkarian, Jirair Reisian, and some other Armenians in Syria express cautious optimism about the future, there are other Armenians in that country, who are living "with a persistent sense of fear, unsure of what the future holds" because of the Islamist leanings of al-Sharaa and some other Muslims in his government, according to an April 2025 article in the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* by George Meneshian.<sup>158</sup> Christians in Aleppo, Syria, including Armenians, were allowed to celebrate Christmas in 2025. However, life in Aleppo and other parts of Syria has not fully returned to its pre-conflict state, for Armenians. One significant change is that Christian-owned stores are closed on Fridays, which is a special day of prayer and worship for Muslims, while remaining open on Sundays, which is a special day of prayer and worship for most Christians. According to Meneshian, a similar pattern applies to schools; although they remain open, they are required to adhere to the Islamic calendar. For instance, Armenian schools were instructed to close during the Islamic Eid al-Fitr holiday, which took place in late March of 2025. Additionally, alcohol is banned, and there have been isolated incidents of verbal and physical attacks by Muslim individuals. Despite these challenges, the new authorities have not systematically targeted Christians.<sup>159</sup> At the same time, al-Sharaa's government's decision to elevate the role of Islamic law in the constitutional declaration of 2025 has sparked further fears among Armenians, many of whom are deeply concerned about the preservation of their religious freedoms and rights. Nevertheless, Armenian organizations and churches continue to operate, maintaining regular activities while community and religious leaders stay in close contact with the authorities.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> George Meneshian, "Life After Assad: The Challenges of Syria's Armenian Community," *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, April 7, 2025, <https://mirrorspectator.com/2025/04/07/life-after-assad-the-challenges-of-syrias-armenian-community/> (accessed May 6, 2025).

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

## HUMAN RIGHTS

With respect to human rights in Syria, according to Amnesty International's *The State of the World's Human Rights, April 2025*, Syria's humanitarian situation remained bleak.<sup>161</sup> According to that report, in August 2024, the United Nations reported that 16.7 million people required humanitarian aid to survive, which is the highest number since the beginning of Syria's civil war in 2011. At least ninety percent of Syria's population lived in poverty and 12.9 million were food insecure. The Humanitarian Response Plan for Syria remained underfunded, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). As of December 2024, only 33.4% of the \$4.07 billion needed for Syria had been secured.<sup>162</sup>

## ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

In this context, the World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook for Syria, which was published in April 2025, states that because Syria is subject to extraordinarily high uncertainty, real Gross Domestic Product is projected to contract by 1.0 percent in 2025, extending a 1.5 percent decline in 2024, due to persistent security instability, potential prolonged disruptions in oil supply, and tight liquidity conditions.<sup>163</sup> With the economic contraction, extreme poverty is projected to significantly increase between 2024 and 2025. According to the World Bank's outlook, Syria's economic future is highly uncertain. Security challenges remain acute, with armed groups retaining significant influence and the proliferation of weapons undermining centralized authority. Securing oil supply will be a major challenge for Syria's new government, as disrupted imports from Iran could drive up fuel prices and inflation. While some sanctions on Syria's energy, transportation, and financial sectors have been eased, frozen assets and restricted access to international banking continue to impede trade and investment. Further sanctions relief could enhance energy supply, foreign assistance, and humanitarian delivery. Additionally, reopened trade routes could facilitate the movement of goods and services and boost cross-border trade with Turkey and neighboring countries.<sup>164</sup>

Return movements have increased since the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad's government. Approximately 300,000 persons, which is 4.9 percent of the 6.3

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<sup>161</sup> Amnesty International, *The State of the World's Human Rights, April 2025* (Amnesty International, London, UK, 2025), 354 (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/middle-east/syria/report-syria/> (accessed May 6, 2025)).

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> World Bank, Macro Poverty Outlook, "Syrian Arab Republic," April 10, 2025, 2 (<https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/65cf93926fdb3ea23b72f277fc249a72-0500042021/related/mpo-syr.pdf> (accessed May 6, 2025)).

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

million Syrian refugees abroad, have returned to Syria since al-Sharaa's came to power in December 2024, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In addition, of the 7.4 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Syria, approximately 885,000 have returned to their areas of origin since late November 2024. While returnees pose a short-term challenge, as they require assistance with food, water, and fuel, for example, their return could boost growth in the medium term, because they may resume their business activities and bring much-needed skills and capital, which could increase aggregate demand and labor supply.<sup>165</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Fortunately for Armenians and other Christians, the Islamic concept of *ahl al-kitab* (which is based on moderate Islamic interpretations of Islam's sacred texts) and the related concept of *dhimmi* (or legally protected non-Muslim minority group) have, at various periods in Islamic history, provided some protection to Christians and certain other non-Muslim minority groups. Unfortunately, there have been numerous horrifically tragic exceptions such as the Hamidian massacres (also known as the Armenian Massacres of 1894 through 1896), the 1909 Adana Holocaust, and the Armenian genocide in 1915, when *dhimmi* status was a factor, which worked to the enormous harm of Armenians.<sup>166</sup>

In sharp contrast to the moderate interpretations of Islamic sacred texts and history which have, at certain times, provided a level of protection to Christians in majority-Muslim contexts, it is the periods in history when ostensibly secular governments, such as those of Hosni Mubarak and Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in Egypt, ignore both the secular and moderate Islamic principles, which are intended to protect religious minorities, when Christians in such contexts face enormous danger and harm.<sup>167</sup> Needless to say, with the rise and apparently growing strength, in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, of Sunni Islamist groups such as ISIS and al-Qaida, all of whom have largely or completely ignored the Islamic principles of *ahl al-kitab*, Armenians and other religious minority groups, and Muslims who disagree with these Sunni Islamist groups, have continued to face death, injury, destruction of their property, and forced exile from their homes.<sup>168</sup> For some Armenians in Syria,

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Migliorino, 118-21; Sanjian, pp. 5-6.

<sup>167</sup> Farhad Khosrokhavar, "Violence and the Egyptian Revolution," *Reimagining Social Movements: From Collectives to Individuals*, Antimo L. Farro and Henri Lustiger-Thaler eds. Ashgate, Farnham, UK, 2014, 133-34.

<sup>168</sup> Robert Fisk, "ISIS in Syria: In the Shadow of Death, A Few Thousand Christians Remain to Defy Militants," *The Independent*, November 12, 2014, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-in-syria-in-the-shadow-of-death-a-few-thousand-christians-remain-to-defy-the-militants->

such fears are heightened by the fact that Ahmad al-Sharaa was a leader of the Islamist organization Hayyat Tahrir al-Sham.<sup>169</sup> At the time of this writing, it is difficult to assess to what extent al-Sharaa's government will or will not implement the strictest interpretations of Sharia in Syria. While his government has implemented some Islamic elements of Sharia already, such as the banning of alcohol and the closure of certain institutions on Fridays, that government has also shown some flexibility, which has manifested itself in al-Sharaa appointing non-Muslims to his cabinet and his government's policy of allowing non-Muslims to worship, with relative freedom, in Syria.<sup>170</sup>

No matter which direction al-Sharaa and his government may pursue -- on the continuum of strict Islamism, on the one side, and flexibility, on the other -- Armenians and other Christians in the Middle East have to try to manage the risks that Islamism may continue to pose. Thus, even if Syria's future leaders do not implement the strictest versions of Sharia in Syria, there will still be some Muslims in Syria, who believe in the strict versions of Sharia, and may threaten Armenians inside and outside Syria. Within the Middle Eastern context, Islamists in Egypt, the most populous Arab country, have attempted, over time, to influence that country's laws and/or overthrow its secular governments completely.<sup>171</sup> In a similar vein, if Islamists in Syria believe that its laws are not sufficiently Islamic, they may try to overthrow any Syrian government, which may fall short of their expectations, or influence those governments in significant ways. Thus, Armenians and other Christians in countries such as Syria, Egypt, and Iraq are caught between multiple raging fires, including the flames of (1) hostile Islamism and (2) ostensibly secular regimes, which under pressure from such groups, at times manifest hostile policies toward Christians, including Armenians.<sup>172</sup> In addition to the threats that strict forms of Islamism pose to Armenians in Syria, they also face significant difficulties related to the civil war's aftermath,

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9857030.html (accessed May 4, 2025); K. Jayalakshmi, "Iraq ISIS Crisis: Christians, Hounded Out of Mosul, Trapped in Desert and Refugee Camps," *International Business Times*, July 28, 2014, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/iraq-isis-crisis-christians-hounded-out-mosul-trapped-desert-refugee-camps-1458647> (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>169</sup> Aaron Y. Zelin, "What to Know About the Man Who Toppled Assad," Washington Institute, December 11, 2024 <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/what-know-about-man-who-toppled-assad> (accessed May 7, 2025).

<sup>170</sup> Meneshian; MacDonald.

<sup>171</sup> Armajani, *Modern Islamist Movements*, 37-84.

<sup>172</sup> Loveday Morris, "Christians under Threat in Syria as Islamist Extremists Gain Influence," *Washington Post*, October 4, 2013, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/christians-under-threat-in-syria-as-islamist-extremists-gain-influence/2013/10/03/214607ee-2a75-11e3-b141-298f46539716\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/christians-under-threat-in-syria-as-islamist-extremists-gain-influence/2013/10/03/214607ee-2a75-11e3-b141-298f46539716_story.html) (accessed May 4, 2025).

economic instability, the destruction of infrastructure, and crime.<sup>173</sup> In this context, the exodus of Armenians and other Christians from Syria, and the potential disappearance of Armenians and other Christians from Syria and other parts of the Middle East in the future, is a source of urgent concern.<sup>174</sup>

Tragically, there have been many times in the history of Armenians, when, because of violence directed against them, they have experienced enormously painful forced migration and social dislocation.<sup>175</sup> Yet, if the economic and political situations in Lebanon and Syria stabilize, there may be reason to believe that the Armenians inside and outside Lebanon, and at least some non-Armenian Christians inside and outside of Lebanon, could continue to be a source of strength and support for Armenians inside Syria, Lebanon, and other countries.

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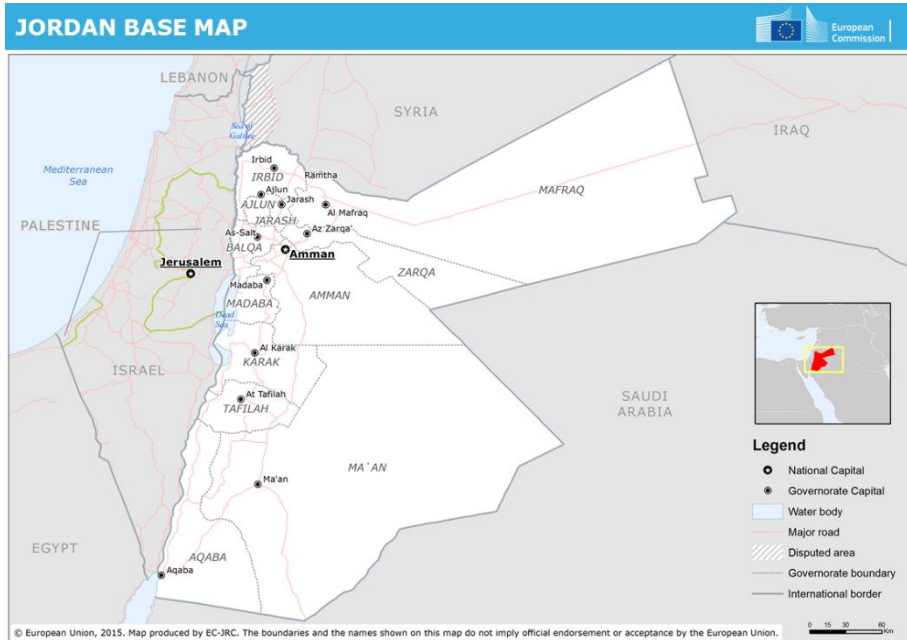
<sup>173</sup> World Bank, *Macro Poverty Outlook*, “Syrian Arab Republic”; Khatcherian.

<sup>174</sup> Will Freeman, “ISIS Is Forcing Thousands of Christians from Their Homes in Iraq,” *Think Progress*, July 24, 2014 <https://archive.thinkprogress.org/isis-is-forcing-thousands-of-christians-from-their-homes-in-iraq-863d24d44971/> (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>175</sup> Migliorino, 1-3; 26-34.



# JORDAN



## DEMOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION, CULTURAL ETHOS, AND WORLDVIEWS

Modern Jordan is a young country that occupies an ancient land, which manifests the traces of many civilizations.<sup>1</sup> Separated from Palestine/Israel by the Jordan River, the region of Jordan played a prominent role in biblical history; the ancient biblical kingdoms of Moab, Gilead, and Edom lie within its borders, as do the red stone city of Petra, the Roman province of Arabia Petraea, and the capital of the ancient Nabatean Kingdom.<sup>2</sup>

Jordanians are comprised of several ethnic backgrounds. Some of the native Jordanians are comprised of Bedouins. The majority of the people in Jordan are Arabs who comprise 97.4% of the country's population and are

<sup>1</sup> Ani Derderian-Aghajanian, "Armenians' Dual Identity in Jordan," *International Education Studies*, 2(3):2009, 35-36; Jon Armajani, "The Jordan Constitution and the Rights of Minorities," *Armenians of Jordan*, 139-54, <https://haigrepository.haigazian.edu.lb/items/eeab008f-4423-4a4b-af39-d5a1935fb562> (accessed May 20, 2025).

<sup>2</sup> Derderian-Aghajanian, 35-36.

constituted by Jordanians and Palestinians.<sup>3</sup> There were an estimated 3,000 Armenians living in Jordan in 2025.<sup>4</sup> Many of them are members of the Armenian Apostolic Church, and Armenians comprise the majority of non-Arab Christians in Jordan.<sup>5</sup> The majority of the Armenians in Jordan are the ancestors of survivors from the Armenian Genocide during World War I, who fled to Jordan from Ottoman Anatolia to the north. The early Armenian refugees in Jordan mainly resided in places like Ma'an, Shobak, Karak, and Madaba. Currently, the majority of Armenians live in the capital Amman, with a few families in Irbid, Aqaba, Madaba, and Zarqa. Jordan also became a refuge to many Armenians leaving Jerusalem and the Armenian Quarter after the Six-Day War, which took place between Israel and several Arab countries in 1967.<sup>6</sup>

Although some Palestinians in Jordan are critical of Jordan's government, it is the only Arab country to grant wide-scale citizenship to Palestinian refugees. As of 2023, approximately 2.39 million registered Palestinian refugees live in Jordan.<sup>7</sup> There are ten Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan, with the largest being the Baqa'a refugee camp with over 131,630 residents,<sup>8</sup> followed by the Amman New Camp (Wihdat) with 61,795 residents.<sup>9</sup> A high percentage of the Palestinians in Jordan live in the northwestern part of the country, principally in the environs of Amman, Zarqa, and Irbid.<sup>10</sup>

The shared history of Palestinians and Jordanians has been a combination of successes and failures, peace and violence. Internal and external forces have contributed to keeping the two groups in a situation somewhere between dependence and resentment. Since 1988 when Jordan disengaged from the West Bank, these tensions have resulted in the disenfranchisement of many of Jordan's citizens who are of Palestinian origin. For instance, Palestinian

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<sup>3</sup> "Jordan," *World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/jordan/> (accessed March 8, 2025).

<sup>4</sup> Republic of Armenia, Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, "Jordan," <http://diaspora.gov.am/en/pages/46/jordan> (accessed May 9, 2025).

<sup>5</sup> International Business Publications, *Jordan: Country Study Guide, Volume 1: Strategic Information and Developments*, (Washington, DC: International Business Publications, 2013), 71.

<sup>6</sup> Derderian-Aghajanian, 37.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), "Where We Work: Jordan," <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/jordan> (accessed May 8, 2025).

<sup>8</sup> UNRWA, "Where We Work: Jordan, Baqaa Camp" <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/jordan/baqaa-camp> (accessed May 8, 2025).

<sup>9</sup> UNRWA, "Where We Work: Jordan, Amman New Camp [Wihdat]" <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/jordan/amman-new-camp> (accessed May 8, 2025).

<sup>10</sup> *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples*, "Jordan: Palestinians" <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/palestinians-2/> (accessed May 8, 2025).

holders of a National Passport without a national number on it have virtually no rights compared to the holders of Jordanian Identity Cards, which includes a national number, who do have a range of rights. This distinction between the two documents allows for significant differences in the application of basic legal rights between the holders of these two documents and for the violation of certain basic legal rights for the persons whose identity cards do not have a national number.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, periodic waves of people from the Caucasus region of Asia, Armenia, Hijaz (the western portion of the Arabian Peninsula), and Syria settled in Jordan. They comprise two percent of Jordan's population. The expatriate workers in Jordan also add diversity to the ethnic mix of the population. Jordan hosts approximately 200,000 Egyptian workers, and another 80,000 Filipinos, Sri Lankans, Indians, Pakistanis, Lebanese, Europeans, and North Americans.<sup>12</sup>

The Circassians, who came from the Caucasus region in the late nineteenth century, had strong loyalties to King Abdullah I, who ruled as Emir of Transjordan from April 21, 1921, and as King of Jordan from May 25, 1946 until his assassination on July 20, 1951. As a result of these loyalties, King Abdullah I allocated large tracts of land to Circassians in Jordan. Circassians also hold key positions in the army and have served as the king's ceremonial bodyguards. Although devout Muslims and loyal to Jordan, the Circassians retain their own customs and habits and still speak their own language along with Arabic. The Chechens, who live in Jordan, also came from the Caucasus region; they retain their own customs and language and have a similar role in Jordan as the Circassians.<sup>13</sup>

Results of Jordan's national census conducted in November 2015, which is the most recent census at the time of this writing, showed that 46 percent of non-Jordanians living in the country and 13.2 percent of the overall population was comprised of Syrians.<sup>14</sup> Of Jordan's total population of 9.5 million, the

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<sup>11</sup> Shaul M. Gabbay, "The Status of Palestinians in Jordan and the Anomaly of Holding a Jordanian Passport" *Journal of Political Sciences and Public Affairs*, 2(113):2014, <https://www.omicsonline.org/open-access/the-status-of-palestinians-in-jordan-and-the-anomaly-of-holding-a-jordanian-passport-2332-0761.1000113.php?aid=23346> (accessed May 8, 2025).

<sup>12</sup> Derderian-Aghajanian, 36.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Mohammad Ghazal, "Population Stands at around 9.5 Million, including 2.9 Million Guests," *The Jordan Times*, January 30, 2016, <https://jordantimes.com/news/local/population-stands-around-95-million-including-29-million-guests> (accessed May 8, 2025); Government of Jordan, Department of Statistics, "Population and Housing 2015," [https://dosweb.dos.gov.jo/censuses/population\\_housing/census2015/](https://dosweb.dos.gov.jo/censuses/population_housing/census2015/) (accessed May 8, 2025); World Economics, "Jordan's Last Census Year: The Year the Most Recent Census was Conducted"

number of Jordanians is approximately 6.6 million, while the number of non-Jordanians, who reside in the country, is approximately 2.9 million, representing 30.6 percent of the overall population. Of the total non-Jordanian population, 1.265 million are Syrians, followed by Egyptians totaling 636,270 representing 6.68 percent of the population, and Palestinians, who do not have national identification numbers, comprising 634,182 persons and representing 6.65 percent of the population.<sup>15</sup>

There are 130,911 Iraqi nationals living in Jordan, who comprise 1.3 percent of the population, and 22,700 Libyans representing 0.24 percent of the population. Approximately 197,385 persons of several other nationalities also reside in Jordan, accounting for 2.07 percent of the population. The census showed that 49.7 percent of the non-Jordanians living in the country live in Amman, while 38.6 percent of Jordanians live in that city. With respect to Syrians, living in that country, 435,578 live in Amman; 343,479 live in Irbid; 207,903 live in Mafraq; 175,280 live in Zarqa, and the rest are distributed across the country's other governates.<sup>16</sup>

In terms of Jordan's religious and cultural ethos, the country is traditional (or, as some persons may call it, "conservative"). There are social restrictions on the interactions between women and men in the public sphere. While men and women interact, they do so within the religious and cultural bounds, which are in place in Jordanian society.<sup>17</sup> Jordanians' loyalties to their immediate and extended families constitute significant manifestations of traditionalism in that culture also. Within this framework, Jordan's Muslims and Christians interpret aspects of their religions in traditional ways, which constitute deeply-rooted aspects of Jordan's religious and cultural ethos.<sup>18</sup> While Armenians living in Jordan are embedded in this cultural context, some Armenians have observed that Jordan's traditionalism has made it difficult for the society to become flexible enough to fully accommodate them.<sup>19</sup>

## ARMENIANS IN JORDAN

Armenian-Jordanian relations have a long history, as Armenians have settled in Palestine and Jordan since ancient times. The current Armenian community was formed primarily around 1915 after Armenians were forcibly displaced from Western Armenia during the Armenian Genocide. In terms of

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<https://www.worldeconomics.com/Demographics/Census-Year/Jordan.aspx>  
(accessed May 9, 2025).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> John A. Shoup, *Cultures and Customs of Jordan* Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 2007, 39.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>19</sup> Private interviews and correspondences with Armenians who are deeply familiar with Jordan (2016-2018).

the broader context, Transjordan (which was named Jordan when that country gained independence), Syria, and Iraq were under Ottoman rule, which made the local authorities follow the orders of Ottoman governmental leaders in Istanbul in dealing with the Armenian refugees.<sup>20</sup> There are currently approximately 3,000 Armenians living in Jordan, including many Armenians from Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. Most of the Armenians are concentrated in Amman, the Armenian district of Al-Ashrafieh Hill (a.k.a. Hay al-Arman), Irbid, Zarka, Madaba, Karak, and Aqaba. The first Armenians in Jordan were mostly merchants and craftsmen. Currently, Jordanian Armenians are also civil servants, doctors, pharmacists, teachers, engineers, and involved in various trades. Armenian watchmakers and jewelers are well known, and most of Amman's photographers are Armenians.<sup>21</sup>

The spiritual leader of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Jordan is under the jurisdiction of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem. As a functioning minority, Armenians have been given the right to have a consulate. It is represented and recognized in the country's state institutions and deals with the national-ecclesiastical issues of the Armenian community. There are three Armenian churches in Jordan: The Armenian Apostolic Saint Thaddeus Church, The Armenian Church of Saint Garabed, which is near the Jordan River, and the Armenian Catholic Church of Saint Sahag and Mesrob.<sup>22</sup> Despite the small size of the Armenian community in Jordan, various socio-political, cultural, and sporting organizations operate in Jordan, these include Homenetmen, the Armenian Relief Society, and Watany Sporting Club. In modern times, the Yuzbashyan-Gulbenkian Daily National School operated in Amman.<sup>23</sup> As of the time of this writing, that school has been closed.<sup>24</sup>

## CONSTITUTIONAL HISTORY OF MODERN JORDAN

In trying to understand Jordan's most recent constitution, which is the constitution that was ratified on January 1, 1952, it would be helpful to

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<sup>20</sup> Personal communication from a scholar of Armenian Studies, December 6, 2025.

<sup>21</sup> Government of Armenia, Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, "Jordan," <http://diaspora.gov.am/en/pages/46/jordan> (accessed July 30, 2025).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.; *The Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, "Saint Garabed Armenian Church Consecrated in Jordan," November 7, 2014, <https://mirrorspectator.com/2014/11/07/st-garabed-armenian-church-consecrated-in-jordan/#:~:text=November%20%2C%202014,baptismal%20site%20of%20Jesus%20Christ.+> (accessed July 30, 2025).

<sup>23</sup> Government of Armenia, Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, "Jordan," <http://diaspora.gov.am/en/pages/46/jordan> (accessed July 30, 2025).

<sup>24</sup> Personal communication from a scholar of Armenian Studies, December 6, 2025.

consider some of the history which preceded it. The area in the Middle East, which came to be the independent country of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, was ruled by a number of different countries and empires throughout its history, although one significant event in its modern history was the Arab Revolt of 1916 which brought to an end the rule of the Ottoman Turks, who had governed that area since the sixteenth century.<sup>25</sup> The Sykes-Picot Agreement, which was concluded between the French and British on May 16, 1916, also played a crucial role in the setting of Jordan's borders and the borders of other Middle Eastern countries.<sup>26</sup> The San Remo Conference of 1920 gave the British government colonial, or "mandate power," over the territory.<sup>27</sup> Britain placed Amir Abdullah ibn al-Hussayn in charge of this territory, which the British named the Emirate of Transjordan.<sup>28</sup> In the wake World War II, the British mandate ended, and during an extended period of many years what were to become several different countries in the Middle East and North Africa gained independence from colonialist nations, such as Britain and France.<sup>29</sup> On May 25, 1946, Abdullah ibn al-Husayn (who came to be known as King Abdullah I) proclaimed himself King of Jordan. In this context, the country established constitutional monarchy with the king as its political leader.<sup>30</sup>

When the British mandate over Palestine ended in 1948, Jordan participated in the military alliance, which was comprised of military forces from several Arab countries that engaged in a war against Israel, beginning on May 15, 1948, one day after Israel declared its independence.<sup>31</sup> These Arab countries' military offensive, which was unsuccessful, had the objective of completely defeating Israel so that the entire territory, which Israel governed, would be returned to the Palestinians. This 1948 Arab-Israeli war gave Jordan control over East Jerusalem and the West Bank, both of which Jordan

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<sup>25</sup> CONSTITUTIONNET, "Constitutional History of Jordan," (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), Strömsborg, SE-103 34 in Stockholm, Sweden) <http://www.constitutionnet.org/country/constitutional-history-jordan> (accessed May 8, 2025).

<sup>26</sup> Beverley Milton-Edwards and Peter Hinchcliffe, *Jordan: A Hashemite Legacy*, 2nd edition, Routledge, Abingdon, 2009, 17; The Geographer; Office of the Geographer; Bureau of Intelligence and Research; United States Department of State; "International Boundary Study: Jordan-Syria Boundary," No .94 (December 30, 1969), 8, <https://library.law.fsu.edu/Digital-Collections/LimitsinSeas/pdf/ibs094.pdf> (accessed May 8, 2025).

<sup>27</sup> CONSTITUTIONNET, "Constitutional History of Jordan."

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Milton-Edwards and Hinchcliffe, 28.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 32–33.

eventually annexed.<sup>32</sup> In December 1948, the West Bank and Jordan were merged.<sup>33</sup> On October 20, 1949, King Abdullah announced that the two sectors constituted a single country.<sup>34</sup> In April 1950, elections were held for a Jordanian parliament that would include the West Bank.<sup>35</sup> Once the West Bank was represented, giving a merger resolution more weight, the issue was taken again to Jordan's parliament.<sup>36</sup> On April 24, 1950, the Jordanian parliament, which was the product of the 1950 election, adopted a resolution of merger.<sup>37</sup> However, King Abdullah I was assassinated on July 21, 1951 at al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem.<sup>38</sup> His son Talal ruled from 1951 until 1952<sup>39</sup> and then a grandson of Abdullah I, by the name of King Hussayn became Jordan's King in May 1953.<sup>40</sup> In 1952, a new constitution was created, and it gave the King significant power.<sup>41</sup> However, after Jordan lost the West Bank to Israel in the 1967 war, the King imposed martial law. During this time, many restrictions on the press and on speech were imposed.<sup>42</sup> In 1989, King Hussayn finally began to initiate gradual political liberalization, first with the reinstatement of parliamentary elections, then with the legalization of political parties in 1992.<sup>43</sup> Also, in 1990 political leaders in Jordan signed a "national charter" that restored multiparty democracy and reaffirmed allegiance to the king.<sup>44</sup> That charter, while reemphasizing the Islamic nature of the state, clearly seeks to promote the rule of law and political pluralism.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *The Palestine Yearbook of International Law*, volume 6, 1990/91, al-Shaybani Society of International Law, Nicosia, Cyprus, 1991, 249.

<sup>33</sup> John Quigley, *The Statehood of Palestine: International Law in the Middle East Conflict*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010, 118.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Harris M. Lentz III, *Heads of States and Governments: A Worldwide Encyclopedia of over 2,300 Leaders; 1945 through 1992* Routledge, Abingdon, 2013, 466.

<sup>39</sup> Mark Hillary Hansen, ed., *Kings, Rulers, and Statesmen*, Sterling Publishing, New York, 2005, 189.

<sup>40</sup> P.R. Kumaraswamy, *Historical Dictionary of the Arab – Israeli Conflict*, 2nd edition, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, Maryland, 2015, 223.

<sup>41</sup> CONSTITUTIONNET, "Constitutional History of Jordan," (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), Strömsborg, SE-103 34 in Stockholm, Sweden). <http://www.constitutionnet.org/country/constitutional-history-jordan> (accessed May 8, 2025).

<sup>42</sup> Robert L. Maddex, *Constitutions of the World*, Routledge, Abingdon, 1996, 146.

<sup>43</sup> CONSTITUTIONNET, "Constitutional History of Jordan," (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), Strömsborg, SE-103 34 in Stockholm, Sweden).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Maddex, *Constitutions of the World*, 146.

## JORDAN'S 1952 CONSTITUTION: RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC MINORITIES

With respect to religion, Jordan's 1952 constitution states that "Islam is the religion of the State."<sup>46</sup> That constitution also states that "Jordanians shall be equal before the law. There shall be no discrimination between them as regards to their rights and duties on grounds of race, language or religion."<sup>47</sup> In addition, the constitution states that "the State shall safeguard the free exercise of all forms of worship and religious [rituals] in accordance with the customs observed in the Kingdom, unless such is inconsistent with public order or morality."<sup>48</sup> In a set of closely-related principles, in addition to Islamic law courts, Jordan's constitution establishes a set of "tribunals of other [that is, non-Muslim] religious communities," which adjudicate matters related to personal status.<sup>49</sup>

There are ideas in Jordan's constitution, which can provide some protection and freedom to all Jordanians, and which may be particularly welcomed by religious and ethnic minorities in Jordan, such as Armenians. For example, Jordan's constitution states that the government "shall ensure work and education within the limits of its possibilities, and it shall ensure a state of tranquility and equal opportunities to all Jordanians."<sup>50</sup> The constitution also guarantees personal freedom, forbids the detaining or imprisonment of persons except in accordance with the provisions of the law, forbids the deportation of Jordanians from the country, and provides Jordanians with the freedom to choose where they will live in the country, while preventing the government from blocking Jordanians to live where they want or being forced to live where they do not want.<sup>51</sup> The constitution also

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<sup>46</sup> The Constitution of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, as amended in 2022, Chapter 1, Article 2, [https://mof.gov.jo/ebv4.0/root\\_storage/en/eb\\_list\\_page/aldastor2022.pdf](https://mof.gov.jo/ebv4.0/root_storage/en/eb_list_page/aldastor2022.pdf) (accessed May 8, 2025).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 2, Article 6(i), [https://mof.gov.jo/ebv4.0/root\\_storage/en/eb\\_list\\_page/aldastor2022.pdf](https://mof.gov.jo/ebv4.0/root_storage/en/eb_list_page/aldastor2022.pdf) (accessed May 8, 2025).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 2, Article 14, [https://mof.gov.jo/ebv4.0/root\\_storage/en/eb\\_list\\_page/aldastor2022.pdf](https://mof.gov.jo/ebv4.0/root_storage/en/eb_list_page/aldastor2022.pdf) (accessed March 8, 2025).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 7, Article 109(i) and 109(ii), [https://mof.gov.jo/ebv4.0/root\\_storage/en/eb\\_list\\_page/aldastor2022.pdf](https://mof.gov.jo/ebv4.0/root_storage/en/eb_list_page/aldastor2022.pdf) (accessed March 8, 2025).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 6(iii), [https://mof.gov.jo/ebv4.0/root\\_storage/en/eb\\_list\\_page/aldastor2022.pdf](https://mof.gov.jo/ebv4.0/root_storage/en/eb_list_page/aldastor2022.pdf) (accessed March 8, 2025).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 2, Article 7; Chapter 2, Article 8; Chapter 2, Article 9, [https://mof.gov.jo/ebv4.0/root\\_storage/en/eb\\_list\\_page/aldastor2022.pdf](https://mof.gov.jo/ebv4.0/root_storage/en/eb_list_page/aldastor2022.pdf) (accessed March 8, 2025).

states that “dwelling houses shall be inviolable and shall not be entered except in the circumstances and in the manner prescribed by law.”<sup>52</sup> In addition, the constitution stipulates that “No property of any person may be expropriated except for purposes of public utility and in consideration of a just compensation, as may be prescribed by law.”<sup>53</sup> All of these constitutional stipulations may be significant for Armenians (and other religious and ethnic minorities in Jordan, including the Christian Arab Orthodox community given the fact that the Ottoman Empire violated these and many other principles during the Armenian genocide, for example.<sup>54</sup>

In the midst of these rights and protections, which seem to be accorded to Jordanians, the King of Jordan continues to wield enormous power and authority. For instance, the constitution states that the King is “the Head of the State and is immune from any liability and responsibility;”<sup>55</sup> he ratifies the laws and promulgates them, while directing their enactment.<sup>56</sup> He also “declares war, concludes peace and ratifies treaties and agreements,”<sup>57</sup> “orders for the holding of elections to the Chamber of Deputies,” “convenes the National Assembly, inaugurates, adjourns,” and may suspend it, while maintaining the authority to dissolve the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate and relieving any Senator of his membership.<sup>58</sup> In addition, “the King appoints the Prime Minister and may dismiss him or accept his resignation. He appoints

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., Chapter 2, Article 10, [https://mof.gov.jo/ebv4.0/root\\_storage/en/eb\\_list\\_page/aldastor2022.pdf](https://mof.gov.jo/ebv4.0/root_storage/en/eb_list_page/aldastor2022.pdf) (accessed March 8, 2025).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., Chapter 2, Article 11, <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/3ae6b53310.pdf> (accessed March 8, 2025).

<sup>54</sup> Khatchig Mouradian, “Concentration Camps, Armenian Genocide,” *Modern Genocide: The Definitive Resource and Document Collection; Volume 1: Armenian Genocide, Bosnian Genocide, Cambodian Genocide*,” Paul R. Bartrop and Steven Leonard Jacobs eds., ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara, California, 2015, 60.

<sup>55</sup> The Constitution of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, as amended in 2022, Chapter 4; Part 1; Article 30, [https://mof.gov.jo/ebv4.0/root\\_storage/en/eb\\_list\\_page/aldastor2022.pdf](https://mof.gov.jo/ebv4.0/root_storage/en/eb_list_page/aldastor2022.pdf) (accessed March 11, 2025).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., Chapter 4; Part 1; Article 31, [https://mof.gov.jo/ebv4.0/root\\_storage/en/eb\\_list\\_page/aldastor2022.pdf](https://mof.gov.jo/ebv4.0/root_storage/en/eb_list_page/aldastor2022.pdf) (accessed March 8, 2025).

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., Chapter 4; Part 1; Article 33, [https://mof.gov.jo/ebv4.0/root\\_storage/en/eb\\_list\\_page/aldastor2022.pdf](https://mof.gov.jo/ebv4.0/root_storage/en/eb_list_page/aldastor2022.pdf) (accessed March 8, 2025).

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., Chapter 4; Part 1; Article 34, i-iv, [https://mof.gov.jo/ebv4.0/root\\_storage/en/eb\\_list\\_page/aldastor2022.pdf](https://mof.gov.jo/ebv4.0/root_storage/en/eb_list_page/aldastor2022.pdf) (accessed March 8, 2025).

the Ministers; he also dismisses them or accepts their resignation, upon the recommendation of the Prime Minister.”<sup>59</sup>

Amendments which were made to Jordan’s constitution in 2014, 2016, and 2022 expanded the King of Jordan’s power.<sup>60</sup> For example, in 2014, Article 40 of the constitution was amended whereby a clause was added to it stating that the King exercises his powers by royal decree without the signature of the Prime Minister or the minister(s) concerned when appointing the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Army Commander) and the Director of the General Intelligence Department. In 2016, the King’s unilateral powers were expanded by adding a new paragraph to Article 40 of the constitution, which gave him the power to appoint the Speaker of the Senate and its members, the president and members of the Constitutional Court, the head of the Judicial Council, and the Director General of the Gendarmerie without the signature of the Prime Minister or the ministers concerned. The amendments also changed the term of the presidency of the House of Representatives, where it became two years instead of one year. An amendment was also made to Article 50 of the constitution which prevented the government from being considered resigned in the event of the death of the Prime Minister. This amendment only suggests a tendency to reduce the regard for and importance of the Prime Minister, who is supposed to be the leader of the majority in Jordan’s parliament.<sup>61</sup>

Amendments to Jordan’s constitution in 2022, which continued to expand the King’s power include amendments to Article 40 (ii) of the constitution which add new provisions, giving the King the power to appoint both the Chief Justice and the Head of the Judicial Council, accept their resignations and terminate their services, appoint the Chief of the Royal Hashemite Court, the Minister of the Royal Hashemite Court, and the King’s advisers, accept their resignations, and terminate their services, without needing the signature of the Prime Minister and the minister(s) concerned on the royal decree.<sup>62</sup> In addition, significant amendments to the constitution in 2022 were the establishment of a National Security Council consisting of the Prime Minister, the Minister of Defense, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Interior, the Army Commander, the Director of the General Intelligence Department, the Director of Public Security Directorate, and two members appointed by the King in accordance with the provisions of Article 40 (ii) of

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., Chapter 4; Part 1; Article 35,

[https://mof.gov.jo/ebv4.0/root\\_storage/en/eb\\_list\\_page/aldastor2022.pdf](https://mof.gov.jo/ebv4.0/root_storage/en/eb_list_page/aldastor2022.pdf) (accessed March 8, 2025).

<sup>60</sup> Omar Atout, “Jordan’s Constitutional Amendments: A Coup against the Parliamentary System,” *Journal of Constitutional Law in the Middle East and North Africa*, January 2023, 321. <https://jcl-mena.org/assets/submissions/issueS01/10.Jordan.en.pdf> (accessed May 8, 2025).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 321.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 324.

the constitution (that is, without the signature of the Prime Minister and the minister concerned). This council has been granted powers in security, defense, and foreign policy matters. The council convenes, when necessary and at the request of the king, in his presence or in the presence of his delegate, and its decisions are enforceable upon approval by the king. All of these provisions increase the king's power.<sup>63</sup>

## ARMENIANS IN JORDAN: RELIGION AND CULTURE

While Jordan's constitution does not explicitly assert cultural rights, the other rights which that constitution grants Jordanian citizens have formed a basis for significant cultural and religious activities on the part of Armenians in that country. In terms of cultural and religious activities, the Jordanian-Armenian Diaspora's infrastructure has three cornerstones and each of them have played significant roles in the thriving of Jordanian-Armenians over the years. These cornerstones are Armenian churches, clubs, and schools.<sup>64</sup> These cornerstones are not unique to Armenians in Jordan. They are present in many countries where there are significant numbers of Armenians living as minorities in diaspora settings. The church and education have played significant roles as symbols of Armenian identity.<sup>65</sup>

For example, in terms of the church, Saint Thaddeus Armenian Apostolic Church in Amman serves the Armenian Apostolic community in that city. High level officials within the Armenian Apostolic community, together with laypersons, have invested substantial time, effort, and finances into renovating that church and the Armenian school in Amman during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. At the time of this writing, the school is closed.<sup>66</sup> Church leaders and laypersons view the church as the heart of the Armenian community, and they believe it is important that the church functions and plays its religious role, while also preserving Armenian history and culture. Because the church is important for Armenians' identity, church leaders have been responsible for youth groups, where Armenian language and history are taught. Armenian church leaders have also facilitated a variety of activities at the Armenian club and in the church where some of the group's youth work as choir girls and boys.<sup>67</sup>

Within this context, the Armenian Apostolic Church in Jordan constitutes an important avenue for ties between Armenians and Jordan's government.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 326-27; Tareq Al Naimat, "Constitutional Amendments in Jordan," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 1, 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2022/03/constitutional-amendments-in-jordan?lang=en> (accessed May 9, 2025).

<sup>64</sup> Derderian-Aghajanian, 37.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Antranig Dakessian, message to author, July 7, 2025.

<sup>67</sup> Derderian-Aghajanian, 38.

The Archbishop represents Armenians in that country and he conducts official work for the Armenian community and individuals. He also represents Armenians during official celebrations in the country. At the same time, other appointed leaders in the Armenian community in Jordan have engaged in cultural production and political work in order to preserve the community and empower Armenians in Jordan to live as a collective, and to properly represent their culture and legacy with respect to themselves and non-Armenians.<sup>68</sup>

The Youzbashian-Gulbenkian School, which is an Armenian elementary school, is next to the Armenian Apostolic church in Amman. That school opened in 1949, with less than two-hundred students, and the Gulbenkian Foundation donated funding for its construction. Almost all the students and teachers in the school are Armenians. Over time, a high percentage of Jordanian-Armenians, who live in Amman, have placed their children in that school. After those Armenian students finish their studies in that elementary school, they attend private missionary schools in Jordan.<sup>69</sup>

Armenian-Jordanians' work in the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) is yet another way that they exercise their freedoms and rights under Jordan's constitution. The AGBU was founded in 1906, and its main office is in New York city. The chapter in Jordan was established in 1949, is located next to the Armenian Apostolic Church in Amman, and functions as a combined cultural center and sports association. The AGBU enriches Armenian projects all over the world. It was established to preserve and promote the Armenian identity and heritage through educational, cultural, and humanitarian programs and does so in important ways in Jordan.<sup>70</sup>

## CITIZENSHIP AND NATURALIZATION

The Jordan Nationality Law of 1954, which was last amended in 2023, is the most recent version.<sup>71</sup> According to that law, the following are Jordanian citizens:

1. Anyone who obtained Jordanian citizenship or a Jordanian passport in accordance with the Jordanian Citizenship Law of 1928 and its amendments, Law No. 6 of 1954, and this law;<sup>72</sup>

2. Anyone who held Palestinian citizenship as a non-Jew before May 15, 1948 and usually resided in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan during the period between December 20, 1949 and February 16, 1954;

3. Anyone, who has a father of Jordanian nationality;

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Jordan: Jordanian Nationality Law of 1954, last amended 2023, UNHCR, RefWorld, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/2023/ar/149578> (accessed July 21, 2025).

<sup>72</sup> Ibiud., Article 3.

4. Anyone born in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to a mother holding Jordanian nationality and a father of unknown nationality, or who has no nationality, or whose lineage to his father has not been legally proven; and

5. Anyone born in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to unknown parents.<sup>73</sup>

The law's provision regarding the naturalization of Arabs states, Every Arab, who has habitually resided in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for a period of not less than fifteen consecutive years, has the right to obtain Jordanian citizenship by a decision of the [Jordanian] Council of Ministers based on the recommendation of the [Jordanian] Minister of the Interior if he renounces his original citizenship by written declaration and the laws of his country permit him to do so, provided that: 1. She or he is of good conduct and behavior and has not been convicted of any crime affecting honor or morals; 2. She or he has a legitimate means of earning a living; 3. She or he must be of sound mind and not suffer from any disability that would make her or him a burden on society; and 4. She or he must take an oath of loyalty and allegiance to His Majesty the King [of Jordan] before a Justice of the Peace.<sup>74</sup>

This statute also states that “the word ‘Arab’ for the purposes of this law means every person whose father is of Arab origin and holds the nationality of one of the Arab League countries.”<sup>75</sup>

In terms of granting Jordanian citizenship to expatriates, the law states, “His Majesty the King, based on the recommendation of the Council of Ministers, may grant Jordanian citizenship to any expatriate who submits written declaration of her or his choice of Jordanian citizenship, provided that she or he renounces any other nationality that she or he may hold upon submitting this declaration.”<sup>76</sup> In that statute, “the word ‘expatriate’ means every Arab who was born in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan or in the usurped part of Palestine and emigrated from the country or was displaced from it. This phrase also includes the mentally challenged or legally incapacitated children of that person, wherever they were born.”<sup>77</sup>

In terms of nationality by dependency, the Jordan Nationality Law of 1954, which was last amended in 2023, states

1. A foreign woman, who marries a Jordanian man, may obtain Jordanian citizenship with the approval of the Minister of Interior if she declares her desire in writing, in accordance with the following:

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., Article 4.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., Article 2.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., Article 5.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., Article 2.

a. If three years have passed since her marriage and she holds an Arab nationality or

b. If she has been married for five years and she holds the nationality of a non-Arab country.

2. A Jordanian woman, who married a non-Jordanian and obtained her husband's nationality, may retain her Jordanian nationality unless she renounces it in accordance with the provisions of this law. She has the right to submit a request to the Minister of Interior to restore her Jordanian nationality in accordance with its provisions.

3. A Jordanian woman whose husband acquires or is naturalized with the nationality of another country due to special circumstances may retain her Jordanian nationality.<sup>78</sup>

In terms of naturalization, the law states, "Any non-Jordanian person who is not legally incapacitated and who meets the following conditions may submit an application to the Council of Ministers to grant her or him a Jordanian naturalization certificate." The statute continues:

1. She or he must have taken up her or his regular residence in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for a period of four years prior to the date of her or his application;

2. She or he must not have been convicted of any crime affecting honor or morals;

3. She or he must intend to reside in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan;

4. She or he must know the Arabic language, in terms of reading and writing;

5. She or he must have good conduct and reputation;

6. She or he must be of sound mind and not suffer from any disability that would make her or him a burden on society; and

7. She or he must have a legitimate means of earning a living, taking into consideration not to compete with Jordanians in professions where she or he is available.<sup>79</sup>

The statute provides restrictions on the rights of naturalized citizens,

A person who has acquired Jordanian nationality by naturalization is considered Jordanian in all respects, provided that she or he may not hold political and diplomatic positions or public jobs determined by the Council of Ministers or be a member of the National Assembly except after at least ten years have passed since she or he acquired Jordanian nationality. She or he is also not entitled to run for municipal and village councils and professional unions except after at least five years have passed since she or he acquired it.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., Article 8.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., Article 12.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., Article 14.

With respect to dual citizenship, the law states, “A Jordanian who has obtained the nationality of a foreign country shall retain her or his citizenship in accordance with the provisions of this law.”<sup>81</sup>

Jordan also offers a “Jordan Citizenship by Investment Program,” whose benefits include visa-free or visa-on-arrival access to over fifty destinations and Jordanian citizenship, which is applicable to the whole family including the main applicant’s spouse, children (unmarried, widowed, or divorced daughters and sons under eighteen years of age), and dependent parents.<sup>82</sup>

In addition to other requirements, applicants are required to fulfill one of the following requirements, in order to receive Jordanian citizenship under the Jordan Citizenship by Investment Program:

1. Bank deposit and treasury bonds

Applicants must place a zero-interest deposit of USD one million at the Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ) for a minimum period of three years; and purchase treasury bonds valued at USD one million at an interest rate to be decided upon by the CBJ, held for a minimum period of six years.

2. Company shares and/or units

Applicants must buy shares and/or units in Jordanian companies valued at a minimum of USD 1.5 million, provided that they are held for at least three years and that the Companies Control Department and/or the Jordan Securities Commission denote temporary seizure of them.

3. Small and medium enterprises (local project leading to employment creation).

Applicants must establish an investment project in a specific productive economic sector with capital of at least USD one million in any location in the Amman governorate (USD 750,000 for a project that is registered outside Amman), provided the project creates at least twenty employment opportunities (reduced to at least ten opportunities for Jordanians for a project in a governorate other than Amman), in accordance with the statements of the Social Security Corporation.<sup>83</sup>

While the Jordan Citizenship by Investment Program, has financial requirements that exceed the amount of finances, which most people possess, the other requirements for naturalization in Jordan are relatively accommodating. In sum, the relative flexibility of Jordan’s naturalization laws could facilitate citizenship for Armenians and others, who may seek citizenship in that country.

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., Article 17.

<sup>82</sup> Henley and Partners, “Jordan: The Jordan Citizenship by Investment Program,” <https://www.henleyglobal.com/citizenship-investment/jordan> (accessed July 22, 2025).

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

## INHERITANCE RIGHTS

With respect to inheritance rights in Jordan, which affects a large percentage of Jordan's population including Armenians, Article 285, Number 36 of the Jordanian Personal Status Law for 2010, which continues to be in force, stipulates "the actual or deemed death of the person who bequeaths his inheritance [is] a condition for [the inheritance] to be carried out." That law also stipulates the requirement of the presence of a living heir at the "time of this decease." Article 285 of the same law states that recipients of inheritance portions are comprised of twelve persons: four males including the father and the father's grandfather. They also include the husband and the mother's brother (proceeding in an ascending order). As for women, there are eight persons: the mother, the wife, the daughter and the son's daughter. They also cover the sister from both parents, including the father's sister, the mother's sister, and the grandmother (proceeding in a descending order).<sup>84</sup> Article 281 of the Jordanian Personal Status Law states "There is no inheritance in the case of different religions; a non-Muslim does not inherit from a Muslim, [and] Muslims can inherit from an apostate."<sup>85</sup> This text can be read in light of Islamic law that gives Muslim men the right to marry non-Muslim women who are "people of the book;" that is, Jewish or Christian. In such cases of marriage, however, the woman will be deprived of the right to inheritance from her husband, sons, or daughters because of her religion.<sup>86</sup>

Jordanian law prevents the inheritance of Muslims to be transferred to non-Muslims, but allows Muslims to inherit from apostates. In preventing inheritance between Muslims and "people of the book," Jordan has opted for one recognized legal position within Islam, which is very traditional. There is a strong undercurrent of conservatism in Jordan's *madhabs*, or Islamic schools of legal thought, and the interpretations of laws governing inheritance in Jordan, are manifestations of this traditionalism. Consistent with that framework, the sons and daughters of a religiously mixed marriage would not be able to inherit from their mother or leave any inheritance to her because of the differences in religious affiliations.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Muhannad Alazzeh, "Women's Right to Inheritance in Jordanian Law: Requirements and Prospects of Change," Research Paper Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, Doha, Qatar, August 2017, 4  
[https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/lists/ACRPS-PDFDocumentLibrary/Womens\\_Right\\_to\\_Inheritance\\_Jordan\\_Research\\_Paper.pdf](https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/lists/ACRPS-PDFDocumentLibrary/Womens_Right_to_Inheritance_Jordan_Research_Paper.pdf) (accessed May 8, 2025).

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 20, n. 34; Shoup, 29-31.

## POTENTIAL THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES REGARDING ARMENIANS IN JORDAN

The foregoing discussions set part of the context for the circumstances within which Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities in Jordan find themselves. While, on the one hand, Jordan's constitution grants these minorities and other Jordanian citizens certain specific freedoms and protections, the enormous power and authority, which that constitution grants the King, can pose an enormous threat to Jordan's minorities, if (for example) the King chooses to use his authority in such a manner that could be harmful to them. The other major threats, which Armenians and other ethnic and religious minorities in Jordan face, stem from the growing numbers and influence of Sunni Islamist groups both inside Jordan and outside it, in countries such as Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and among the Palestinians.<sup>88</sup> Sunni Islamist groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood,<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> American Foreign Policy Council, *World Almanac of Islamism, 2014* Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, Maryland, 2014, 197ff.

<sup>89</sup> The Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, al-Qaida, the Nusra Front, and ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) are Sunni Islamist organizations which are committed to establishing a single global Islamic nation-state and/or to establishing individual Islamic nation-states in various countries. The members of these organizations want to implement strict versions of Islamic law, also known as Sharia. The Muslim Brotherhood, which was founded in Egypt in 1928, was the first of the above-named organizations to be established. Hasan al-Banna, an Egyptian Sunni Muslim who founded the Muslim Brotherhood, led it as a grassroots organization which opposed secularization and westernization and attempted to establish a strict Islamic state in Egypt, which would impose restrictions on Christians. The Muslim Brotherhood's structure and ideology had a significant influence on Sunni Islamist groups which were contemporaneous with it and were established after it. Many Christians living in the majority-Muslim world believe that these Islamist groups and their ideologies pose significant threats to Christians (Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, 8; Armajani, *Modern Islamist Movements*, 37-78; Najib George Awad, *And Freedom Became a Public-Square: Political, Sociological and Religious Overviews on the Arab Christians and the Arab Spring*, Lit Verlag, Vienna, Austria, 2012, 83-87.

Hamas,<sup>90</sup> al-Qaida,<sup>91</sup> and ISIS (also known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria),<sup>92</sup> often have little tolerance for Christians.<sup>93</sup> If these groups become significantly more powerful in any of the countries and regions surrounding Jordan, this could form a serious threat to Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities in that country.<sup>94</sup> The other danger which these Islamist groups pose to the Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities in Jordan is, even if these Islamist groups do not actually overthrow Jordan's relatively moderate King and government, these Islamists could pressure that government to act in a manner that is harmful to Jordan's minorities.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> The roots of Hamas are in the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Hamas is a Palestinian Sunni Islamist organization dedicated to resisting Israel's oppression of Palestinians and occupation of the Gaza Strip, Jerusalem, and the West Bank, while espousing the establishment of a Sunni Islamic state in Palestine after the Palestinians liberate themselves from Israel's occupation. Many members of Hamas view the origins of their organization as dating to 1935 when Abd al-Rahman al-Banna, who was Hasan al-Banna's brother, visited Palestine and met with Hajj Amin al-Huseini, who was the Mufti of Jerusalem and Head of the Higher Islamic Council at the time. While Hamas continues its resistance against Israeli occupation, the Gaza Strip is one of the places where it has a strong presence and continues its work (Ziyad Abu-Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza: Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic Jihad* Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 1994, 1-2; Björn Brenner, *Gaza Under Hamas: From Islamic Democracy to Islamist Governance* I.B. Tauris, London, 2017, 1-29).

<sup>91</sup> Al-Qaida is an international Sunni Islamist organization, which was founded in large part by Usama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, and traces its origins to the Soviet-Afghan War in Afghanistan which lasted from 1979 until 1989. Al-Qaida is committed to using physical jihad, or militant means, to fight against what its members believe to be the enemies of Islam, in its effort to establish a global Islamic nation-state (Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2004, 150, 167; Steve Coll, *The Bin Ladens: An Arabian Family in the American Century*, Penguin, New York, 2008, 336-38).

<sup>92</sup> ISIS, also known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria or IS, was founded in 1999 by Jordanian Sunni Muslim Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and controlled large portions of Iraq from 2014 until 2017. As an international Sunni Islamist organization, ISIS is committed to establishing a global Islamic nation-state under Sharia in the Middle East and throughout the world; Gerges, 1-128.

<sup>93</sup> Habib C. Malik, *Islamism and the Future of the Christians of the Middle East*, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, California, 2010, 36ff.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.; William Christou, "Jordan Shuts Local Branch of Muslim Brotherhood after Arrests," *The Guardian*, April 23, 2025  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/apr/23/jordan-shuts-local-branch-of-muslim-brotherhood-after-arrests> (accessed May 9, 2025).

<sup>95</sup> Gokhan Bacik, *Hybrid Sovereignty in the Arab Middle East: The Cases of Kuwait, Jordan, and Iraq*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 200, 152ff.

## HUMAN RIGHTS

Regarding human rights in Jordan, Human Rights Watch has documented dozens of cases in which Jordanian authorities have already jailed journalists and citizens for peaceful criticism of foreign countries.<sup>96</sup> In 2014, Jordan added the language of article 118 to the country's anti-terrorism law, which also made criticizing foreign countries "terrorism offenses," which magnifies the severity of these kinds of offenses.<sup>97</sup> If the Jordanian government expands this violation of human rights, then it could seriously infringe on the free exercise of religion, and other important freedoms, among Armenian Christians and other religious minorities, who live in Jordan, because freedom of religion and freedom of speech in various societies are often intrinsically related. The amended version of Article 118 could also be a troubling development for Armenians and other minorities in Jordan because it seems to violate article 7 of Jordan's constitution, which states that "personal freedom shall be guaranteed," and article 15 of that constitution, which guarantees, among other things, freedom of speech and opinion.<sup>98</sup>

In addition, Jordan's government prosecutors continue to charge protestors with "unlawful gathering" following peaceful protests and marches, citing articles 164 and 165 of the current penal code.<sup>99</sup> According to Amnesty International's *The State of the World's Human Right, April 2025*, the Jordanian government escalated its crackdown on the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, detaining and prosecuting thousands of individuals for criticizing the authorities, expressing pro-Palestinian sentiments or participating in peaceful protests. Hundreds were held in administrative detention without charge or access to due process guarantees,

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<sup>96</sup> Sarah Leah Whitson (Executive Director, Middle East and North Africa, Human Rights Watch) to His Excellency Abdullah Ensour (Prime Minister, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan), September 13, 2015, [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/supporting\\_resources/gl.2015.9.9.letter\\_to\\_pm\\_re\\_penal\\_code\\_0.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/supporting_resources/gl.2015.9.9.letter_to_pm_re_penal_code_0.pdf) (accessed May 8, 2025). Hereafter cited as "Human Rights Watch's Letter." Additional information about that letter appears at "Jordan: Strengthen Penal Code Overhaul; Amendments Retain Limitations on Basic Rights," September 13, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/09/13/jordan-strengthen-penal-code-overhaul> (accessed May 8, 2025); Garry Leech "The Bias of Human Rights Watch," *Counterpunch*, March 14, 2013, <http://www.counterpunch.org/2013/03/14/the-bias-of-human-rights-watch/> (accessed May 8, 2025).

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*; The Constitution of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Chapter 2, Article 7; and Chapter 2, Article 15, sections i and ii, <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/3ae6b53310.pdf> (May 8, 2025).

<sup>98</sup> "Human Rights Watch's Letter," 3.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

and political parties were dissolved.<sup>100</sup> In January 2025, Jordan's government underwent its fourth Universal Periodic Review, under the auspices of the United Nations Human Rights Council.<sup>101</sup> The Jordanian government only noted recommendations to remove legal provisions that criminalize forms of expression protected under international law. It rejected recommendations to repeal or amend the Crime Prevention Law of 1954, which the governors of Jordan's governates continued to use to administratively detain individuals without charge or trial. The Jordanian government did not commit to amending the Nationality Law, which would grant women the right to pass on their nationality to their children on an equal basis with men. It rejected recommendations to abolish the death penalty and ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture.<sup>102</sup>

These human rights violations could constitute potentially threatening developments for Armenians and other minorities in Jordan in view of the fact that the right of freedom of speech, association, and assembly are often inherently linked to the right of freedom of worship. Thus, if the Jordanian government is violating certain Jordanians' rights to freely assemble for political purposes, which seems to violate article 16 of Jordan's constitution, then the Jordanian government's next step could involve obstructing Christians' and other religious minorities' right to worship freely (which is another significant right under Jordan's constitution).<sup>103</sup>

However, there may be an alternative way to interpret these apparent violations of human rights in Jordan. That alternative interpretation involves the following argument. If these apparent human rights violations remain limited to those specific areas of freedom of speech and freedom of assembly, without effecting Jordan's religious and ethnic minorities, and these restrictions lead to continuing stability in Jordan, then these human rights violations and restrictions could actually benefit Jordan's Armenians and other minorities because, often, when a country is stable, then religious and ethnic minorities remain protected. In view of this possibility, while Armenians and other minorities in Jordan have reasons to be concerned about

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<sup>100</sup> Amnesty International, *The State of the World's Human Rights, April 2025*, Amnesty International, London, UK, 2025, 220  
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/8515/2025/en/> (accessed May 9, 2025)

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 220.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>103</sup> See also *The Constitution of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan*, Chapter 2, Articles 14 and 16, <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/3ae6b53310.pdf> (accessed May 8, 2025); Amnesty International, *The State of the World's Human Rights: April 2024*, 220-22, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/7200/2024/en/> (accessed May 8, 2025).

their future in that country, the following factors can give Jordan's Armenians and other minorities reasons to be somewhat hopeful:

1. Jordan's decades-long history of moderate kings and other political leaders;
2. Jordan's historic toleration of various minorities in that country;
3. The Jordanian constitution's ostensible protections of human rights; and
4. the Jordanian government's relatively strong diplomatic relationship with the Republic of Armenia.<sup>104</sup>

Thus, there are at least some reasons to be cautiously optimistic about the future of Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities in Jordan.

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<sup>104</sup> Adnan M. Hayajneh, "US-Jordan Relations: The King Abdullah II Era: An Analytical Study," *Handbook of US-Middle East Relations*, Robert Looney ed., Routledge, Abingdon, 2014, 194-95; Joshua Castellino and Kathleen A. Cavanaugh, *Minority Rights in the Middle East*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, 112-13; "Armenia Ambassador has Talks in Jordan," *News.am (Armenia News)*, March 17, 2014, <http://news.am/eng/news/199361.html> (accessed May 8, 2025); Minority Rights Group International, *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, Jordan*, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4954ce4ec.html> (accessed November 2, 2015); Arda Dergarabedian, *Al-Arman al-Urdiniyun: Al-waqa al-ijtimai wa al-hawiya*, manshwarat al-bank al-ahayi al-Urduni, Amman, Jordan, 2005.



## IRAQ



The modern history of the region, which came to be the state of Iraq, can be divided into four general periods, first, the Ottoman Period, which lasted from approximately 1534 to 1918;<sup>1</sup> second, the British period, which lasted

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<sup>1</sup> Beth K. Dougherty and Edmund A. Ghareeb, *Historical Dictionary of Iraq*, Second Edition, Scarecrow Press, Lanham, Maryland, 2013, 463; Jon Armajani, “The Iraqi Constitution and the Armenians,” *Armenians of Iraq*, 279-96, <https://haigrepositary.haigazian.edu.lb/items/3f4b9a9e-cab3-43d5-aa45-9abaf2dc316c> (accessed May 20, 2025).

from approximately 1918 until 1932;<sup>2</sup> third, the Iraqi national period from 1932 until 2003;<sup>3</sup> and fourth, the American period, which began with the United States' invasion of Iraq in 2003 that has continued to last until the time of this writing, in view of the fact that American soldiers continue to be in Iraq.<sup>4</sup> While all those periods are important, the focus of this chapter will be on the American period, with specific attention to Iraq's current constitution, which was ratified in 2005 and has not been amended, and the relationships between Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq with that constitution.<sup>5</sup>

## IRAQ'S ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS, GEOGRAPHY, AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Ethnically, Iraq's population of approximately 42 million is comprised of Arabs, who are 75% to 80% of the population and are distributed throughout the country, Kurds who are 15% to 20% and are concentrated mostly in Iraq's north, and Armenians, Assyrians, Bedouins, Circassians, Kaka'is (also known as Yarsanis), Mandaecans (also known as Sabians), Romanis, Shabaks, Turkmens, Yezidis, and Persians, who collectively comprise 5% of the population.<sup>6</sup> Currently, there are approximately 7,000 to 8,000 Armenians in Iraq, and they live in such places as Baghdad, Basra, Kirkuk, Mosul, and Zakhu.<sup>7</sup> Religiously, Shia Muslims comprise 61% to 64% percent of Iraq's

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq: Contriving King and Country*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2007, 193.

<sup>3</sup> Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2003, xxii.

<sup>4</sup> James Lee Ray, *American Foreign Policy and Political Ambition*, Second Edition, CQ Press, an imprint of Sage Publications, Los Angeles, California, 2015, 359; Agnes Helou, "US Announces Coalition Mission in Iraq to end by 2025, but US 'Not Withdrawing,'" *Breaking Defense*, September 27, 2024, <https://breakingdefense.com/2024/09/us-announces-coalition-mission-in-iraq-to-end-by-2025-but-not-withdrawing/> (accessed May 9, 2025).

<sup>5</sup> Safwan Al-Amin and Bilal Wahab, "Iraq's Constitutional Moment?" The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 27, 2022, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/iraqs-constitutional-moment> (May 9, 2025); Vincent Campos, "Iraq: Long Overdue for an 'Amendments' Constitutional Congress?" Washington Kurdish Institute, October 17, 2022 <https://dckurd.org/2022/10/17/iraq-long-overdue-for-an-amendments-constitutional-congress/> (accessed March 11, 2025).

<sup>6</sup> "Iraq," *World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/iraq/factsheets/> (accessed March 8, 2025).

<sup>7</sup> "Iraq," Government of Armenia, Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, n.d. <http://diaspora.gov.am/en/pages/48/iraq> (accessed March 8, 2025); Valentinas Mite, "Iraq: Tiny Ethnic-Armenian Community Survived Hussein, Making It in Postwar Times," Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, July 6, 2004, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1053693.html> (accessed May 8, 2025).

total population, Sunni Muslims comprise 29% to 34%, and Christians comprise 1% including Armenian Apostolic Christians, Catholics and Evangelical (or Protestant) Christians, and various Assyrian Christians, other Catholics, and Orthodox Christians. Members of other religions, including but not limited to the Mandaeans and Yezidis, comprise 1% to 4% of the country's population.<sup>8</sup>

In terms of geography and terrain, Iraq has broad plains in the southern and central portions of the country, reedy marshes in parts of the south, with mountains along its borders with Iran and Turkey. Iraq's significant natural resources include petroleum, natural gas, phosphates, and sulfur.<sup>9</sup> Iraq produces an average of 4.6 million barrels per day barrels of oil per day, and has the world's fifth largest oil reserves with 145.02 billion barrels.<sup>10</sup> From 2012 to 2022, Iraq's oil revenues have accounted for more than 99% of its exports, 85% of the government's budget, and 42% of gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>11</sup>

### ARMENIANS IN IRAQ

Armenians have been arriving in Iraq since the seventh through twelfth centuries, during the Abbasid Caliphate, and have established their communities in Basra and Baghdad. In 1638, after conquering Baghdad, the Ottoman sultan Murad IV granted Armenians the privilege of living in the city, after which the Armenian community was formed. It was one of the traditional and prosperous communities of the Middle East. The first Armenian printing house in Iraq was established by the Tadevosyan brothers in 1874 in Baghdad. In modern times, the Iraqi Armenian community mainly grew and was formed by the refugees who had survived the Armenian Genocide. In the 1920s, around ninety thousand Armenians took refuge in Iraq. Later, some of them left the country for countries other than Armenia, and others were repatriated to Armenia.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> "Iraq," *World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/iraq/factsheets/> (accessed March 8, 2025).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> "Iraq Plans to Boost Oil Production to 6m Barrels Per Day," *Middle East Monitor*, September 9, 2024 <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20240909-iraq-plans-to-boost-oil-production-to-6m-barrels-per-day/> (accessed May 8, 2025); "World's Largest Oil Reserves by Country in 2024," *World Atlas*, <https://www.worldatlas.com/industries/the-world-s-largest-oil-reserves-by-country.html> (accessed May 8, 2025).

<sup>11</sup> "The World Bank in Iraq: Overview: Context," *The World Bank*, June 1, 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/iraq/overview> (accessed May 9, 2025).

<sup>12</sup> Government of Armenia, Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, "Iraq," <http://diaspora.gov.am/en/pages/48/iraq> .

Before the Iraq War, which began in 2003, the number of the Iraqi Armenians was about 25,00. Approximately 15,000 to 17,000 of them lived in Baghdad. The rest lived mainly in Basra, Mosul, Kirkuk and Zakho. In contemporary times, there are 7,000 to 8,000 Armenians living in Iraq. Most of them are citizens of Iraq, who work mainly in the fields of construction, science, commerce, education, health, finance, management, and sports. Armenians speak Armenian as their mother tongue, and Arabic, as an official language. They are of similar social status. Armenians living in Northern Iraq find it difficult to speak Armenian, thus Kurdish is predominantly used. In 2004, the Armenian National United School in Baghdad was reopened. One-day schools operate in many Iraqi cities, except Mosul.<sup>13</sup>

The Iraqi Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church was formed in 1944. The seat of the primate is the Armenian Apostolic Cathedral of Sourp Krikor Lousavoritch (Saint Gregory the Illuminator) in Baghdad. In 1640, the first Armenian church in Iraq, which is the Armenian Church Sourp Asdvadzadzin (Holy Mother of God, also called Miskinta), was built in Baghdad. It is a place of pilgrimage for Armenians and other local Christians. Next to the Prelacy, there is a national nursing home, a kindergarten, and a school, where Armenian language and literature, religion, and Armenian history are taught. The Armenian Diocese of Iraq is part of the Etchmiadzin Catholicosate, and it has ten functioning churches, four of which are located in Baghdad. The governing body of the Iraqi Armenians is the National Central Bureau that coordinates the religious and national activities of the community. All district committees in Iraq are subject to the bureau.<sup>14</sup>

The small Armenian Catholic community in Iraq was formed in the seventeenth through eighteenth centuries. The center of the predominantly Arabic-speaking Iraqi Armenian Catholic community has always been in Baghdad. The community has two churches in Baghdad: The Armenian Catholic Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which was established in 1937, and the Armenian Catholic Church of Assumption, which was founded in 1844. In 1997, the Armenian Catholic Cathedral, which is the largest Christian church in Baghdad, was reconstructed. Today, there are approximately 200 to 250 Armenian Catholic families left in Iraq. The Armenian Evangelical community in Iraq was formed as a result of the emigration of the Evangelical Armenians from other parts of the Ottoman Empire to Iraq following the Armenian Genocide.<sup>15</sup> There was a small

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

emigration from Beirut and Aleppo to Iraq in the mid-twentieth century too.<sup>16</sup>

Apart from emigrating to other countries, many Iraqi Armenians, particularly from Baghdad and Basra, moved to and settled in safer, northern Kurdish-populated rural areas as a result of the internal movement that occurred during the war. Almost all Armenians of northern Iraq are members of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The Catholics are much smaller in number. Currently, the following Armenian organizations operate in Iraq: The National Central Bureau, the Iraqi branch of the AGBU, the Iraqi branch of the Homenetmen, the Armenian Mixed Youth Union of Baghdad, the AMYU branch in Basra and, the Armenian Women's Cultural Union (AWCU).<sup>17</sup>

### IRAQ'S CONSTITUTIONAL HISTORY AND THE 2005 CONSTITUTION

In trying to understand the 2005 constitution, it would be helpful to consider some of the history, which preceded that constitution. Comprehending this history will also facilitate a deeper understanding of the relationships between Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq, on the one hand, with Iraq's current constitution, on the other.

Iraq's first constitution, which established a constitutional monarchy, entered into force under the auspices of a British military occupation in 1925, and remained in effect until the 1958 revolution in Iraq established a republic.<sup>18</sup> Interim constitutions were adopted in 1968 and 1970.<sup>19</sup> In 1990, a draft constitution was prepared but never promulgated due to the onset of the Gulf War.<sup>20</sup> Iraq became an independent kingdom in 1932, and a republic was proclaimed in 1958, although for much of Iraq's history, its actual form of government has been autocratic.<sup>21</sup>

With respect to the British colonial period in Iraq, partly as a result of the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, the San Remo Conference in 1920, and the

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<sup>16</sup> Personal communication from a scholar of Armenian Studies, December 6, 2025.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Tareq Y. Ismael, Jacqueline S. Ismael, Glenn E. Perry, *Government and Politics of the Contemporary Middle East: Continuity and Change*, Second Edition, Routledge, Abingdon, 2016, 279.

<sup>19</sup> CONSTITUTIONNET, "Constitutional History of Iraq," (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), Strömsborg, SE-103 34 in Stockholm, Sweden), <http://www.constitutionnet.org/country/constitutional-history-iraq> (accessed March 12, 2025); Zaid Al-Ali, Constitutional scholar, specializing in Arab/Middle East constitutional reform, <https://zaidalali.com> (accessed March 12, 2025).

<sup>20</sup> *Iraq Country Study Guide; Volume 1: Strategic Information and Developments*, International Business Publications, Washington, DC, 2013, 96-97.

<sup>21</sup> Dale Lightfoot and Angelia L. Mance, *Iraq*, Chelsea House Publishers, Philadelphia, 2003, 88.

Cairo Conference of 1921, the British maintained *de facto* control over much of what was to become Iraq and very large areas which were near it.<sup>22</sup> In this context, the British decided to appoint Faisal I bin Hussein bin Ali al-Hashimi as the first king of Iraq.<sup>23</sup> He ruled that country from 1921 until 1933.<sup>24</sup> King Faisal I's son, who was King Ghazi, ruled Iraq from 1933 until 1939,<sup>25</sup> and King Ghazi's son, who was King Faisal II, ruled Iraq from 1939 until 1958, when he and other members of the Hashemite family in Iraq were killed in a military coup.<sup>26</sup>

In July 1968, the Baath Party overthrew Iraq's President Abdul Rahman Arif and his allies, and that party established a new government where Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr, who was originally from Tikrit, Iraq and was a relative of Saddam Hussein and a former military officer, became the President and Prime Minister of Iraq.<sup>27</sup> In 1976, al-Bakr appointed Saddam Hussein to the rank of general in the army. Saddam Hussein was also from Tikrit and, before his appointment as general, had had substantial control over the Baath Party's militia and was head of a complex network of security agencies.<sup>28</sup> This appointment of Saddam Hussein into a high position in the military's hierarchy reduced the importance of al-Bakr, and in 1979 al-Bakr resigned.<sup>29</sup> Hussein immediately succeeded al-Bakr as president of Iraq, secretary general of the Baath Party, chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council, and commander-in-chief of the armed forces.<sup>30</sup> Throughout the years of Hussein's rule, which followed his becoming president of Iraq in 1979, Hussein commanded more power into his own hands.<sup>31</sup>

After the Iran-Iraq War ended in 1989, President Hussein allowed elections for a new national legislature and proposed the creation of a new

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<sup>22</sup> Eugene L. Rogan, "The Emergence of the Middle East into the Modern State System" *International Relations of the Middle East*, Third Edition, Louise Fawcett, ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, 2013, 48; William E. Watson, *Tricolor and Crescent: France and the Islamic World*, Praeger, Westport, Connecticut, 2003, 200.

<sup>23</sup> Dougherty and Ghareeb, 19.

<sup>24</sup> Peter L. Hahn, *Historical Dictionary of United States-Middle East Relations*, Second Edition, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, Maryland, 2016, 101.

<sup>25</sup> Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2009, 54.

<sup>26</sup> Barry Jones, *Dictionary of World Biography*, Third Edition, ANU [Australian National University] Press, Acton, Australia, 2016, 280.

<sup>27</sup> William L. Cleveland and Martin Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, Fifth Edition, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 2013, 425.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 426.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

constitution.<sup>32</sup> This constitution intended to create a Council of Ministers, lift the ban on political parties, and provide for direct presidential elections.<sup>33</sup> However, the Persian Gulf War, which began in August of 1990, interrupted this process and permanently stalled the creation of what may have been a more democratic constitution.<sup>34</sup> President Hussein used his powerful position to install formidable controls over the press and freedom of expression.<sup>35</sup>

In the run-up to the United States' war in Iraq, which the United States initiated by invading that country militarily in March 2003, United States President George W. Bush, and the Americans who agreed with Bush's policies, claimed that the United States was justified in invading Iraq because, among other reasons, according to this argument, the Iraqi regime possessed "weapons of mass destruction" and Iraqi President Saddam Hussein constituted a threat to the entire region. This war constituted a devastating error on the United States' part, in view of the fact that it has caused the deaths of a large number of Iraqis, severely weakened Iraq's infrastructure, and precipitated a catastrophic civil war in that country.<sup>36</sup> Saddam Hussein was apprehended by the United States military on December 13, 2003, and was executed on charges of war crimes on December 30, 2006.<sup>37</sup>

Iraq's current constitution was drafted in 2005 by members of the Iraqi Constitution Drafting Committee to replace the Law of Administration for the State of Iraq for the Transitional Period, also known as the "Transitional Administrative Law" (TAL).<sup>38</sup> The TAL was drafted between December 2003 and March 2004 by the Iraqi Governing Council, an appointed body that was selected by the Coalition Provisional Authority after the Iraq War and the occupation of Iraq by the United States and Coalition forces.<sup>39</sup> The current

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<sup>32</sup> CONSTITUTIONNET, "Constitutional History of Iraq."

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> "Why Did We Go to War? A Look at the Rationales for Going to War in Iraq, from WMD and Terrorism to Democracy in the Middle East" on PBS's [Public Broadcasting Service's] program *Frontline* <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/truth/why/> (accessed May 8, 2025). PBS is a major television network in the United States; Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, Brown University, "Costs of War: Civilians Killed and Wounded," <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/human/civilians> (accessed May 8, 2025).

<sup>37</sup> Robert W. Malick, "Hussein, Uday," *The Encyclopedia of Middle East Wars: The United States in the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, and Iraq Conflicts, Volume 1*, Spencer C. Tucker ed., ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara, California, 2010, 549.

<sup>38</sup> *Iraq Country Study Guide*, 96.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

constitution was approved by a referendum that took place on October 15, 2005.<sup>40</sup>

The fifty-five members of the committee which drafted Iraq's constitution were from the following political parties:

United Iraqi Alliance (comprised mostly of Shia Islamists) - 28 members

Democratic Patriotic Alliance of Kurdistan (Kurdish) - 15 members

Iraqi National Movement (non-sectarian party comprised of Sunnis and Shias) - 8 members

Communist Party of Iraq (Communist) - 1 member

Iraqi Turkmen Front (Turkmen) 1 member

National Rafidain List (Assyrian Democratic Movement) - 1 member

Sunni Arab nominee - 1 member<sup>41</sup>

The preponderance of Shias on that committee reflects in part their relatively large numbers in Iraq's population and Iraqi Shia political leaders' ability to leverage influence for themselves in the aftermath of the United States' invasion of Iraq which began in 2003. Subsequently, Iraq's Shia political parties have garnered significant influence.<sup>42</sup>

Generally, some common themes that Iraq's 2005 constitution shares with some of that country's past constitutions, beginning with the one in 1925, include (1) secularism; (2) Islam; (3) individual rights; (4) a three-part system of government including executive, parliamentary, and judicial institutions, and (5) positive attention to religious and ethnic minorities.<sup>43</sup> One reason for these commonalities relates to Britain having imported aspects of its constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy to Iraq during the period that King Faisal I ruled.<sup>44</sup> Iraq's 1925 constitution has been described

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>41</sup> *Niqash: The Place to Debate in Iraq*,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20060227172321/http://www.niqash.org/content.php?contentTypeID=94&id=672> (accessed March 11, 2025). According to Niqash's website, it is a space for Iraqi citizens to exchange views on the political process and to debate the processes that shape Iraqi society. In order to do so, Niqash provides background information and organizes expert exchanges on current topics ("What is Niqash?")

<https://web.archive.org/web/20051222201300/http://www.niqash.org/content.php?contentTypeID=36&id=22> (accessed March 11, 2025); Wikipedia, "Members of the Iraqi Constitution Drafting Committee"

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Members\\_of\\_the\\_Iraqi\\_Constitution\\_Drafting\\_Committee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Members_of_the_Iraqi_Constitution_Drafting_Committee) (accessed March 11, 2025).

<sup>42</sup> Phebe Marr with Ibrahim al-Marashi, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 4th ed., Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 214-15.

<sup>43</sup> Robert L. Maddex, *Constitutions of the World*, 3rd ed., CQ Press, Washington, DC, 2008, 217-21.

<sup>44</sup> Adeed Dawisha, *Iraq: A Political History from Independence to Occupation*, Princeton University Press, 2009, 12-14; Iraq Legal Education Initiative (ILEI) at

as Iraq's "only legitimate, permanent constitution" prior to the 2005 constitution.<sup>45</sup> The 1925 constitution reflected a compromise between the British desire to have power concentrated in the king (which would have increased Britain's influence on Iraqi politics) and Iraqis' desire for democracy.<sup>46</sup> That constitution recognized three branches of government: an executive branch centered on the king,<sup>47</sup> a legislative branch comprised of two parliamentary houses (a Senate and Chamber of Deputies),<sup>48</sup> and courts.<sup>49</sup> The 1925 constitution granted the king the power to unilaterally dissolve parliament,<sup>50</sup> select a prime minister,<sup>51</sup> confirm laws, order their promulgation and supervise their execution,<sup>52</sup> and issue ordinances on important matters when the parliament was not in session.<sup>53</sup> Thus, while the 1925 constitution appeared to establish a parliamentary system, the king essentially controlled the government's policymaking power.<sup>54</sup>

At the same time, Iraq's parliament had the power to make, amend, and repeal laws.<sup>55</sup> After the enactment of the 1925 constitution, some members of Iraq's parliament tried to strengthen the democratic aspects of the constitutional system by attempting to assert their influence over domestic and foreign policy issues, sometimes in opposition to the British. However, Iraq's king continued to hold considerable power with respect to the parliament and electoral processes.<sup>56</sup>

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Stanford Law School and American University of Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS), "Constitutional Law of Iraq," Introduction to the Laws of Kurdistan, Iraq Working Paper Series, Pub. 2013, p. 7 <https://law.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/ILEI-Constitutional-Law-2013.pdf> (accessed March 11, 2025).

<sup>45</sup> Feisal Amin al-Istrabadi, "Reviving Constitutionalism in Iraq," *New York Law School Law Review*, 50:2005-2006, 269 <https://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3362&context=facpub> (accessed March 11, 2025); ILEI and AUIS, "Constitutional Law of Iraq," 7.

<sup>46</sup> Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, Cambridge University Press, 2007, 56; ILEI and AUIS, 7.

<sup>47</sup> Constitution of the Kingdom of Iraq, March 21, 1925, as amended July 29, 1925, Constitution Society <https://constitution.org/1-Constitution/cons/iraq/iraqconst19250321.html> (accessed March 11, 2025).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, Articles 27-63.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, Articles 68-89 and 116-17.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 26, Section 2.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 26, Section 5.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 26, Section 1.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 26, Section 3.

<sup>54</sup> ILEI and AUIS, 8.

<sup>55</sup> Constitution of the Kingdom of Iraq, March 21, 1925, as amended July 29, 1925, Article 28.

<sup>56</sup> ILEI and AUIS, 8.

Iraq's 1958 revolution ended the monarchy and established Iraq as a republic.<sup>57</sup> That revolution also canceled the 1925 constitution, and led to an era when some of Iraq's most powerful governmental leaders ignored or violated constitutional principles. During and after the 1958 revolution, interim and provisional constitutions utilized words and phrases such as "democracy," "people's fundamental rights," and "equality before the law" but those ideals were not tangibly implemented.<sup>58</sup> Unlike the 1925 and 2005 constitutions, the provisional constitutions were subjected to almost no discussions outside the cabinet, and were not the results of any debates or referendums.<sup>59</sup> In addition, during the post-revolutionary period, the President and Iraq's Revolutionary Command Council had supreme executive power with the authority to appoint the Premier and Cabinet, all judges and civil servants, and to declare martial law and states of emergency. The President could even cancel laws through executive decrees.<sup>60</sup> The provisional constitutions during the post-revolutionary period also allowed the government to cancel or modify individual rights.<sup>61</sup> For example, Article 26 of Iraq's 1970 interim constitution (which was ratified during the Baath Party's rule) remained in effect, with amendments, until 2003 when the United States removed Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and his government from power. That article states,

The Constitution guarantees freedom of opinion, publication, meeting, demonstrations and formation of political parties, syndicates, and societies in accordance with the objectives of the Constitution and within the limits of the law. The State ensures the considerations necessary to exercise these liberties, which comply with the revolutionary, national, and progressive trend.<sup>62</sup>

While that article appears to protect individuals' freedom of expression, association, and opinion, the second sentence indicates that the State can restrict those freedoms to ensure compliance with the "revolutionary, national, progressive trend." Similarly, the following provision in a 1977 law places restrictions on individual rights and parliamentary power.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> The Interim Constitution of Iraq and Its Amendments, July 16, 1970, [Iraq] Ministry of Information, Baghdad, published in 1974, Article 26. <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP09T00207R001000100001-3.pdf> (accessed March 11, 2025).

<sup>63</sup> ILEI and AUIS, 9-10.

The people as interpreted by the Revolution and the Leading Party, the Arab Baath Socialist Party, is all the members of the society who enjoy equal rights and equal duties. But in exercising democracy . . . it is inevitable to exclude all persons who take a political, economical (sic) or intellectual attitude hostile to the Revolution and its programme. The status of such people shall be defined [and] revolutionary political consciousness shall play a decisive role in immunizing public opinion towards them. This being an exceptional case created by the necessity of transforming society.<sup>64</sup>

Although an Iraqi National Assembly existed and had the authority to propose and draft laws, confirm budgets, and debate all aspects of domestic and foreign policy, its jurisdiction was restricted to endorsing policies and enacting laws submitted to it by the Revolutionary Command Council.<sup>65</sup> The United States' 2003 invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq have caused increased instability in that country and, as a result, Iraq's political future is uncertain. If stability can be established and maintained, Iraq's 2005 constitution contains provisions, which can preserve that country's democratic institutions, while protecting the rights of Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities.

For example, although Iraq's 2005 constitution states that Islam is the official religion of the state and contains other significant provisions with respect to Islam, the constitution also "guarantees the full religious rights to freedom of religious belief and practice of all individuals such as Christians, Yazidis, and Mandaean Sabaeans."<sup>66</sup> While the Iraqi constitution states that Arabic and Kurdish "are the two official languages of Iraq[,] [t]he right of Iraqis to educate their children in their mother tongue, such as Turkmen, Assyrian, and Armenian, shall be guaranteed in government educational institutions in accordance with educational guidelines, or in any other language in private educational institutions."<sup>67</sup> This constitutional article is the

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<sup>64</sup> Law no. 35 of 1977, Legal System Reform, *al-waqai al-iraqiyya* [Official Gazette of Iraq] 20, no. 37, September 14, 1977, 21, as quoted in Democratic Principles Workshop, *Final Report on the Transition to Democracy in Iraq*, Democratic Principles Working Group Report, November 2002, 6 <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB198/FOI%20Democratic%20Principles.pdf> (accessed March 11, 2025).

<sup>65</sup> ILEI and AUIS, 10.

<sup>66</sup> Iraq's Constitution of 2005, Article 2, Second, [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iraq\\_2005.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iraq_2005.pdf?lang=en) (accessed March 11, 2025). Constituteproject.org is part of the Comparative Constitutions Project which is a scholarly endeavor that produces comprehensive data about the world's constitutions. See "About the CCP" at <http://comparativeconstitutionsproject.org/about-ccp/> (accessed May 8, 2025).

<sup>67</sup> Iraq's Constitution of 2005, Article 4, First.

only instance in Iraq's constitution where there is an explicit mention of Armenians or anything related to the language of Armenian. Iraq's constitution is also clear in its condemnation of what it terms racism or terrorism, stating that those forms of hostility "shall be prohibited . . . [and that] [s]uch entities may not be part of political pluralism in Iraq."<sup>68</sup>

In line with these protections, the Iraqi constitution states, "Iraqis are equal before the law without discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, origin, color, religion, sect, belief or opinion, or economic or social status"<sup>69</sup> and "[e]very individual has the right to enjoy life, security and liberty."<sup>70</sup> Iraq's constitution also guarantees equal opportunities for all Iraqis,<sup>71</sup> the right to personal privacy,<sup>72</sup> the protection of the "sanctity of homes,"<sup>73</sup> citizenship rights for Iraqis,<sup>74</sup> an independent judiciary,<sup>75</sup> the right to participate in public affairs, and to vote, elect, and run for office.<sup>76</sup>

### IRAQ'S PERSONAL STATUS LAW OF 1959

In this vein, although Iraq's Personal Status Law of 1959 (IPSL) functions as a basis for personal status and family law in that country, the way which it may apply to Christians and other religious minorities is unclear because some Iraqi Shia and Sunni political parties have been placing enormous pressure on Iraq's government to Islamize personal status law in a manner that is consistent with the strictest interpretations of Islamic law (sharia) which could result in many Iraqi Christians losing their rights.<sup>77</sup> The large-scale political and cultural battles with respect to these laws are ongoing. The unclear and threatening situation for Iraq's Christians with respect to personal status law is exacerbated by the fact that 83% of Iraq's Christian population has left the country, leaving the Christians who remain there vulnerable and severely weakened with little political influence or representation. Making matters even more difficult for Iraq's Christians, ISIS, al-Qaida, and other Islamist groups have often acted in hostile ways toward Christians, physically attacking them, expropriating or destroying their properties and churches

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., Article 7.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., Article 14.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., Article 15.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., Article 16.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., Article 17, First.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., Article 17, Second.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., Article 18, First.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., Article 19, First.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., Article 20.

<sup>77</sup> Juan Cole, "Struggles over Personal Status and Family Law in Post-Baathist Iraq," *Family, Gender, and Law in a Globalizing Middle East and South Asia*, Kenneth M. Cuno and Manisha Desai eds., Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, New York, 2009, 122-25; Noga Efrati, *Women in Iraq: Past Meets Present*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2012, 51-85.

while implementing strict Sharia in a manner that has been damaging to Christians.<sup>78</sup> Thus, an analysis of Iraq's personal status laws must consider these factors together with the fact that little information is available about those laws and their applicability to Iraq's Christians, in part because they are embattled and beleaguered.

Despite these ambiguities, the IPSL forms a basis for personal status law in Iraq.<sup>79</sup> Before considering the relevance of specific articles of that law for Christians, it is important to describe the context within which the IPSL was written. Iraq's 1958 revolution, which occurred the year before the ISPL was drafted, resulted in the overthrow of the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq that had been established by King Faisal I in 1921 under the auspices of the British.<sup>80</sup> King Faisal II, Prince Abd al-Ilah, and Prime Minister Nuri al-Said were killed during that uprising. After this revolution, the Iraqi Republic was established. Abd al-Karim Qasim took power as Prime Minister until 1963.<sup>81</sup> With the overthrow of the old Hashemite king and the creation of a secular republic, a political environment with a secularist ideology created an opportunity to develop a personal status law, with some secular foundations. The new Republic of Iraq created Personal Status Law No. 188 in 1959.<sup>82</sup> The Iraqi Shia and Sunni ulema (Muslim legal scholars) opposed the secular codification of personal status because it violated their religious beliefs, encroached on their authority, and transferred family matters to secular state courts and civil servants.<sup>83</sup> The IPSL partially diverged from sharia by introducing laws that granted equal inheritance and divorce rights, relegated divorce, inheritance and marriage to civil, instead of religious courts, and provided for child support. Yet, the ulema could adjudicate, through sharia, some cases that the 1959 law did not address. The IPSL provided a text for judges, who were trained and appointed by the state, to rule on many matters of personal status.<sup>84</sup> The IPSL's combination of secular and Islamic ideologies manifest the conflicts between secular and Islamic groups as that law was being written.

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<sup>78</sup> Frank Gardner, "Iraq's Christians 'Close to Extinction,'" BBC News, May 23, 2019 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-48333923> (accessed March 11, 2025).

<sup>79</sup> Cole, 105-25.

<sup>80</sup> Marr and al-Marashi, 66-69.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Kelsey Cherland, "The Development of Personal Status Law in Jordan and Iraq" (Senior Thesis, Claremont McKenna College, 2014), 66. [http://scholarship.claremont.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1926&context=cmc\\_theses](http://scholarship.claremont.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1926&context=cmc_theses) (accessed March 11, 2025).

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 70.

With these factors in mind, Article 17 of the IPSL states that Muslim men may marry a woman from a religion that has been divinely revealed (which could include Christianity), but Muslim women may not marry non-Muslims.<sup>85</sup> Article 18 of the IPSL states, “entering into Islam by one spouse before the other shall follow the sharia-based provisions in remaining married or becoming separated” which is one of several sections of the IPSL that makes specific reference to Islam in a manner that could give Muslims advantages.<sup>86</sup> In fact, the IPSL explicitly refers to sharia thirty times. Yet, the IPSL’s articles related marriage dowries provide flexibility with respect to religions and customs stating that the wife shall be entitled to the dowry designated in the contract, while providing protections to wives and husbands and giving attention to “norms” and “customs.”<sup>87</sup> The IPSL provides protections for women and men with respect to alimony without explicitly mentioning sharia or any religions although, the IPSL contains provisions for a man having more than one wife.<sup>88</sup>

The IPSL’s articles related to divorce are written in a manner that could, in principle, be applied fairly to Muslims and Christians, while making allowances for Muslims by referring to a sharia court.<sup>89</sup> With respect to parentage and lineage, the IPSL states, without giving preference to a religion, that “the parentage/lineage of a child of every wife shall be attributed to her husband.”<sup>90</sup> The IPSL’s articles about wills and inheritance are also written in a manner that exclude specific reference to religion.<sup>91</sup>

Armenians in Iraq and other Christians in that country face an uncertain future with respect to personal status laws and broader political matters in that country. However, if Article 41 of Iraq’s 2005 constitution, which pertains to personal status law, remains in effect, it could provide some protection for Armenians and other Christians. That article states, “Iraqis are free in their commitment to their personal status according to their religions, sects, beliefs, or choices, and this shall be regulated by law.”<sup>92</sup> While the secular aspects of that constitution, the ISPL, and other laws in Iraq provide some flexibility for

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<sup>85</sup> Personal Status Law of 1959, “Personal Status Law (1) No. 188 of 1959 and its Amendments” <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5c7664947.pdf> (accessed March 11, 2025), Article 17. This chapter will refer to that Iraqi Personal Status Law as “IPSL.” Refworld is affiliated with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and provides country and legal information, as well as policy and legal documents. See “About Refworld” at <https://www.refworld.org/about.html> (accessed March 11, 2025).

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 18.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, Articles 19-22.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, Articles 23-33.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, Articles 34-39. Article 39, Section 1 refers to a Sharia court.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 51.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, Articles 64-74 and 85-89.

<sup>92</sup> Iraq’s Constitution of 2005, Article 41.

Christians, the strength of Shia and Sunni groups and the influence of Islamist ideologies could pose significant threats to personal status laws and other legal protections for Christians.<sup>93</sup>

While the amendments to the ISPL, which Iraq's House of Representatives approved on January 21, 2025, will not have a direct impact on Iraq's Armenians and other Christians, the stipulations of those amendments are worth noting.<sup>94</sup> Those amendments, which pertain to the ISPL Law No. 188 of 1959, allow Muslim couples to select the Jaafari Shiite school of jurisprudence as the governing law for their marriage and family. The amendments provide that, upon registering their marriage contract in the Personal Status Court, an Iraqi Muslim man and woman have the right to have the rulings of the Jaafari Shiite school of jurisprudence applied to them in relation to matters of family law. For marriage contracts concluded and registered before the amendments' effective date, either party may submit a request to the Personal Status Court to apply rulings of the Jaafari Shiite school of jurisprudence (Article 2 (3) (a)). The right to request the Personal Status Court to apply rulings of the Jaafari Shiite school to their family law matters is granted to every legally competent adult Iraqi Muslim man and woman (Article 2 (3) (b)).<sup>95</sup> Once such a request has been made by one of the parties to the marriage, courts handling personal status cases will be required to adhere to the rulings of the Jaafari Shiite school. (Article 2 (3) (c)).<sup>96</sup>

The amendments stipulate that the new code must not conflict with article 8 of Law No. 188 of 1959, which sets the age of consent at 18 years old. The amendments also mandate that the new code complies with article 56 (4) of Law No. 188 of 1959, which governs matters of child custody in divorce (Article 2 (3) (e) (2)). Article 56 (4) states that the mother loses her right to child custody when the child turns seven years of age. If parties in a family dispute disagree on whether to apply the rulings of the Shiite Jaafari school in

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<sup>93</sup> Cole, 105-25.

<sup>94</sup> George Sadek, "Iraq: House of Representatives Approves Amendments to Law on Personal Status," Law Library of Congress [in the United States], February 14, 2025, <https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2025-02-14/iraq-house-of-representatives-approves-amendments-to-law-on-personal-status/> (accessed May 9, 2025).

<sup>95</sup> Sadek, "Iraq: House of Representatives,"; The Presidency of the Republic of Iraq, "Amendment to Personal Status Law No. 188 of 1959," The amendment was ratified in 2025 and uploaded on February 4, 2025, <https://perma.cc/4FBU-VQ3Y> (accessed May 10, 2025); The Baghdad Institute for Economic and Legal Development, "The 1959 Personal Status Law, Number 188 with Amendments," January 18, 2022, (captured on August 19, 2024), <https://perma.cc/9X7Z-MEVR> (accessed May 10, 2025).

<sup>96</sup> Sadek, "Iraq: House of Representatives,"; The Presidency of the Republic of Iraq, "Amendment to Personal Status Law No. 188 of 1959."

cases of divorce, the court will apply the choice of the husband (Article 2 (3) (h)).<sup>97</sup>

Following the approval of the amendments, the Iraqi parliament issued a statement affirming that the amendments comply with the 2005 Iraqi constitution, specifically article 2, which prohibits the enactment of any amendments or laws that contradict established provisions of Islam, and article 41, which guarantees individuals the freedom to follow personal status laws consistent with their religions, sects, beliefs, or choice. The statement further added that the amendments were issued at the request of the citizens represented by the Shiite component in the parliament. It also clarified that, under the amendments, the rulings of the Shiite Jaafari school of jurisprudence apply exclusively to Shiite Iraqis and do not apply to the Sunni Muslims in Iraq.<sup>98</sup>

## HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAQ AND IRAQI KURDISTAN

Although the intention of Iraq's 2005 constitution is to provide rights, freedoms, and protections to everyone in Iraq, that country's relatively weak central government and the multi-sided conflicts have made Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities particularly vulnerable. While Amnesty International has, at times during its history, been criticized for pro-Western biases, its report entitled *The State of the World's Human Rights, April 2025* provides some helpful information with respect to the negative situation related to human rights in Iraq.<sup>99</sup> According to that report, the fate of thousands of persons, who have been forcibly caused to disappear since 2014, has remained undisclosed. Justice and adequate reparations were slow for enforced disappearances and unlawful killings committed by security forces and militias during the October 2019 demonstrations in Iraq, where participants protested corruption, high unemployment, political sectarianism, inefficient public services and foreign interventionism. Governmental authorities arrested and prosecuted people for what those authorities believed was indecent content, and attempted to suppress dissent in other ways also.<sup>100</sup> This somewhat repressive environment could create difficulties for almost anyone who criticizes Iraq's government, including Armenians, if any of them would choose to do so.

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<sup>97</sup> Sadek, "Iraq: House of Representatives,"; The Presidency of the Republic of Iraq, "Amendment to Personal Status Law No. 188 of 1959."

<sup>98</sup> Sadek, "Iraq: House of Representatives,"; The Presidency of the Republic of Iraq, "Amendment to Personal Status Law No. 188 of 1959."

<sup>99</sup> Amnesty International, *The State of the World's Human Rights, April 2025*, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/8515/2025/en/> (accessed March 8, 2025).

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

## ARMENIANS, KURDS, AND THE KURDISH REGIONAL GOVERNMENT

Yet, according to an article originally published in 2023, and updated in 2024, which was written by Bashar Matti Warda, a Chaldean Catholic cleric and Archbishop of Erbil at the time, there is willingness on the part of the Kurdistan Regional Government's leadership to consistently engage in acts of public solidarity with the Christian population.<sup>101</sup> These examples of tolerance and respect are of great significance. In Bashar Matti Warda's view, especially in the aftermath of the ISIS war, continued vigilance and leadership must be shown at all levels of government, in order to ensure that hateful ideologies are not allowed any space to take root. From his perspective, the Christians in the Kurdistan Region will continue to look closely for unwavering support in this area.<sup>102</sup>

According to him, the future of Christians in the Kurdistan Region rests on the freedom to practice their faith. In this vein, he acknowledges that the Kurdistan Regional Government has protected the freedom for communities to practice and live their faith openly. Since 2014, new churches, schools and health clinics have opened, and a new university was established, which is the Catholic University in Erbil. At the same time, the Kurdistan Regional Government allowed Christians to administer and manage the humanitarian needs of their displaced families in various sites throughout the greater Erbil region, and provided land and security to support the efforts of the Church. In all these cases, the Kurdistan Regional Government has allowed for the building and operation to take place in a manner that respects and supports Christian traditions and beliefs.<sup>103</sup>

In terms of non-Kurds in positions in the Kurdistan Regional Government, there is one Armenian, who holds a seat in the Kurdistan Parliament - Iraq, and his name is Vahik Kamal Sughumun Huhan Serani.<sup>104</sup> Other non-Kurds in that parliament include one Assyrian Christian and four Turkmen.<sup>105</sup> There are one hundred and eleven members in that parliament.<sup>106</sup> There is one

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<sup>101</sup> Bashar Matti Warda, "The Status of Christians in the Kurdistan Region," Fondation-Institut kurde de Paris, originally published on July 1, 2023, and updated on January 23, 2024, n.p. <https://www.institutkurde.org/info/the-status-of-christians-in-the-kurdistan-region-1232552334> (accessed March 11, 2025.)

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Kurdistan Parliament - Iraq, "Vahik Kamal Serani (Armenian)" [https://www.parliament.krd/english/members-and-parties/mps-of-fifth-term-2019-2023/mps-normal/vahik-kamal-serani-armenian/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.parliament.krd/english/members-and-parties/mps-of-fifth-term-2019-2023/mps-normal/vahik-kamal-serani-armenian/?utm_source=chatgpt.com) (accessed December 7, 2025).

<sup>105</sup> Kurdistan Parliament - Iraq, "Parties in the Kurdistan Parliament" [https://www.parliament.krd/english/members-and-parties/parties-fifth-term/#pos\\_2872](https://www.parliament.krd/english/members-and-parties/parties-fifth-term/#pos_2872) (accessed December 7, 2025).

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

Assyrian Christian and one Turkmen in the Cabinet, which is also known as the Council of Ministers.<sup>107</sup> There are a total of twenty-three members of that cabinet.<sup>108</sup>

In terms of legal status in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities are protected under the Law of Protecting Components in Kurdistan.<sup>109</sup> That law protects the right of participation in the government, the right to avoid discrimination, cultural and linguistic rights, as well as rights to free speech and freedom of religion, and the right to form organizations and maintain diaspora links.<sup>110</sup> The law does not impose special extra duties on Armenians or other religious and ethnic minorities. Armenians are bound by the same general legal obligations as other citizens. For example, they must obey statutes, respect public order, and comply with administrative requirements.<sup>111</sup>

In this context, there are ongoing efforts on the part of Armenia and Iraqi Kurdistan to boost economic and cultural ties.<sup>112</sup> Such alliances between Armenians and Kurds are rooted in their mutual desire to protect themselves from (1) Turkish aggression; (2) the hostility of ISIS and similar groups; and (3) possible attacks on the part of Shias, the Iraqi government and/or forces aligned with one or both of those entities.<sup>113</sup>

As of this writing, Armenians in Iraqi Kurdistan face a precarious situation, with a dwindling population due to ongoing migration, and concerns about their future security despite relative stability in the region. While the Armenians in Iraqi Kurdistan have some protections and representation within the Kurdish government, some Armenians have a growing sense of isolation and a fear of their community possibly going out of existence, because of the

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<sup>107</sup> Kurdistan Regional Government, “The Cabinet Ministers,”

<https://gov.krd/english/government/the-cabinet/> (accessed December 7, 2025).

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Peace and Freedom Organization in Kurdistan and Al-Mesalla Organization for Human Resources Development, “A Reading for the Law of Protecting Components in Kurdistan,” July 2015, <https://www.iraqicivilsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/A-Reading-for-the-Law-of-Protecting-Components-in-Kurdistan-english.pdf> (accessed December 7, 2025).

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> “Armenia Confirms Plans to Open Consulate General in Erbil,” *Rudaw*, March 2, 2017, <http://www.rudaw.net/english/world/020320171> (accessed March 8, 2025); Asbed Kotchikian, “The Forgotten Armenians of Iraqi Kurdistan: Iraq’s Dwindling and Displaced Armenian Community Faces an Uncertain Future,” *Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) Magazine*, February 2016, <https://agbu.org/changing-landscape-middle-east/forgotten-armenians-iraqi-kurdistan#:~:text=Compounding%20the%20insecurity%20facing%20Armenians,Kurdistan%20are%20at%20a%20crossroads> (accessed March 8, 2025).

<sup>113</sup> Interview with scholar of Armenian Studies, in Beirut on June 13, 2016.

internal and external threats that they face, which include a belief on the part of those Armenians that other diaspora Armenians and the government of Armenia are ignoring them.<sup>114</sup> Demographically, the Armenian communities in Iraqi Kurdistan have significantly shrunk over the years due to large-scale migration, primarily driven by violence and insecurity in various parts of Iraq, leading to a smaller and aging population concentrated mainly in cities like Dohuk and Zakho.<sup>115</sup> While the Kurdish Regional Government's (KRG's) constitution recognizes Armenians as an ethnic minority and allocates to them a seat in parliament, some community members feel that this representation is not enough to fully address their concerns.<sup>116</sup> Despite efforts to maintain their language and traditions, the shrinking community faces challenges in preserving Armenian culture and identity, especially among younger generations.<sup>117</sup> Despite the challenges, the Armenian community in Iraqi Kurdistan benefits from relative stability within the KRG, access to education in their language, and the presence of Armenian churches and cultural centers.<sup>118</sup>

As the future unfolds, the potential strengths and/or weaknesses of the Armenian-Kurdish alliance will become clearer. At the same time, one must also keep in mind the worrisome and potentially tragic possibility that the Kurds could turn against the Armenians and other minorities inside and outside Kurdish-controlled regions because if the Kurds gain political power, they may want to use that power to benefit themselves. Alternatively, if the Kurds feel threatened, by Turkey for example, they may engage against hostile acts against Turks and Christians in their vicinity as a means of regaining their power.<sup>119</sup> In this context, if the Kurds' support of Armenians and other

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<sup>114</sup> Kotchikian.

<sup>115</sup> "Armenians in Iraq," Minority Rights Group, November 2017, <https://minorityrights.org/communities/armenians-4/#:~:text=Ethnically%20distinct%20from%20the%20rest,five%20churches%20in%20the%20region> (accessed March 8, 2025); Robert Istepanian, "The Armenians of Iraq since 2003: Two Decades of Progress or Regression," Centre Français de Recherche sur l'Irak, June 23, 2023, <https://cfri-irak.com/en/article/the-armenians-of-iraq-since-2003-two-decades-of-progress-or-regression-2023-07-07#:~:text=These%20need%20to%20have%20the,that%20still%20binds%20them%20together>. (accessed March 8, 2025).

<sup>116</sup> Istepanian.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> For some examples of past Kurdish atrocities and massacres against the Kurds, see Dominik J. Schaller and Jürgen Zimmerer, "Late Ottoman Genocides: The Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and Young Turkish Population and Extermination Policies – Introduction," *Late Ottoman Genocides: The Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and Young Turkish Population and Extermination Policies*,

minorities were to remain in place, that support could increase the Kurdish Regional Government's international credibility.<sup>120</sup>

The Kurdish Regional Provisional Constitution was written in 1996, reformed in 2003 and functions as a working document, even though it has not been formally ratified.<sup>121</sup> Nonetheless, it provides several protections for Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities in Iraqi Kurdistan.<sup>122</sup> For example, Article 6 of that constitution states, "The people of Iraqi Kurdistan consists of Kurds and other nationalities (Turkomans, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Armenians and Arabs) and according to law, they are all citizens of the Region."<sup>123</sup> Article 14 of that constitution states, "Kurdish and Arabic are the two official languages in the Region, and this Constitution guarantees the rights of citizens of the Region to teach their children in their mother tongue, such as: Turkoman, Syriac, and Armenian, in the governmental education institutions according to the educational procedures."<sup>124</sup> Articles 7 and 65 of the constitution protect freedom of religion,<sup>125</sup> while that constitution has other articles which protect civil and political rights,<sup>126</sup> life, liberty and security,<sup>127</sup> equal opportunity,<sup>128</sup> women,<sup>129</sup> rights to education,<sup>130</sup> participation in public

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Dominik J. Schaller and Jürgen Zimmerer, eds., Routledge, Abingdon, UK, 2009, 2-3.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> The Kurdish Project, "KRG: Kurdistan Regional Government" <https://thekurdishproject.org/history-and-culture/kurdish-democracy/krg-kurdistan-regional-government/> (accessed March 8, 2025). The Kurdish Project is a cultural-education initiative to raise awareness in Western culture of Kurdish people ("Our Mission" at <https://thekurdishproject.org/our-mission/> (accessed March 8, 2025).

<sup>122</sup> Ibid; European Union Agency for Asylum, "Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)," June 2019, <https://euaa.europa.eu/country-guidance-iraq-2021/kurdistan-regional-government-kr#:~:text=The%20KRI%20is%20governed%20by,only%20constitutionally%20recognised%20autonomous%20region.> (accessed March 8, 2025).

<sup>123</sup> The Kurdish Regional Constitution, Article 6, First, in Michael J. Kelly, "The Kurdish Regional Constitution within the Framework of the Iraqi Federal Constitution: A Struggle for Sovereignty, Oil, Ethnic Identity, and the Prospects for a Reverse Supremacy Clause," *Penn State Law Review*, 114(3):2010, 775, <http://www.pennstatelawreview.org/articles/114/114%20Penn%20St.%20L.%20Rev.%20707.pdf> (accessed March 8, 2025).

<sup>124</sup> Kurdish Regional Constitution, Article 14, First, 777.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., Article 7, p. 775, and Article 65, 785.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., Article 18, 777-778.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., Article 19, 778.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., Article 20, 778.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., Article 21, 778.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., Article 22, 778.

affairs,<sup>131</sup> and the right to a fair trial.<sup>132</sup> That constitution also protects freedom of speech, self-expression,<sup>133</sup> the press, publishing, printing, assembly, peaceful demonstration and strikes,<sup>134</sup> communication,<sup>135</sup> and travel<sup>136</sup> while protecting the freedom to establish associations, political parties, and to affiliate with a party and participate in meetings and peaceful associations.<sup>137</sup> Thus, in principle, the Kurdish Regional Constitution provides Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities in Kurdistan several rights and protections.

Fortunately for Armenians and other Christians, the Islamic concept of *ahl al-kitab* (who are members of certain minority religions who should have protected status under Islamic governments) and the related concept of *dhimmi* (or a legally protected non-Muslim minority group) have during periods in Islamic history protected Christians and certain other non-Muslim minority groups. There are, of course, numerous horrifically tragic exceptions such as the Hamidian massacres (of 1894 through 1896) and subsequent genocides against Armenians, when *dhimmi* status was a factor which very sadly worked to the enormous harm of Armenians.<sup>138</sup>

With the growth, in Iraq and other countries, of Sunni Islamist groups such as ISIS, which have largely or completely ignored the Islamic principles of *ahl al-kitab*, Armenians and other religious minority groups, and Muslims who disagree with these Sunni Islamist groups, have faced enormous danger.<sup>139</sup> Thus, Armenians and members of every other group who either oppose ISIS -- and similar groups -- or represent ideas, which are in any way inconsistent with those Islamist groups, face the possibility of complete destruction.<sup>140</sup> Certain religious and ethnic minorities -- such as Armenians -- in Iraq and other countries in the Middle East and Central Asia can also be threatened by governments, which may come to the conclusion that members

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., Article 23, 778.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., Articles 25-39, 779-80.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., Article 59, 785.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., Article 60, 785.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., Article 61, p. 785.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., Articles 62-63, 785.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., Articles 67-68, 786.

<sup>138</sup> Migliorino, 118-21; Sanjian, 5-6.

<sup>139</sup> Fisk, <https://www.the-independent.com/news/world/middle-east/isis-in-syria-in-the-shadow-of-death-a-few-thousand-christians-remain-to-defy-the-militants-9857030.html> (accessed March 11, 2025); Jayalakshmi, <https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/iraq-isis-crisis-christians-hounded-out-mosul-trapped-desert-refugee-camps-1458647> (accessed March 11, 2025).

<sup>140</sup> "What is Islamic State?" BBC News, December 2, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29052144#:~:text=The%20jihadist%20group%20Islamic%20State,mass%20killings%2C%20abductions%20and%20beheadings> (accessed March 11, 2025).

of those groups are disloyal to those governments. Thus, Armenians and other Christians in countries like Iraq and Syria are caught between multiple potentially negative forces, including strict Sunni Islamism and ostensibly secular regimes, which, at times manifest damaging policies toward Christians, including Armenians.<sup>141</sup>

## CONCLUSION

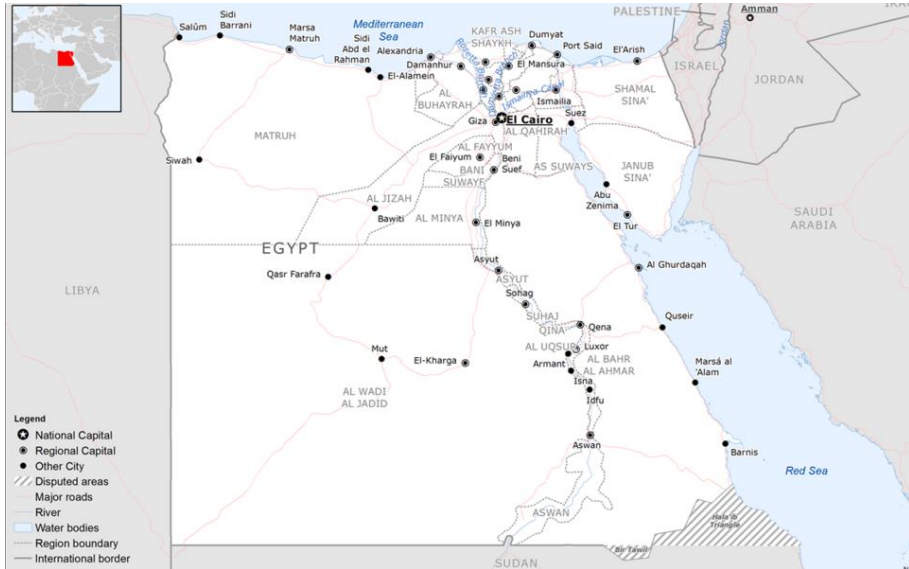
Tragically, there have been many times in the history of Armenians, when, because of violence directed against them, Armenians have experienced enormously painful forced migration and social dislocation. Yet, if Armenians who live in more stable countries than Iraq and Syria, can position themselves in such a manner to assist the Armenians in those hostile environments, this could be one factor, which may potentially increase the level of security, which Armenians in Iraq, Syria, and other unstable countries may experience.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Harriet Sherwood, "Calls Grow to Label Attacks on Middle East Christians as Genocide," *The Guardian*, London, UK, March 10, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/10/middle-east-christians-label-genocide-hillary-clinton-european-parliament> (accessed March 11, 2025); Loveday Morris, "Christians under Threat in Syria as Islamist Extremists Gain Influence," *Washington Post*, October 4, 2013, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/christians-under-threat-in-syria-as-islamist-extremists-gain-influence/2013/10/03/214607ee-2a75-11e3-b141-298f46539716\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/christians-under-threat-in-syria-as-islamist-extremists-gain-influence/2013/10/03/214607ee-2a75-11e3-b141-298f46539716_story.html) (accessed March 11, 2025); Anchal Vohra, "The Arab World's Revolution Against Sectarianism: Lebanon and Iraq are Rising Up against Constitutions that Have Empowered Religious Factions – and Enabled their Corruption," *Foreign Policy*, October 24, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/24/lebanon-iraq-arab-world-wants-to-overthrow-sectarianism/> (accessed May 8, 2025).

<sup>142</sup> Muriel Mirak-Weissbach, *Through the Wall of Fire; Armenia-Iraq-Palestine: From Wrath to Reconciliation*, Ithaca Press, Reading, UK, 2013, 3-158.

## EGYPT



### INTRODUCTION: EGYPT’S DEMOGRAPHICS AND GOVERNORATES

This chapter examines Egypt’s 2014 constitution, that country’s previous constitutions, and topics related to minority rights, focusing on Armenians in Egypt. In this vein, geographic and demographic information about Egypt, which describes that country’s geography and administrative divisions as well as the rights delegated to these districts, provide relevant background for this chapter’s main topics.

Geographically, Egypt is divided into the Nile Valley and Delta, the Western Desert, the Eastern Desert, and the Sinai Peninsula. The Nile Valley and Delta are the most important region because that is where ninety-nine percent of Egypt’s population lives, and it constitutes the country’s only cultivable land.<sup>1</sup> In terms of religious demographics, ninety percent of Egypt’s total population of 118.4 million is comprised of Muslims, most of whom are Sunnis. Ten percent of the country’s population is Christian with most of Egypt’s Christians being comprised of Coptic Orthodox, and the country’s

<sup>1</sup> Helen Chapin Metz, ed. *Egypt: A Country Study*, GPO for the Library of Congress, Washington: 1990, <http://countrystudies.us/egypt/47.htm> (accessed May 19, 2025); Jon Armajani, “Egypt’s Constitution and Minority Rights,” *Armenians of Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia/1*, 535-56, <https://haigrepository.haigazian.edu.lb/items/c7151a39-db34-434c-babd-11a2c81adf4e> (accessed May 20, 2025).

other Christians being comprised of Armenian Apostolic Christians, Catholics, Maronites, Orthodox Christians, Anglicans, and other Protestants.<sup>2</sup>

In terms of ethnic demographics, although the ancestors of the Egyptian people include many ethnic groups, including Africans, Arabs, Berbers, Greeks, Persians, Romans, and Turks, Egypt's contemporary population is relatively homogeneous linguistically and culturally. Approximately three percent of Egyptians belong to ethnic minority groups. Linguistic minorities include small communities of Armenians, with a population of approximately eight thousand in Egypt, and Greeks, principally in the cities of Cairo and Alexandria; groups of Berber origin in the oases of the Western Desert; and Nubians living in cities in Lower Egypt and in villages clustered along the Nile in Upper Egypt. The Arabic-speaking Bedouins in the Western and Eastern Deserts and the Sinai Peninsula constitute the principal cultural minority. Several hundred Europeans, mostly Italians and French, have also lived in Egypt.<sup>3</sup>

Administratively, Egypt is divided into twenty-seven governorates (محافظة muhafazah, singular; and محافظات muhafazat, plural). Egyptian governorates constitute an upper level of the country's governmental system. A governor administers each governate, and the President of Egypt appoints each governor, who serves under the president's rule.<sup>4</sup> Ordinarily, governorates are urban or a combination of urban and rural areas. The governmental delineations between urban and rural are present in the lower administrative levels. Governorates, which are completely urban, have no subregions, and are comprised of several villages or small towns. At the same time, governorates may be comprised of just one city, as in the case of the governates of Alexandria and Cairo, respectively. These governorates are subdivided into districts or urban neighborhoods. For example, Cairo's governorate consists of forty-one districts, while Alexandria's Governorate consists of seven.<sup>5</sup> There may be differences in the ways that governorates apply the laws.<sup>6</sup>

Before the Egyptian revolution of 1952, which brought the free officers to power, the central government's involvement in Egypt's rural areas was circumscribed by the power of local officials and landowners. During the

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<sup>2</sup> "Egypt," *World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/egypt/> (accessed March 9, 2025). See also World Population Review, "Egypt," <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/egypt> (accessed May 10, 2025).

<sup>3</sup> Metz; Middle East Eye Correspondent, "How Armenians in Egypt are Preserving Their Heritage" *Middle East Eye*, March 6, 2023 <https://www.middleeasteye.net/discover/how-armenians-egypt-are-preserving-their-heritage> (accessed May 10, 2025).

<sup>4</sup> Metz.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Personal communication from a scholar of Armenian Studies, July 7, 2025.

presidency of Gamal Abdel Nasser, national land reform policies under Egypt's central government reduced the power of local officials and landowners, and farmers were integrated into cooperatives which transferred dependence from local officials and landowners to Egypt's central government. As the central government gave more authority to its officials to govern the rural areas, that enabled the government to provide services to villages, while increasing the central government's power in local areas. The local branches of Egypt's ruling party, the Arab Socialist Union (ASU), brought local landowners under its dominance and limited their power. As the central government reduced the influence of local parties, administrative controls over local farmers remained strong. In addition to all the powers under the central government's command, local police forces extended the central government's hold on localities, including the governates.<sup>7</sup>

After Anwar Sadat became Egypt's president in 1970, he implemented several policies, which decentralized power, and provided some authority to Egypt's governates and other localities. Egypt's Governors were given increased authority under Law Number 43 of 1979, which reduced the administrative and financial control of the central government over the governates. Local elected councils acquired rights to approve or disapprove their local budgets while being given more power over local taxes. Local governments were encouraged to engage in joint ventures with private investors, and these endeavors established alliances between local government officials and local investors. During Hosni Mubarak's presidency, decentralization and local autonomy became more of a reality, and local policies were adapted to local conditions.<sup>8</sup> During Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's presidency, certain policies related to decentralization have continued, which have included decentralization of aspects of public administration and the education of government employees as well as deregulation of facets of business and investment. Overall, decentralization of Egypt's government can be helpful to Armenians and other minorities in Egypt as long as the central government and local authorities protect those minorities from Islamists and other potentially negative forces.<sup>9</sup>

## ARMENIANS IN EGYPT

Armenians first have settled in Egypt around the fourth century BCE.<sup>10</sup> Their number increased in the middle of the seventh century when the Arabs, who had conquered Egypt, did not interfere with the strengthening of the local

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen J. King, *The Arab Winter: Democratic Consolidation, Civil War, and Radical Islamists*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2020, 136.

<sup>10</sup> Government of Armenia, Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, "Egypt" <http://diaspora.gov.am/en/pages/34/egypt> (accessed August 7, 2025).

Armenians. The Egyptian-Armenian community was formed and flourished during the Fatimid era (969-1171), which was conditioned by the development of Egyptian cities and the friendly policy of the Arab rulers toward Christians. The number of Armenians also increased during the reign of the Mamluks. During the eleventh through twelfth centuries, more than thirty Armenian churches and monasteries were functioning in Egypt, which indicates a large number of Armenians were living in Egypt. According to the website of the Government of Armenia's Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, comparative data indicates that the number of Armenians at that time reached approximately one hundred thousand persons.<sup>11</sup>

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the Egyptian-Armenian community experienced some growth thanks to the administrative and economic policies pursued by Muhammad Ali Pasha of Egypt, as well as his religious tolerance towards Armenians. Two hundred skilled Armenian craftsmen were invited to Egypt from Constantinople (Istanbul) and other cities, and Armenians were entrusted with important state positions. Three nazirs of Egypt were Armenians: Boghos Yusufian, Artin Tcherakian, and Arakel Nubarian. In 1825, an Armenian diocese was founded in Egypt. In 1828, the first Armenian Yeghiazarian school was opened in Cairo, and in the same year an asylum, a hospital, and a hotel were built.<sup>12</sup>

The Armenian community has given Egypt many high-ranking officials, public and political figures. Nubar Pasha Nubarian (1825-1899), a prominent, well-known, and influential Egyptian-Armenian, was a national benefactor, head of the Armenian National Delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, a Prime Minister of Egypt, and Egypt's Minister of Foreign Affairs. There is a statue of Nubar Pasha, in Alexandria, Egypt, and some streets in Cairo and Alexandria have been named after him.<sup>13</sup>

Two prominent nationwide and transnational organizations of the Armenian diaspora, which continue their activities, were founded in the Egyptian-Armenian community. One of them is the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), founded on April 15, 1906, in Cairo on the initiative of Boghos Nubar to support the Armenian refugees who emigrated to Egypt from Western Armenia as a result of the Hamidian massacres at the end of the nineteenth century. In addition, the AGBU had the purpose of assisting the destitute Armenians after the recurring massacres and killings, which they faced in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>14</sup> The other is the Hamazkayin Armenian Educational and Cultural Society, which was founded in 1928 in Cairo. On the initiative of Boghos Pasha Nubarian, many cultural centers were opened, periodicals were published and the construction of a settlement near

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Personal communication from a scholar of Armenian Studies, December 6, 2025.

Yerevan, which was named after him, Nubarashen, was funded to provide assistance to Armenians, who were repatriated from other countries.<sup>15</sup>

Prominent persons in the Egyptian-Armenian community have done work in literature, art, culture, among other fields. Among them were writers Yervant Odian and Vahan Tekeyan. The eminent opera singer of Armenia, Gohar Gasparian, was of Egyptian-Armenian descent as well. Historically, Armenians in Egypt have lived primarily in Cairo and Alexandria, as well as in Aswan, Asyut, Giza, Port Said, Zagazig, and other cities. Today's Egyptian-Armenians are predominantly the Armenians who were born in Egypt and have citizenship. They are concentrated in Alexandria and Cairo, mainly in the district of Heliopolis. Armenians in Egypt have the status of a religious community. There is a community Board of the Diocesan Assembly of the Egyptian-Armenians (the Diocesan Assemblies of Cairo and Alexandria) operating in the community. The Armenian Apostolic Church, under the Pastorate of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, and the Armenian Catholic Church operate in Egypt. There are a small number of Armenians, who are representatives of the Armenian Evangelical Church. The Egyptian diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church was formed in 1825 and is subordinate to the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.<sup>16</sup>

The axis of the self-government of the Armenian community in Egypt is the National Prelacy. It supports the Armenian sports and cultural clubs, halls, schools, and the Armenians, who are students at universities in Egypt. The Prelacy has a special charity fund to help the Armenians receiving treatment in hospitals. In terms of Armenian organizations in Egypt, the National Bureaus of Cairo and Alexandria, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), Armenian Democratic Liberal Party also known as the Ramgavars, (ADL), and Social Democrat Party (SDHP), also known as Huntchag, AGBU, Homenetmen, Armenian Relief Society (ARS), Armenian schools, cultural, charitable and sports unions, dance groups and choirs are active in Egypt's Armenian community.<sup>17</sup>

A Center for Armenian Studies was established at Cairo University in 2007. At present, the Kalousdian and Nubarian National School in Cairo and the Boghossian National School in Alexandria are operating in Egypt. In circulation to this day are the newspapers *Arev* and *Housaper*, the monthly *Arek*, the weekly *Chahagir*, and the magazine *AGBU Deghegadou*.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Government of Armenia, Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, "Egypt" <http://diaspora.gov.am/en/pages/34/egypt> (accessed August 7, 2025).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

## EGYPT'S CONSTITUTIONAL HISTORY

The constitutional history of modern Egypt is rooted, in part, in the Egyptian revolution of 1919.<sup>19</sup> After Egyptian revolts against Britain, which had governed Egypt as a colonial protectorate since 1914, and Egyptians' increasing demands for independence, British rule over Egypt was formally terminated in 1922 under the terms of a joint declaration between the two countries.<sup>20</sup> This declaration provided for the establishment of a thirty-member legislative committee, comprised of political parties and members of Egypt's revolutionary movement, who had the responsibility of writing a constitution for an independent Egypt. The constitution took effect in 1923 and it established a constitutional monarchy with Egypt's king as the highest governmental executive.<sup>21</sup> The 1923 Constitution provided for many freedoms and liberties, including mandates for primary education and protection of personal privacy. The 1923 Constitution's mandates for personal rights, its establishment of a parliament, and other provisions became a template for Egypt's subsequent constitutions. The 1923 Constitution gave much power to the king and empowered the people of Egypt, in a limited way. The significant amount of power which Egypt's constitution granted the king was, ultimately, one of its weaknesses. A new constitution, which was promulgated in 1930 replaced the 1923 constitution. This new 1930 Constitution, unlike the 1923 Constitution, which granted all males the right to vote, limited voting rights to those owning a certain amount of property. The Free Officers Revolution in 1952 abolished the constitutional monarchy and the monarchy itself, while establishing a republic under a new constitution.<sup>22</sup>

The 1952 Constitution established Egypt as a republic which was ruled, in large part, by the military officers, who were responsible for the 1952 revolution. Because of the Egyptian military's domination of the government after that 1952 revolution, the period between 1956 and 1970 was characterized by inconsistent constitutional development. During this period, the military frequently issued and revoked constitutional edicts that often served the military's interests and hindered the development of a viable

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<sup>19</sup> ConstitutionNet, "Constitutional History of Egypt," International IDEA, <https://constitutionnet.org/country/egypt> (accessed August 3, 2025).

<sup>20</sup> British occupation and colonization of Egypt began in 1882 (Robert L. Tignor, *Modernization and British Colonial Rule in Egypt, 1882-1914*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey: 1966, 25-30; Robert L. Tignor, *Egypt: A Short History*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2011, 228-55).

<sup>21</sup> "Royal Decree No. 42 of 1923 on Building a Constitutional System for the Egyptian State" (Egypt's 1923 Constitution) [https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/1923\\_egyptian\\_constitution\\_english\\_1.pdf](https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/1923_egyptian_constitution_english_1.pdf) (accessed March 9, 2025).

<sup>22</sup> "Constitutional History of Egypt," Constitutionnet, <http://constitutionnet.org/country/constitutional-history-egypt> (accessed March 9, 2025).

multiparty democracy which many Egyptians had hoped that the 1952 revolution would establish. The first constitution in this period between 1956 and 1970 was the Constitution of January 1956, which was approved several months before Gamal Abdel Nasser became Egypt's President in June 1956.<sup>23</sup> The second was the Unity Constitution of 1958, following the creation of the United Arab Republic of Egypt and Syria, and the third was the Interim Constitution of March 25, 1964, which was issued following the termination of the Egypt-Syria union. This Constitution remained in place until a new one was approved in September 1971.

This 1971 Constitution remained in force, with a few amendments in 1980, 2005, and 2007 until its dissolution in February 2011.<sup>24</sup> The constitution of 1971 stipulated four goals among others: (1) world peace, (2) Arab unity, (3) national development, and (4) freedom for humanity including all Egyptians. The 1971 Constitution established a system of government with a strong executive authority on the one hand, and legislative and judicial branches, on the other. However, significant restrictions on political activities effectively made Egypt a one-party state. The 1971 Constitution subjugated political parties to the law and the government could control who could affiliate with a party and in which elections they could participate.<sup>25</sup> This was one of many forms of oppression in Egypt, which led to the revolt against President Hosni Mubarak between January 25 and February 11, 2011, which was part of the broader Arab Spring protests and caused Mubarak to resign as Egypt's president.

Egypt's Supreme Council of the Armed Forces took over the state, dissolved state institutions, suspended the Constitution, and announced the establishment of an eight-person constitutional committee, with a ten-day deadline, to prepare a technical report to review certain articles of the constitution. A referendum, on March 19, 2011, approved the draft constitution, which was proposed by the committee. In the second and final round of the Presidential election, which was held in 2012, Mohamed Morsi, who was the candidate of the Freedom and Justice Party, which has strong links to the Muslim Brotherhood, won a majority of the vote. The coalition,

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<sup>23</sup> "1956 Constitution" in Kayla Sivak-Reid's "Tracing a State and its Language from Province to Republic: Translations of Modern Egypt's Constitutions," Classics Honors Thesis, Macalester College, April 2016, 40-75 [https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1023&context=classics\\_honors](https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1023&context=classics_honors) (accessed March 9, 2025).

<sup>24</sup> "The Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt, 1971," <https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/Egypt%20Constitution.pdf> (accessed May 10, 2025).

<sup>25</sup> "Constitutional History of Egypt," Constitutionnet, <http://constitutionnet.org/country/constitutional-history-egypt> (accessed March 9, 2025).

of which the Freedom and Justice Party was a member, won a plurality of the seats in Egypt's parliament in the parliamentary elections, which were held in 2011. The 2012 constitution, which was ratified while Morsi was President and only lasted six months, strengthened Islam's role in judicial and legislative processes. Partly because of civil unrest in Egypt and partly because of the military's belief that Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood constituted threats to the military and secular government in Egypt, the military removed Morsi from the presidency on July 3, 2013.<sup>26</sup>

Egypt's Constitution was suspended, and an interim government headed by Adly Mansour, the Supreme Constitutional Court President, was established. A ten-member committee was formed to review specific articles of the 2012 Constitution and to propose amendments. This committee finished its task in August 2013 and submitted a draft of Egypt's constitution to a fifty-member committee, which was comprised of members of several components of Egyptian society. In December 2013, the committee of fifty released a final draft, which was approved in a referendum that took place in January 2014. Significant among the reforms in the new Constitution were the strengthened roles of the military, police, and judiciary.<sup>27</sup>

Some of the common aspects of Egypt's previous constitutions and its 2014 constitution include recognition of the power of Egypt's national executive and its parliament; acknowledgment of Islam's role in Egyptian society; and the granting of rights to Egypt's minorities. While Egypt's constitutions and laws during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have recognized the power of Egypt's national executive (Egypt's president, since 1953), over the decades Egypt's president and that country's military have wielded enormous authority. While there have been brief moments in Egypt's modern history when elections have had an impact on that country's leadership, such as the election of Muhammad Morsi as President and his Islamist coalition receiving a majority in Egypt's parliament in 2012, that country's presidents and military have ruled Egypt in authoritarian ways during most of Egypt's history since Egypt's Revolution of 1952.<sup>28</sup>

Except for Morsi, almost all of Egypt's presidents since 1952 served in that country's military before becoming President. Because Islam has been a significant force in Egypt since the 7<sup>th</sup> century and because that country is majority Muslim, its constitutions have acknowledged Islam's role in Egyptian society. Flexible interpretations of Islam benefit Egypt's minorities, while rigid interpretations of it carry risks for them. Because 10% of Egypt's population has been and continues to be comprised of Christians, that country's constitutions have granted rights to minorities. Yet, factors such as

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

nationalism, Islamist groups, and anti-Christian bias have generated dangers for Egypt's Christians historically and during contemporary times.<sup>29</sup>

## EGYPT'S 2014 CONSTITUTION AND MINORITIES

Egypt's 2014 constitution was amended in 2019, and those amendments constitute the most recent amendments to that constitution.<sup>30</sup> That version of the constitution is the one, which is in force at the time of this writing. In that vein, the sections of that constitution, which are relevant to Armenians in Egypt, will be one focus of this chapter.<sup>31</sup>

Egypt's 2014 constitution does not specifically refer to Armenians, although it does make a few specific references to Christians. In this vein, while that constitution states that Islam is the religion of the state, Arabic is its official language, and principles of Islamic Sharia are the principle source of legislation,<sup>32</sup> it also states that the principles of the laws of Egyptian Christians and Jews are the main source of laws regulating their personal status, religious affairs, and selection of spiritual leaders.<sup>33</sup> The 2014 constitution states that in Egypt's House of Representatives' first legislative term after the Constitution comes into effect, that House shall issue a law to organize the building and renovation of churches, guaranteeing Christians the freedom to practice their religious rituals.<sup>34</sup> The 2014 constitution states that the state shall endeavor that youth, Christians, persons with disability and Egyptians living abroad be appropriately represented in the House of Representatives, as regulated by law.<sup>35</sup> That constitution also states that there should be a "proper representation of Christians" on local councils in Egypt.<sup>36</sup>

There are other provisions in the 2014 constitution which have the potential of protecting Armenians, other Christians, and other minorities in Egypt. For example, that constitution states that it "achieves equality between

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Egypt 2014 (rev. 2019) [2014 Constitution of Egypt, as revised (or amended) in 2019], *Constitute*, [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Egypt\\_2019](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Egypt_2019)

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. Timothy Kaldas, "Taking Dictatorship from De Facto to De Jure: Egypt's Constitutional Amendments," *CONSTITUTIONNET*, May 1, 2019, <https://constitutionnet.org/news/taking-dictatorship-de-facto-de-jure-egypts-constitutional-amendments>; Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2025*, "Egypt," <https://freedomhouse.org/country/egypt/freedom-world/2025> (accessed May 10, 2025).

<sup>32</sup> Egypt's Constitution of 2014, as Amended in 2019, Article 2: Islam, Principles of Islamic Sharia, [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Egypt\\_2019](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Egypt_2019) (accessed March 9, 2025).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., Article 3: Christian and Jewish Religious Affairs.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., Article 235: Building and Renovating Churches.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., Article 244: Representation for Youth, Christians, Disabled Persons, etc.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., Article 180: Election of Local Councils.

[Egyptians] in rights and duties with no discrimination”<sup>37</sup> while in several instances the constitution specifically refers to Christianity in vividly religious terms. For example, the 2014 constitution’s Preamble states, “On its land, Egyptians welcomed [the] Virgin Mary and her baby, and offered up thousands of martyrs in defense of the Church of Jesus,” while the Preamble also refers to Egypt’s “patriotic church.”<sup>38</sup> There are a large number of rights and protections in Egypt’s 2014 Constitution, which are intended to apply to all Egyptians, and, if properly enforced, could be helpful to Armenians, Christians, and other minorities in Egypt. These constitutional rights and protections relate to equal opportunity, private property, cultural identity, right to culture, human dignity, equality in public rights and duties, personal freedom, due process, right to safety, freedom of movement, freedom of belief, thought, and the press, as well as the right to establish associations.<sup>39</sup>

In this vein, there may be some similarities, in terms of the situations which Armenians face with respect to Kurdish Muslims in Iraq and Syria, on the one hand, and the situation which Armenian-Egyptians face with respect to Egyptian Copts, on the other hand. That is, somewhat like Kurdish Muslims have provided some Armenians in Iraq and Syria a certain level of protection in those countries, so too Egyptian Copts may be providing some protection for Armenians in Egypt. While the Armenians in Iraq and Syria have alliances with Kurds in those countries, and those alliances exist in part because Sunni Islamist groups such as ISIS and al-Qaida are adversaries of both the Kurds and the Armenians, so too in Egypt an alliance between Armenians and Copts could be based, in part, on the fact that Armenians and Copts face common adversaries, such as Islamists. in Egypt.

#### AMENDMENTS TO THE 2014 CONSTITUTION

The 2019 amendments to Egypt’s 2014 constitution were approved in a 2019 referendum, with 88.83% voting in favor.<sup>40</sup> The amendments extended the presidential term from four years to six years and allowed President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to extend his current term and run for a third term, which could

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., Preamble.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., Article 9: Equal Opportunity; Article 35: Private Property; Article 47: Cultural Identity; Article 48: Right to Culture; Article 51: Human Dignity; Article 53: Equality in Public Rights and Duties; Article 54: Personal Freedom; Article 55: Due Process; Article 59: Right to Safety; Article 62: Freedom of Movement; Article 64: Freedom of Belief; Article 65: Freedom of Thought; Article 70: Freedom of the Press; Article 75: Right to Establish Associations.

<sup>40</sup> State Information Service [Egypt], “Constitutional Amendments,” n.d. <https://www.sis.gov.eg/section/10/9418?lang=en-us#:~:text=A%20A%20A,with%2088.83%25%20voting%20in%20favour.> (accessed May 10, 2025).

keep him in power until 2030. The amendments also gave the president the power to appoint one or more vice presidents.<sup>41</sup> On the whole, the amendments seem to be designed to extend and entrench el-Sisi's authoritarian rule. Taken together, they appear to weaken the legislative and judicial branches of government, as they strengthen a powerful executive.<sup>42</sup>

With respect to the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, in the 2014 constitution, Article 185 was limited to delineating the degree of financial independence of the judiciary. With the 2019 constitutional amendments, Article 185 has been expanded to grant the president the power to appoint the head judges of Egypt's top judicial bodies.<sup>43</sup> Previously, these positions were filled based on seniority with judges managing their own affairs in terms of judicial appointments. Under the 2019 amendment, the president is allowed to choose the head judges from among the seven most senior judges in each judicial body. The head judges are appointed to terms of four years or until they reach the age of retirement, whichever comes first. A law to a similar effect was passed and signed in 2017. However, it appears that a decision was made to write this amendment into the constitution, in order to avoid the possibility that judges would attempt to overturn the president's expanded authority over them by claiming the 2017 appointments law was unconstitutional.<sup>44</sup>

Regarding the legislative branch, the new articles to Egypt's constitution, which are 248 through 254, add an upper house of parliament, the Senate.<sup>45</sup> According to those new articles, this body will be consulted on all constitutional and legislative matters handled by the lower house of parliament. However, a significant difference from the 2014 version of the constitution, is that one-third of the Senate's members are to be appointed by the president, increasing the power of the president over the legislature and diluting the power of elected members of parliament.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Kaldas, <https://constitutionnet.org/news/taking-dictatorship-de-facto-de-jure-egypts-constitutional-amendments> (accessed May 10, 2025). See also Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2025*.

<sup>43</sup> Kaldas, [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Egypt\\_2014](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Egypt_2014) (accessed May 10, 2025); Article 185, *Judicial Bodies, Egypt's Constitution of 2014, as Amended in 2019*, [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Egypt\\_2019](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Egypt_2019) (accessed May 10, 2025).

<sup>44</sup> Kaldas.

<sup>45</sup> Kaldas; Articles 248 through 254, *Egypt's Constitution of 2014, as amended in 2019*, [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Egypt\\_2019](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Egypt_2019) (accessed May 10, 2025).

<sup>46</sup> Articles 248 to 254, *Egypt's Constitution of 2014, as Amended in 2019*, [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Egypt\\_2019](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Egypt_2019) (accessed May 10, 2025).

Finally, an amendment to Article 150, which is designated as Article 150bis, has added the role of the vice president to the constitution. That amendment does not require a vice president to be appointed, nor does it grant that office any powers. Rather, it allows the president, should he or she so choose, to appoint one or more vice presidents and assign them whatever roles the president decides. Moreover, the president can appoint and dismiss the vice president(s) without any external oversight from the legislature or judiciary.<sup>47</sup> Clearly, these provisions substantially increase the Egyptian president's power.

These amendments, and the increased power of the president, which they entail, could carry advantages or disadvantages for Armenians and other religious minorities in Egypt, depending on the circumstances. If Egypt's president were to act in accordance with the Egyptian constitution's provisions that protect religious persons and institutions, then the president's increased powers could provide advantages to Armenians and other religious minorities, in that the president could use his power to protect those minorities from potential harms that could come their way from Egyptian persons or groups, who may view those minorities as a threat. In contrast to that, if the Egyptian president believes that it is in his interest to align himself with certain Egyptians, who may be hostile to minorities, such as strict Islamists, then that could create a potentially difficult situation for those minorities. Thus, increased presidential power could have varying effects for Armenians and other minorities in Egypt, depending on the circumstances.

## CULTURAL RIGHTS IN EGYPT

Section 3 of Egypt's 2014 constitution, entitled "Cultural Components," includes articles which are entitled "Cultural Identity" and "Right to Culture." That constitution's article on cultural identity stipulates, "The state is committed to protecting Egyptian cultural identity with its diverse civilizational origins,"<sup>48</sup> while the article on right to culture states,

Culture is a right of every citizen that is guaranteed by the state. The state is committed to support it and provide all types of cultural materials to the different groups of people without discrimination based on financial capacity, geographical location, or anything else. The state gives special attention to remote areas and the groups most in need. The state encourages translation from and to Arabic.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Article 150bis, Egypt's Constitution of 2014, as Amended in 2019, [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Egypt\\_2019](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Egypt_2019) (accessed May 10, 2025).

<sup>48</sup> Egypt's Constitution of 2014, as Amended in 2019, Article 47: Cultural Identity.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 48: Right to Culture.

Such constitutional rights have enabled the Armenians of Egypt to establish and foster several organizations, which relate to Armenian culture. For example, the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) was established in Cairo in 1906 by Boghos Nubar, the son of the first Prime Minister of Egypt, Nubar Pasha. Although the organization moved to Paris in 1922 and to New York in 1942, it still has two branches in Egypt, one in Cairo and one in Alexandria. It also runs the Nubar Club in both cities. Cairo has also been an important place for diaspora political parties, which have branches there, along with their sports clubs and newspapers.<sup>50</sup>

Within the realm of cultural rights, the Kalousdian Armenian School is the oldest institution of private education in Egypt and the oldest remaining Armenian school in the country. It was established in 1854 by Garabed Agha Kalousd in the Heliopolis district of Cairo. Famous Egyptian Armenians who have contributed to the country's development, include Nubar Nubarian (Nubar Pasha) and Ohan Hagop Justinian, the first person to manufacture cameras for film production in Cairo and Alexandria. He produced twelve Egyptian films between 1948 and 1957. Among the famous Armenian actresses in Egyptian cinema are Beyrouz Artin Kalfaian (Fayrouz), Nonia Kobelian (Lebleba), and Mary Nizar Julian (Mimi Gamal). Well-known musician Fuad Grabit Panosian (Foad al-Zahery) has composed the music for approximately three-hundred and fifty Egyptian films.<sup>51</sup>

Another well-known Armenian, who has contributed to the culture of modern Egypt, is cartoonist Alexander Saroukhan, who worked for various Egyptian publications, as well as the Armenian daily, *Arev*. Saroukhan left his mark on Egyptian media through his political satire. He also wrote a book in Armenian about the art of caricature, as well as five satirical plays. The Armenian community of Cairo has a rich history of intellectual activity, especially in journalism and media. A number of prominent intellectuals and writers, such as Arpiar Arpiarian, Vahan Tekeyan, and Yervant Odian, lived and spent their last days in Cairo. The first Armenian paper to be established in Egypt was *Armaveni* (Palm tree), founded in Cairo by Abraham Mouradian in 1865. Three periodicals continue to be published in Cairo: *Housaper*, founded in 1913; *Arev*, founded in 1915; and *Tchahagir*, founded in 1948.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> "Armenians of Cairo: ADS [Armenian Diaspora Survey] 2018 Pilot Project," Hratch Tchilingirian, Director, Armenian Diaspora Survey, <https://www.armeniandiasporasurvey.com/cairo> (accessed March 9, 2025); Middle East Eye Correspondent, "How Armenians in Egypt are Preserving Their Heritage," *Middle East Eye*, March 6, 2023, op. cit. (accessed May 10, 2025).

<sup>51</sup> "Armenians of Cairo: ADS; Middle East Eye Correspondent, "How Armenians in Egypt."

<sup>52</sup> "Armenians of Cairo: ADS; Middle East Eye Correspondent, "How Armenians in Egypt."

## EGYPT'S 2014 CONSTITUTION AND PRESIDENT EL-SISI'S GOVERNMENT

While Egypt's 2014 constitution addresses rights, freedoms, and protections for Christians, Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and his government have done little to enforce the constitution in those ways.<sup>53</sup> Unfortunately, in many respects they have done the opposite. For example, the chapter on Egypt in Amnesty International's April 2024 report on the state of the world's human rights asserts, "[Egyptian] authorities continued to discriminate against Christians in law and practice. No one was held accountable for sectarian attacks in January against Christians in the village of Ashruba in Minya governorate, which led to injuries and property damage."<sup>54</sup> The report also states, "The right to build or repair churches remained restricted by a 2016 law requiring approval from security agencies and other state bodies. In May, the prime minister announced that since the law came into force, the government had approved the legalization of 2,815 churches, approximately half of the submitted requests."<sup>55</sup> The report continues by stating "Members of religious minorities, atheists and others not espousing state-sanctioned religious beliefs were summoned and questioned by the NSA or otherwise threatened or harassed."<sup>56</sup> On a positive note, the report refers to an Egyptian court case in November 2019, where a family court in Cairo applied Christian by-laws in an inheritance case brought by Huda Nassrallah, a lawyer at the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights.<sup>57</sup> Under the Islamic Sharia inheritance laws, female heirs inherit half that of male relatives. Nassrallah built her case on the Christian doctrine of equal inheritance, and earned a victory in that case. This court case is significant because (1) Egyptian courts have a tendency to broadly apply Islamic Shariah

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<sup>53</sup> Abdel Fattah el-Sisi became Egypt's president as a result of a coup d'état against Egypt's elected President Mohamed Morsi, who was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and whose election as Egypt's president was officially announced on June 24, 2012. Morsi served as Egypt's president from June 30, 2012 until July 3, 2013, when the coup took place. El-Sisi and his supporters vehemently opposed Morsi, the Muslim Brotherhood, and their Islamist worldview. As Minister of Defense, and ultimately Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Armed Forces, el-Sisi was a crucial person in that military coup. El-Sisi was elected President in 2014 and re-elected in 2018; Cleveland and Bunton, 6th ed., 540-47.

<sup>54</sup> Amnesty International, "The State of the World's Human Rights, April 2024," 159. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/7200/2024/en/> (accessed March 8, 2025).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

law in inheritance cases, and (2) in Nasrallah's situation, two courts had earlier ruled against her, based on those courts' interpretations of Sharia.<sup>58</sup>

According to this Amnesty International report and other sources, el-Sisi's government has severely restricted freedom of expression, association, and assembly, has engaged in excessive use of force, has enforced arbitrary arrests and detentions, and has perpetrated enforced disappearances, torture, and unfair trials.<sup>59</sup>

Along similar lines, Amnesty International's 2025 report on human rights states that the Egyptian authorities continued to crack down on criticism, stifled aspects of civil society, and restricted street protests. Authorities carried out mass arrests to prevent planned anti-government protests and forcibly dispersed the few small peaceful protests that took place.<sup>60</sup> According to Freedom House's report entitled "Freedom in the World 2025: Egypt," Christians in Egypt face discrimination, which affects their ability to participate in political life. El-Sisi and the security apparatus's increasing control of elections and other aspects of society only permit these groups to represent their interests within the narrow scope of officially sanctioned politics or risk harsh penalties for transgressing stated and unstated red lines. The diminishing power of the legislature further undercuts avenues for meaningful representation.<sup>61</sup>

The reasons for the Egyptian government's repressive measures relate to the threats, which that government faces at the hands of the various groups in Egyptian society that oppose it, including Sunni Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood and ISIS, and various pro-democracy individuals and groups that may not necessarily have religious affiliations. At the same time, el-Sisi's government has placed restrictions on Christians, in all likelihood because of the pressure that Islamists have placed on that government.<sup>62</sup> In this vein, when the Egyptian government accommodates the demands of the Islamists, it weakens minorities in Egypt because it lessens their influence.

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<sup>58</sup> "Egyptian woman 'wins court battle' over unequal inheritance laws," BBC News, November 25, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-50544239> (accessed March 11, 2025).

<sup>59</sup> Amnesty International, "The State of the World's Human Rights, April 2024," 155-59.

<sup>60</sup> Amnesty International, *The State of the World's Human Rights, April 2025*, 153.

<sup>61</sup> Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2025: Egypt," <https://freedomhouse.org/country/egypt/freedom-world/2025#:~:text=Coptic%20Christians%20in%20particular%20have,that%20can%20escalate%20into%20violence>. (accessed May 11, 2025).

<sup>62</sup> Hilary Miller, "State Restrictions on Religious Freedom in Egypt," United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, February 2025, <https://www.uscirf.gov/publications/state-restrictions-religious-freedom-egypt> (accessed Ma 11, 2025).

Minorities are also weakened because the Islamic restrictions, which the government accepts, apply to everyone including the minorities.

One way that ostensibly secularist governments, such as el-Sisi's, have attempted to resist the Sunni Islamist groups which seek to overthrow them has been through a policy of accommodation and opposition. That is, these ostensibly secular governments have tried to maintain their hold on governmental and military power by simultaneously using certain tactics to accommodate these Sunni groups while using other tactics to oppose them. One of many ways that the Egyptian government attempts to accommodate many different kinds of Muslims in Egypt, including Sunni Islamists such as the Muslim Brotherhood and ISIS, is by means of several constitutional provisions including the ones that stipulate Islam is the religion of the Egyptian state and that the principles of Islamic Sharia are the principle source of legislation.<sup>63</sup> El-Sisi and other Egyptian governmental leaders also project their allegiance to Islam when Egyptian news outlets show these governmental leaders conducting their Islamic prayers and reporting on these leaders when they take strong moral stances, which are consistent with Sharia.<sup>64</sup>

While the Egyptian government has tried to lessen the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood, ISIS, and similar groups through *accommodation*, it has also used the starkly contrasting policy of *opposition* in its attempts to weaken these Sunni Islamist groups. Among other means of directly opposing the Muslim Brotherhood, ISIS, and similar groups, el-Sisi's government has engaged in killings of protesters, mass detentions, military trials of civilians,

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<sup>63</sup> Egypt's Constitution of 2014, Article 2: Islam, Principles of Islamic Sharia. See also Egypt's Constitution of 2014, Preamble; Article 7: Al-Azhar; and Article 50: Material and Moral Civilizational and Cultural Heritage. The following articles also provide indications of the ways in which Egypt's government has attempted to accommodate the Muslim Brotherhood and similar groups: Martin Chulov and Marwa Awad, "Egyptian Government Offers Muslim Brotherhood Ministerial Posts," *The Guardian*, August 5, 2013 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/05/egyptian-government-offers-muslim-brotherhood-ministerial-posts> (accessed March 9, 2025); Kylie MacLellan, "Sisi Says Muslim Brotherhood Can Play Role in Egypt before UK Visit," *Reuters*, November 4, 2015 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security-sisi/sisi-says-muslim-brotherhood-can-play-role-in-egypt-before-uk-visit-idUSKCN0ST0TB20151104> (accessed March 9, 2025).

<sup>64</sup> David Herbert, *Religion and Civil Society: Rethinking Public Religion in the Contemporary World*, Ashgate, Aldershot, UK, 2003, 271-72; "A Special Report on Egypt; Saving Faith: Islam Seems to be Fading as a Revolutionary Force," *The Economist*, July 17-23, 2010, 15; Gregory Starrett, *Putting Islam to Work: Education, Politics, and Religious Transformation in Egypt*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1998, 16; Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2004, 22-78.

hundreds of death sentences, and the forced eviction of thousands of families in the Sinai Peninsula.<sup>65</sup>

While both el-Sisi's government and the Sunni Islamist groups have implemented policies, which have been hostile to Armenians and other Christians in Egypt, if historic trends continue, Armenians and other Christians will probably receive more protection from an ostensibly secular government such as that of el-Sisi, than under a government which is run by the Muslim Brotherhood or ISIS, either of which would implement strict forms of Sharia, which could further marginalize Egypt's Armenians and other Christians. Although the concepts of *dhimmi* and *ahl al-kitab* have played crucial roles in Islamic empires in such a way that those concepts have benefited Christians, very often during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries the Muslim Brotherhood and ISIS have ignored those principles and unfairly targeted Christians in several majority-Muslim countries and regions. As long as Egypt's government remains largely secular and does not become hostile to Armenians and other Christians in Egypt, those Christians will continue to experience a modicum of safety in that country.

#### EGYPT'S 2014 CONSTITUTION AND FAMILY LAW

According to Egypt's 2014 Constitution, "Family is the basis of society and is based on religion, morality, and patriotism. The state protects its cohesion and stability, and the consolidation of its values."<sup>66</sup> With respect to women and family law, that constitution states, "The state commits to the protection of women against all forms of violence, and ensures women empowerment to reconcile the duties of a woman toward her family and her work requirements. The state ensures care and protection and care for motherhood and childhood, and for breadwinning, and elderly women, and women most in need."<sup>67</sup> Regarding children, Egypt's 2014 constitution states, "A child is considered to be anyone who has not reached eighteen years of age. Children have the right to be named and possess identification papers, have access to free compulsory vaccinations, health and family care or an alternative, basic nutrition, safe shelter, religious education, and emotional and cognitive development."<sup>68</sup>

Related to these principles, in Egypt's Islamic family law system, Muslims and non-Muslims each have their own religious family laws as well as their own separate courts that adjudicate these laws. The separation of legal systems

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<sup>65</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Egypt: Year of Abuses Under al-Sisi; President Gets Western Support While Erasing Human Rights Gains*, June 8, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/06/08/egypt-year-abuses-under-al-sisi> (accessed March 9, 2025).

<sup>66</sup> Egypt's Constitution of 2014, Article 10: Family as the Basis of Society.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 11: The Place of Women, Motherhood and Childhood.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 80: Rights of the Child.

has been preserved until contemporary times in most majority-Muslim countries with non-Muslim minorities, including Egypt.<sup>69</sup> However, this coexistence of Islamic and non-Islamic family laws, in Egypt for example, does not suggest equality between and among these laws. Islamic family law is upheld as the general, overriding law. The application of non-Muslim laws is an exception to the rule of Islam's legal supremacy. The aggregation of family laws is not a plurality of family laws, as commonly mentioned in contemporary Egyptian legal doctrine, but rather a duality of family laws, since a distinct difference is drawn between the family laws for Muslims and non-Muslims.<sup>70</sup> In this vein, such policies are called interreligious rules or laws, and the following two points are significant.

First, interreligious rules work bilaterally. When more than one law applies to a single case, each law will have both its own interreligious rules and public policy, and be considered superior to the other. For instance, in a Christian marriage, if the husband converts to Islam, the marriage remains intact according to Islamic law but not according to the relevant Christian law. A Christian court therefore will not recognize the Muslim court's pronouncement that the marriage is valid and, conversely, a Muslim court will not recognize a Christian court's pronouncement that the marriage is invalid. This is not necessarily a problem when the legal systems exist on the basis of parity and the litigants live within their own religious communities. In that case, the Muslim will abide by the ruling of the Muslim court and pay no heed to the ruling of the Christian court, and the Christian will do likewise. However, in Islamic and contemporary Egyptian family law, the family law of the Muslims has overriding authority over the other family laws and sometimes even overrules them.<sup>71</sup>

Secondly, there is the issue of terminology. Contemporary Egyptian legal doctrine and case law use the term Islamic Sharia when discussing the Egyptian family law for Muslims. Along these lines, Sharia can connote a

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<sup>69</sup> Maurits S. Berger, "Secularizing Interreligious Law in Egypt," *Islamic Law and Society*, 12(3):2005, 394. The family and personal status laws in Egypt, which Berger discusses in his article, and which are discussed in this chapter, are the most recent; Nouran Ahmed, "Personal Status Litigation in Egypt: The Unintended Effects of Women's Empowerment," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 21, 2024, <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2024/03/personal-status-litigation-in-egypt-the-unintended-effects-of-womens-empowerment?lang=en> (accessed May 11, 2025) and George Sadek, "Egypt: Cabinet Withdraws Proposed Codification of Personal Status Law," Law Library of Congress [in the United States], December 11, 2024 <https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2024-12-11/egypt-cabinet-withdraws-proposed-codification-of-personal-status-law/#:~:text=The%20second%20bill%20was%20submitted,Christians%20and%20Muslims%20in%20Egypt.> (accessed May 11, 2025).

<sup>70</sup> Berger, 394-95.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 396.

divine code in its origins. Yet, that legal code has been interpreted by Muslim jurists, throughout Islamic history, and serves as the root of contemporary family law.<sup>72</sup> The fact that non-Muslims and Muslims have separate family laws and courts points to the following rule: each court exclusively applies its own religious law. If the religion of one litigant is different from that of the court, the basic rule is that a Muslim court may hear non-Muslim cases, but a non-Muslim court may not do so with regard to Muslims.<sup>73</sup>

Non-Muslim courts are prohibited to hear cases involving Muslim parties, let alone pass judgment on them, because that would imply the submission of a Muslim to non-Muslim authority or law. This involves the sovereignty of Islamic law and Muslim authority: a non-Muslim may not rule, judge or otherwise exercise authority over a Muslim. Thus, a non-Muslim may not testify against a Muslim, and a Muslim woman may not marry a non-Muslim man. This understanding of the supremacy of Islamic law is encapsulated in the principle which states, "Islam supersedes and cannot be superseded."<sup>74</sup>

Thus, with respect to interreligious law, Muslim family law applies whenever a Muslim is involved and whenever a non-Muslim refers her or his case to a Muslim court. In the latter case, the Muslim judge may apply only Islamic law, although some schools of law argue that the Muslim judge is not compelled to pass judgment, while others hold that he should not hear such a case at all. The Hanafi legal school, which predominates in Egypt, maintains that when a non-Muslim is a litigant in a Muslim court, the Muslim judge should hear the case and pass judgment in accordance with Islamic law. Therefore, according to Hanafi doctrine, by referring to a Muslim court, a non-Muslim implicitly applies for the application of Islamic law to her or his marriage or divorce.<sup>75</sup>

While separate law courts had existed for Jews, Christians, and Muslims of Egypt from the time that Islam established itself there in the seventh century, a significant divergence from this legacy of separate legal spheres of family law occurred in 1955: the family courts (both Muslim and non-Muslim) were abolished and consolidated under a single, national Egyptian court.<sup>76</sup> According to the Explanatory Memorandum to Law 462, the abolition of the family courts was intended to put an end to what its supporters viewed as the "chaos and abuse of litigation" caused by the plurality of jurisdictions. Also, both Muslim and non-Muslim courts were often mismanaged and did not function properly. In addition to these practical considerations, the reform of the judiciary served the purpose of national unity by theoretically subjecting all Egyptians, regardless of their religion, to a single judiciary that was both

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 396-97.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 399.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 399-400.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 400.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 400-3.

Egyptian and secular, although Islamic law still had significant authority in this apparently new legal system. The general feeling among the judiciary and political leadership in Egypt was that “the existence of separate and autonomous personal status courts, with their own laws, procedures, training and personnel, was inconsistent with a unified, centralized, national judiciary.”<sup>77</sup> Objections to the unification of the courts were voiced by traditionalist lawyers of the Sharia courts and members of minority and foreign communities in Egypt.<sup>78</sup>

The apparent abolition of the Muslim and non-Muslim family courts did not entail any change to the content and jurisdiction of the religious family laws. The family laws of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim, communities in Egypt remained in force, with their applicability being determined by the litigant’s religion. In several instances, non-Muslims requested the application of Muslim law, or of a non-Muslim law other than their own, arguing that the abolition of the family courts had also annulled their jurisdictions. However, the Egyptian Court of Cassation ruled that, as a matter of public policy, parties are not permitted to opt for the family law of their choice.<sup>79</sup>

The legal structure of Egyptian interreligious law has remained intact. The prevalent opinion of the Hanafi legal school continues to be the default doctrine for judgments in family cases, in which the relevant family law does not provide answers. What was formerly referred to as the Islamic supremacy of Muslim family law is maintained as Egypt’s general law, which is the law with overriding authority in matters of family law. Also, the practice of applying Muslim family law to non-Muslim couples who are not of the same religion, rite or sect, was formally legalized by Law 462 of 1955.<sup>80</sup>

This law stipulates that a non-Muslim law applies to a non-Muslim couple only if they share the same religious rite and sect. Otherwise, i.e., in the case of a mixed non-Muslim marriage, Muslim family law applies automatically, even if the non-Muslim couple have agreed differently. As stated earlier, this rule represents the codification of an existing practice in Egypt. While Hanafi doctrine asserts that difference of religion or rite among couples, who are members of Egypt’s religious minorities, is not an issue, the non-Muslim courts in Egypt considered mixed non-Muslim marriages a problem. In the case of a marriage between a Catholic and an Orthodox Christian, for example, both the Catholic and Orthodox Christian courts would declare the marriage void, if it was concluded in accordance with the law of the other spouse. Until 1955, such cases, as a matter of practice, referred to a Muslim court which applied Muslim family law. This practice was subsequently put into law in

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 403.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 403.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 403-4.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 404.

1955. What was new, however, was that the application of Muslim family law to mixed non-Muslim couples now became mandatory.<sup>81</sup>

In this new legal context, three issues were contested. First, should a mixed Christian marriage be declared invalid if concluded by a priest, i.e., without the mandatory witnesses as required by Islamic law? Second, is the husband in a mixed Christian marriage permitted to marry a second wife? Third, can he divorce his wife by means of repudiation, as allowed by Muslim family law? This issue is of particular relevance to the Catholics who, religiously, do not have a right to divorce, but may have their marriages annulled.<sup>82</sup>

In several rulings, Egypt's Court of Cassation argued that the principles of Muslim family law are not to be applied to Christian mixed couples when they are in conflict with any of the principles of the essence of the Christian faith, which, if violated by the Christian, will render that person an apostate of her or his own religion, corrupting her or his doctrine and infringing on that person's Christianity. With regard to the three above-mentioned issues, the Court ruled that only the conclusion of a marriage by a priest and the prohibition of multiple marriages are principles of the essence of the Christian faith. Consequently, when Muslim family law was applicable to Christian mixed couples, the rules of witnesses to the marriage and the possibility of polygamy were not to be applied. The prohibition of divorce, on the other hand, was not considered a "principle of the essence of the Christian faith," and husbands of mixed Christian couples were allowed to exercise the right of divorce with the exception of Catholics, for whom the law made a special provision.<sup>83</sup>

In other words, Muslim family law generally applies to a mixed non-Muslim marriage, although exceptions are made for rules that are essential to the Christian faith. Indeed, the procedures under the 1955 laws are similar to the Islamic procedures which applied before that time: whereas non-Muslim family laws may not violate essential principles of Islamic law, here Muslim family law may not violate essential principles of non-Muslim family law. Some have argued that after 1955, two types of laws co-exist, one for Muslims and another for non-Muslims. The Court of Cassation could not be persuaded to accept that argument, however, and claimed, dubiously, to adhere to a single Egyptian law, which the Court defined as essential principles of Islamic law. However, that court also ruled that one of those essential principles is the protection of the religious practices of non-Muslims.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 413-14.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 414.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 414-15.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 415.

## CITIZENSHIP AND NATIONALITY IN EGYPT

According to Egypt's constitution of 2014, "citizenship is a right to anyone born to an Egyptian father or an Egyptian mother. Being legally recognized and obtaining official papers proving his personal data is a right guaranteed and organized by law. Requirements for acquiring citizenship are specified by law."<sup>85</sup> Somewhat in this spirit, the Egyptian nationality law is based on a mixture of the principles of *Jus sanguinis* (the nationality of one's parent or parents) and *Jus soli* (the location of one's birth) with some alterations. In other words, one's parentage and the location of one's birth are relevant for determining whether a person is an Egyptian citizen.<sup>86</sup> As of the time of this writing, anyone born to an Egyptian mother or father is considered ethnically Egyptian under the law, and eligible for Egyptian citizenship upon request.<sup>87</sup> In addition, "Anyone who is born in Egypt from unknown parents" is Egyptian.<sup>88</sup>

At the time of codification, the law's provision on ethnically mixed marriages excluded the children of Egyptian mothers and foreign fathers from being considered Egyptians or citizens, while providing an automatic right of citizenship to the children of Egyptian fathers and foreign mothers. In 2004, the law was amended, giving mothers the right to pass down their citizenship and ethnicity to children they had with foreign men. The law applies retroactively, meaning children born to Egyptian women and foreign fathers before 2004 are also eligible for citizenship.<sup>89</sup>

The following are deemed Egyptian nationals:

1. Persons who have settled in Egypt since before November 5, 1914, and are not nationals of foreign countries, and have maintained their residence in Egypt until the present law comes into force;

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<sup>85</sup> Egypt's Constitution of 2014, Article 6: Citizenship.

<sup>86</sup> Reem Leila, "Citizenship Costs Less," *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, August 3-9, 2006 <https://web.archive.org/web/20150116015744/http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2006/806/eg4.htm> (accessed March 9, 2025).

<sup>87</sup> Law No. 26 of 1975, Concerning Egyptian Nationality, Refworld, UNHCR, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b4e218.html> (accessed March 9, 2025) and Law # 154 for Year 2004 - Amending Some Provisions of Law No.26 of 1975 Concerning Egyptian Nationality, Article 2, Refworld, UNCHR, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/2004/en/115992> (accessed May 11, 2025).

<sup>88</sup> Law # 154 for Year 2004 - Amending Some Provisions of Law No.26 of 1975 Concerning Egyptian Nationality, Article 2, Refworld, UNCHR, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/2004/en/115992> (accessed May 11, 2025).

<sup>89</sup> Amira Hass, "In Egypt, Kids with Palestinian Fathers to Get Citizenship," *Haaretz*, May 11, 2011 <https://www.haaretz.com/1.5010392> (accessed March 9, 2025).

2. Persons who on February 22, 1958 were enjoying the Egyptian nationality according to the provisions of law no. 391 for 1956 concerning Egyptian nationality;

3. Persons who have acquired the United Arab Republic (UAR) nationality pursuant to the provisions of Law no. 82 for 1958 concerning UAR nationality;

(a) By birth, from a father or a mother who is considered Egyptian as per item two of the present article or by birth in the Egyptian region of the United Arab Republic, or if the UAR nationality has been granted to him on the basis of birth, or residence in the Egyptian region, or on the basis of Egyptian origin, or having rendered honorable services to the government of the Egyptian region, or because he is head of an Egyptian religious sect working in the Egyptian regions;

(b) Persons who are considered Egyptians under nationality laws issued prior to law No. 82 for 1958, then forfeited their nationality and restored it later or it has been restored to them under Law No. 82 referred to herein beforehand; and

(c) A foreign woman who has acquired the nationality of the United Arab Republic, under the provisions of Law No. 82 for 1958 referred to before, either through marriage to someone regarded as Egyptian in accordance with the provisions of item 2 (above) of the present article, or provisions of (a) and (b) of that item, or because her foreign husband has acquired the Egyptian nationality.<sup>90</sup>

With respect to marriage, a foreign woman who is married to an Egyptian does not acquire his nationality through marriage unless she notifies her wish to acquire his nationality to the minister of Interior, and the marriage has not been terminated before the lapse of two years from the date she announces her wish, by another reason than his decease. The minister of Interior may issue a justified decree depriving the wife from acquiring the Egyptian nationality, before the lapse of the two years.<sup>91</sup>

If a foreign woman acquires the Egyptian nationality, she will not forfeit it with the termination of marriage, unless she has restored her foreign nationality, or get married to a foreigner and acquired his nationality by virtue of the law governing that nationality.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Article 1, Law No. 26 of 1975, Concerning Egyptian Nationality, Refworld, UNHCR, May 29, 1975 <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b4e218.html> (accessed March 9, 2025).

<sup>91</sup> Article 6, Law No. 26 of 1975, Concerning Egyptian Nationality, Refworld, UNHCR, May 29, 1975 <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b4e218.html> (accessed March 9, 2025).

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

According to Article 4, Law No. 26 of 1975, Concerning Egyptian Nationality, the Egyptian nationality may be granted by decree of the Minister of Interior:

First: To whomever is born in Egypt of a father of Egyptian origin, if he applies for the Egyptian nationality after having made his ordinary residence in Egypt, and is of full age at the time he applies for the nationality.

Second: To whomever belongs to an Egyptian origin whenever he applies for Egyptian nationality after five years of ordinary residence in Egypt, provided he has already attained full age at the time he submits the application.

Third: To any foreigner born in Egypt of a foreign father who was also born in it, if such a foreigner belongs to the majority of inhabitants in a country whose language is Arabic, or religion is Islam, if he applies for the Egyptian nationality within one year from the date he attains full age.

Fourth: To each foreigner born in Egypt and his ordinary residence has been in it on attaining full age, if he applies within one year from attaining full age, for the Egyptian nationality, provided he fulfills the following conditions:

1. That he should be mentally sane and suffering from no disability rendering him a burden on society.

2. That he should be of a good conduct and reputation, and that no criminal penalty or penalty restricting his freedom should have been passed against him in a crime against honor, unless he has been rehabilitated.

3. That he should be acquainted with the Arabic language.

4. That he should have a legal means of earning his living.

Fifth: To each foreigner who has made his normal residence in Egypt for ten consecutive years at least before he submits an application for the Egyptian nationality, if he is of age, and provided he fulfills the conditions set forth under item four above.<sup>93</sup>

According to Article 5, Law No. 26 of 1975, Concerning Egyptian Nationality, “the Egyptian nationality may be granted by Presidential decree, without being bound by the restrictions set out under the preceding article of the present law, to any foreigner who renders honorable services to Egypt, as well as to the heads of the Egyptian religious sects.”<sup>94</sup>

Amendments to Egypt’s Citizenship Law in 2023

On April 12, 2023, the Egyptian House of Representatives approved new amendments to Law No. 26 of 1975 on Citizenship.<sup>95</sup> The new amendments

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid. Article 1, Law No. 26 of 1975, Concerning Egyptian Nationality, Refworld, UNHCR, May 29, 1975 <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b4e218.html> (accessed May 10, 2025).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., accessed March 9, 2025.

<sup>95</sup> Sadek, “Egypt: House of Representatives,” Law Library of Congress, May 8, 2023, <https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2023-05-07/egypt-house-of-representatives-approves-new-amendments-to-citizenship-law/> (accessed May 11, 2025).

pertain to articles 6 and 11 of the Citizenship Law. Under the new amendments, article 6 of the Law on Citizenship allows foreign women, who have acquired Egyptian citizenship, to pass this citizenship on to their minor children. The new amendment further stipulates that to do this; the foreign women must be from a country where the language is Arabic or the religion of the majority of its population is Islam. Previously, the same article granted only foreign men, who had acquired Egyptian citizenship, the right to pass Egyptian citizenship on to their minor children and deprived foreign women of that right. The speaker of the House of Representatives, Hanafi al-Gebaly, declared that before Article 6 was amended, it violated the principle of gender equality cited in article 11 of the 2014 Egyptian Constitution.<sup>96</sup>

The new amendment enforces an earlier Supreme Constitutional Court<sup>97</sup> decision issued in April 2019 (Case No. 131 of judicial year 39)<sup>98</sup> in which the court held article 6 of Law No. 26 of 1975 concerning Egyptian Nationality to be unconstitutional. The court determined that article 6 discriminated against foreign women, who became naturalized Egyptian citizens, by depriving them of the right to pass Egyptian citizenship to their minor children and limiting that right to foreign male naturalized Egyptian citizens.<sup>99</sup> Additionally, the new amendments apply to article 11 of the Law on Citizenship. Through this amendment, article 11, which allowed only foreign nationals who purchased real estate from the government or state-owned developers in order to acquire Egyptian citizenship, applies to foreign nationals who buy real estate from private developers.<sup>100</sup>

On March 2, 2023, Egyptian Prime Minister Mustafa Kamal Madbouly issued Prime Minister's Decree No. 876 of 2023. This decree set the minimum price threshold for acquisition of Egyptian citizenship through the purchase of real estate at US\$300,000 (Prime Minister's Decree No. 876 of 2023, article 1). The prime minister's decree also provides foreign nationals with two other options to enable them to apply for Egyptian citizenship. The first option is to establish or participate in an investment project with a minimum investment of \$350,000, along with a deposit of an additional \$100,000 "as direct revenue in foreign currency that is transferred to the public treasury of the state and is not returned" (Article 1(2)). The second option is depositing \$250,000 in the

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Fatuh al-Shathali, "Egyptian Constitutional Court: Children of Egyptian Mothers by Naturalization are also Egyptian," *Legal Agenda*, April 15, 2019 (The preceding information is a translation from the Arabic original.) <https://perma.cc/5V43-3E3D> (accessed May 12, 2025).

<sup>98</sup> Egyptian Supreme Constitutional Court Decision, Case No. 131 of Judicial Year 39, April 2019 (The preceding information is a translation from the Arabic original.) <https://perma.cc/M9V5-CZDF> (accessed May 12, 2025).

<sup>99</sup> Sadek, "Egypt: House of Representatives," Law Library of Congress, May 8, 2023.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

Egyptian Central Bank. This amount is likewise a nonrefundable deposit. (Article 1(4).)<sup>101</sup>

Some of the flexibility within Egypt's nationality laws have allowed Armenians in Egypt to be Egyptian citizens. Yet, unfortunately there have been periods in Egypt's history when hostility against persons, who have lived in Egypt and were deemed foreign, has made life difficult for those persons. One of those events was the 1956-57 exodus and expulsions from Egypt of the "Mutamassirun," who were Egyptianized persons living in Egypt, whose parents or ancestors were born outside Egypt. The root cause of this exodus of Armenians and others, such as Britons, French, Greek, and Italians from Egypt was that country's victory in the Suez Canal Crisis and the related increase in Egyptian nationalism and anti-foreign sentiments in Egypt.<sup>102</sup>

Regarding dual citizenship, Egypt's nationality law explicitly permits dual citizenship, stating that Egyptians may acquire foreign nationality without losing their Egyptian nationality.

The only formal requirement involves notifying the Egyptian Ministry of Interior about the second nationality within specified timeframes. This notification is a procedural matter rather than a request for permission – dual citizenship is a right rather than a privilege requiring special approval.<sup>103</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Egypt's Armenians and other Christians face similar threats as Armenians and other Christians in other parts of the Middle East, which include the threats posed by Islamism, anti-Christian bias, and weak economies. As a result of those and other threats, Armenians and other Christians have been departing from many parts of the Middle East in large numbers.<sup>104</sup> Yet, given the large number of Christians in Egypt, the strength of their institutions, and the modicum of protection which they receive from Egypt's government, there is some reason to be hopeful about their future in that country.

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.; "Egyptian Prime Minister's Decision No. 876 of 2023, Amending Certain Provisions of Prime Minister's Decision No. 3099 of 2019," *Official Gazette* [Government of Egypt], Issue 9, Letter ج, March 2022 (The preceding information is translated from the Arabic original.) <https://perma.cc/M9MC-VUS8> (accessed May 12, 2025).

<sup>102</sup> Anthony Gorman, *Historians, State and Politics in Twentieth Century Egypt: Contesting the Nation*, RoutledgeCurzon, London, 2002, 175.

<sup>103</sup> Citizen X, "Egyptian Dual Citizenship Explained," <https://citizenx.com/insights/egypt-citizenship-investment/#:~:text=Legal%20Provisions%20for%20Dual%20Nationality,focused%20investors%20and%20their%20families.> (accessed July 24, 2025).

<sup>104</sup> Rachid Hmami, "Brother Rachid: Amid Middle Eastern Turmoil, Christian Minorities face Uncertain Future," Christian Solidarity International, April 22, 2025, <https://www.csi-int.org/news/amid-middle-eastern-turmoil-christian-minorities-face-uncertain-future/> (accessed May 11, 2025).

## SUDAN AND ETHIOPIA



### INTRODUCTION, AND ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHICS

This chapter examines the constitutions of the Republic of Sudan and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, and minority rights, with a focus on Armenians in those countries. After the chapter examines Sudan, it will turn to Ethiopia. In terms of the ethnic demographics of the Republic of Sudan, approximately seventy percent of Sudan’s people are characterized as Sudanese Arabs, with a significant black African minority at approximately thirty percent, including the Fur, Beja, Nuba, and Fallata.<sup>1</sup> More than five-

<sup>1</sup> Minority Rights Group, “Sudan: Communities,” June 2019, <https://minorityrights.org/country/sudan/> (accessed April 21, 2025); Jon Armajani, “The Constitutions of North Sudan and Ethiopia, and Minority Rights,” *Armenians of Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia*/2, 9-11 <https://haigrepository.haigazian.edu.lb/items/69f069ee-7887-4ab1-8550-b0bbd00f88d6> (accessed May 20, 2025). Regarding a related matter, the following archives can be helpful in conducting research on the Sudan: The Sudan Open

hundred ethnic groups speaking more than four-hundred languages live within the borders of Sudan. While intermarriage and the coexistence of Arab and African peoples in Sudan over centuries have blurred ethnic boundaries to the point where distinctions are often considered impossible, ethnic boundaries have reemerged in response to decades of conflict fueled by political manipulation of identity.<sup>2</sup>

In terms of religious demographics, 91 percent of Sudan's population is Muslim, 5.4 percent is Christian, 2.8 percent is comprised of adherents of indigenous religions, and the remainder follow other religions or are unaffiliated. Some religious advocacy groups estimate that non-Muslims may comprise more than 13 percent of Sudan's population.<sup>3</sup> There are approximately 2.7 million Christians in Sudan. Historically, there have been no more than one thousand Armenians in Sudan.<sup>4</sup> Highly accurate numbers are hard to verify, and some Armenians and other categories of persons have been departing from Sudan because of that country's civil war.<sup>5</sup> While the focus of this book and this chapter is on Armenians, a series of constitutional and legal stipulations, which this section of this chapter describe, are relevant to many religious and ethnic minorities in Sudan, including Armenians. With those ideas in mind, this chapter will turn to a history of Sudan's constitutions.

## ARMENIANS IN SUDAN

An early interaction between Armenians and Sudanese was in the eleventh century when Badr al-Jamali, a Muslim Armenian mamluk (military slave) and military commander, was called upon by the Fatimid Caliph Al-Muntasir to save his rule over Syria and Egypt. Having arrived in Egypt in 1073, Armenian soldiers constituted the majority of Badr's army, and in his maneuverings to maintain control of Egypt, he disbanded all factions except the Sudanese, whom he integrated into his military forces. Through his joint Armenian and Sudanese army, this Armenian vizier restored the Fatimid order to Egypt, Palestine, and the Hijaz. He cemented his legacy by having one of

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Archive at <https://sudanarchive.net/> (accessed May 4, 2025) and Durham University's Sudan Archive at [https://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ark/32150\\_s1k930bx05z.xml](https://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ark/32150_s1k930bx05z.xml) (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> United States Department of State, "2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Sudan," 2022 <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/sudan/> (accessed April 21, 2025).

<sup>4</sup> Personal communication from a scholar of Armenian Studies, July 7, 2025.

<sup>5</sup> Mohaned Elnour, "The Forgotten War on Sudan's Christians," The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, May 9, 2024, <https://timep.org/2024/05/09/the-forgotten-war-on-sudans-christians/> (accessed April 21, 2025); "Armenian[s] in Sudan," Joshua Projects, [https://joshuaproject.net/people\\_groups/10429/SU](https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/10429/SU) (accessed April 27, 2025).

his daughters marry a caliph, thus initiating a wave of Armenian migration to Egypt following the fall of the Bagratuni capital of Ani, and beginning a series of construction projects that remain to this day, including Old Cairo's famous fortifications and the Al-Juyushi Mosque.<sup>6</sup>

Following the migration encouraged by Badr Al-Jamali, an active Armenian religious life started to flourish. Abu Salih Al-Armani was an Armenian priest in Alexandria who wrote a book entitled the *History of the Churches and Monasteries of Egypt and Nubia*, in the twelfth century. Though it is unclear whether he traveled to Nubia himself or received information from other sources, he details the churches built by the Nubian kingdoms in present-day northern Sudan.<sup>7</sup>

Armenians were recorded to have formed part of the foreign trader community in the Sultanate of Sennar (also known as the Funj Sultanate). The Sultanate of Sennar ruled most of what is now central Sudan from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. Vedik Baghdasarian, an Armenian traveler from Tigranakert (present-day Diyarbakir), recorded his travels through Ethiopia and Nubia on his way to the Straits of Gibraltar via the west coast of Africa in the eighteenth century. Yeghia Yenovkian and Bishop Hovhanness were Armenians involved in diplomatic activities in the Sultanate of Sennar in the eighteenth century. By the nineteenth century, the Sultanate of Sennar was under pressure from the Ethiopian Empire in the south and the Sultanate of Darfur to the west. The final blow, took place in 1820, and was dealt to them by the Turco-Egyptian forces under the command of Ismail bin Muhamed Ali, a son of Mehmet Ali, the Khedive of Egypt.<sup>8</sup>

The Turco-Egyptian invasion of Sudan marked the beginning of the *Turkiyya* period of Sudanese history. In Egypt, a dynasty of Khedives or viceroys of Ottoman Egypt ruled from 1805 when the Ottoman Sultan dispatched the ethnically Albanian Muhammad Ali to recover Egypt from the French following Napoleon's retreat. Through shrewd political maneuvering and military prowess, he seized Egypt as his own autonomous region within the Ottoman Empire. He was only prevented from conquering Constantinople in 1831 and 1842 due to the intervention of the European powers. Muhammad Ali's dynasty lasted until King Farouk was deposed by Gamal Abdel Nasser's Free Officers Movement in 1952.<sup>9</sup>

Territorial ambitions in Africa and the desire for a supply of slaves from Sudan led them to consolidate their rule further into Sudan in Kordofan, Kassala, Fashoda, Suakin, Equatoria, and finally Darfur province. In the *Turkiyya* period, Armenian traders and craftsmen from places like Arabkir and

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<sup>6</sup> Vahe Boghosian, "Chronologies: The Turkiyya and the Mahdiyya," *Sudanahye*, <https://www.sudanahye.com/blog/turkiyyaandmahdiyya> (accessed August 3, 2025).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Agn settled in Khartoum. Khartoum was originally a military outpost for the Turco-Egyptian army as a strategic location where the blue and white Niles meet, later becoming the seat of their colonial government from 1823. The Turco-Egyptians encouraged northern merchants (jalaba) to go south by providing protections such as Sharia courts and a market for trading goods and slaves from Sennar.<sup>10</sup>

The Armenian presence in the *Turkiyya* was limited to a small trading community, though some Armenians purchased land and engaged in agriculture. One of these persons was Artin Arakelian, who introduced the growing of tobacco in Gedaref in 1859 before shipping the tobacco to be cured and packaged by Armenian associates in Khartoum. He married a Coptic woman and expanded his farming to include fruits and spices, amassing significant wealth in the process.<sup>11</sup>

Nubar Nubarian, also known as Nubar Pasha, is famous in Egypt as an Armenian-Egyptian statesman who held significant positions during the nineteenth century, including his role as Egypt's first prime minister and as an advisor for Muhammad Ali's descendants. However, his brother, Arakel, is seldom mentioned in these accounts. Arakel Noubarian was born in 1826 in Smyrna (modern-day Izmir) to an Armenian merchant who had married a relative of Boghos Bey Yousoufian. Boghos Bey Yousoufian had worked his way up the ranks to be a chief dragoman (interpreter) and minister to Muhammad Ali. In 1854, Mohamed Sa'id Pasha, a son of Muhammad Ali, came to power with Nubar Pasha in his entourage.<sup>12</sup>

On a visit to Sudan, Sa'id Pasha was considering scaling back his dominion over Sudan following a cholera epidemic and in light of the threat of Ethiopian attacks from the south. Sudan was primarily of importance to him for its supply of slaves for his army and estates, and this could continue without costly direct control. Sa'id Pasha decided to maintain his rule over Sudan when he knew that Nubar Pasha's brother, Arakel Bey Al-Armani, was willing to take on governorship in Sudan, a role Sa'id Pasha was struggling to fill. Sa'id Pasha split Sudan into five provinces, and in 1857, the thirty-year-old Arakel went south to take on his role as governor of Khartoum and Sennar provinces.<sup>13</sup>

Khedive Ismail appointed Arakel Bey Abroian, who was the second Armenian governor in Sudan and a nephew of Nubar Pasha, as governor of the Eastern Sudan General Governorate in 1873. During his governorship, he tightened control over the Red Sea coastline in an attempt to suppress the slave

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

trade, in part to improve his governorship's relationship with European countries.<sup>14</sup>

In 1881, Muhammad Ahmad, a religious leader from Dongola and the Samaniyya Sufi Order, proclaimed himself the Mahdi ("the guided one") and united those in Sudan opposed to the oppressive Turco-Egyptian administration. Like the Copts and Jews in Sudan, many Armenians were either killed, fled the Mahdi's rule, or converted to Islam. Those Armenians who converted formed the Masalma community which survived in Omdurman under strict Mahdiyya laws, primarily working as jewelers and watchmakers. The tobacconist, Artin Arakelian, had his property looted and later died in Gedaref in 1889. Some in this community reverted back to their original religion of Christianity after the Mahdiyya's rule ended in 1898.<sup>15</sup>

Later, a major influx of Armenians came into Sudan after the Armenian Genocide.<sup>16</sup> Many Armenians sought refuge in Sudan, joining existing communities or establishing new ones, particularly in cities like Khartoum, Omdurman, and other parts of the country. The Armenian community established cultural centers, churches, and schools to preserve their language and traditions.<sup>17</sup> Despite the challenges of displacement and genocide, the Armenians in Sudan became integrated into Sudanese society, participating in various aspects of life while maintaining their distinct identity.<sup>18</sup> Like many diaspora communities, the Armenian population in Sudan has experienced significant emigration, particularly since the 1950s, with many seeking opportunities in Europe, North America, and elsewhere.<sup>19</sup> The current war in Sudan has further complicated the situation, leading to displacement and

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Rushaa Hamid, "Losing Armenia in the Capital of Sudan," *500 Words Magazine*, July 3, 2016, <https://500wordsmag.com/columns/the-other-sudanese/losing-armenia-in-the-capital-of-sudan/#:~:text=Like%20many%20communities%20in%20Sudan,later%20Armenian%20genocide%20of%201915>. (accessed August 3, 2025).

<sup>17</sup> Anoushka Kurkjian, "History and Humanity: An Armenian Perspective of the Implications of Sudan's Descent into Civil War," Songhai Advisory, August 7, 2023, <https://www.songhaiadvisory.com/blog/2023/8/7/history-amp-humanity-an-armenian-perspective-of-the-implications-of-sudans-descent-into-civil-war#:~:text=Zvart's%20father%2C%20Karnig%20Yegavian%2C%20was,the%20harrowing%20experience%20of%20genocide>. (accessed August 3, 2025).

<sup>18</sup> Vahe Boghosian, "Sudanahye," <https://www.sudanahye.com/about#:~:text=On%20many%20occasions%20when%20Sudanese,project%2C%20please%20get%20in%20touch>. (accessed August 3, 2025).

<sup>19</sup> Betwa Sharma, "Keeping Armenia Alive in the Capital of Sudan," *Time*, June 9, 2009 <https://time.com/archive/6946907/keeping-armenia-alive-in-the-capital-of-sudan/> (accessed August 3, 2025).

dispersal of the remaining Armenian community. The complexities of that war make it difficult to ascertain, which Armenian person(s) or entities constitute the official Armenian representative to the Sudanese government. Initiatives such as the Sudanahye project are working to document and preserve the history and cultural heritage of the Sudanese-Armenian community.<sup>20</sup>

## HISTORY OF SUDAN'S CONSTITUTIONS

Sudan gained independence from Britain on January 1, 1956, and independent Sudan's first constitution was implemented on that date.<sup>21</sup> When Sudan became independent, the existing Self-Government Statute, which was approved in 1953, was amended and approved by parliament as Sudan's Transitional Constitution of 1956. The Self-Government Statute stipulated a transitional period, which would lead to Sudanese independence, provisions for its form of government, and principles related to rights and freedoms.<sup>22</sup> In that vein, Sudan's 1956 constitution provided for a cabinet government subject to the control of a bicameral parliament, and an independent judiciary. That constitution also includes fundamental-rights provisions that had appeared in the Self-Government Statute, such as the right not to be arbitrarily arrested or deprived of the use of property; protections related to freedom of religion, opinion and association; the right to constitutional remedy; independence of the judiciary; and the rule of law.<sup>23</sup>

In 1957, a Sudanese constituent assembly was elected, and a national constitutional commission was appointed to draft a new constitution for the country, in part because there was a need for a new constitution to provide more detailed provisions for Sudan's governance. That commission was composed of forty-six members, who were drawn from a wide circle of academics, lawyers, politicians, and representatives of workers and farmers. However, no women were included. The southern members of the constituent

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<sup>20</sup> Boghosian, "Sudanahye."

<sup>21</sup> Kristine Mo, *Contested Constitutions: Constitutional Development in Sudan, 1953-2005*, SR 1:2014, Chr. Michelsen Institute, University of Bergen, 26 <https://open.cmi.no/cmi-xmlui/handle/11250/2475015> (accessed April 22, 2025).

<sup>22</sup> The formal title of the Self-Government Statute is the *Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Egyptian Government Concerning Self-Government and Self-Determination for the Sudan (Cairo, February 12, 1953)*, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, UK, 1953, <https://treaties.fcdo.gov.uk/data/Library2/pdf/1953-TS0047.pdf> (accessed April 22, 2025).

<sup>23</sup> Self-Government Statute; Mohammed Abdelsalam Babiker and Atta H. el-Battahani, *Reflections on Sudan's Constitutional Trajectory: 1953-2023*, 13, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, IDEA, 2023, Stockholm, Sweden, <https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/reflections-sudans-constitutional-trajectory-1953-2023> ; <https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2023.53> (accessed April 22, 2025).

assembly had withdrawn from the national constitutional commission when it failed to endorse their desire for federalism. The commission opted for a parliamentary system. Following Sudan's 1958 parliamentary election, the constituent assembly set up a new national committee to draft a constitution. That assembly invested part of its time debating the merits of the British and American systems of government, and whether the Sudanese state should be secular or Muslim in its future orientation. No agreement on a constitution had been reached when the army, under its commander-in-chief Major General Ibrahim Abboud, took power in 1958. Abboud's reign lasted for six years until his downfall at the hands of a popular movement during the October Revolution of 1964. His government did not have a vision for nation-building. In addition, it did not perceive a need to develop a constitution. As a result, during the period from 1958 to 1964 there was government by executive decree with no constitution or progress toward one.<sup>24</sup> Yet, in 1964, the National Uprising, which took place in October of that year, overthrew Abboud's military regime and led to yet another Interim Constitution. That 1964 document amended the Constitution of 1956. Both constitutions included bills of rights and provisions for equality before the law. The other major positive dimension of the 1964 Constitution is that it gave women equal political rights, which included voting and running for political office, as well as other rights to education, work and equal payment for equal work.<sup>25</sup>

On May 23, 1969, the political parties in Sudan's constituent assembly accepted the principles that Sudan should have a constitution based at least in part on Islam, with a President, and general elections were scheduled to take place in January 1970. However, a coup took place on May 25, 1969.<sup>26</sup> That coup was led by Sudanese Colonel Jaafar Nimeiry, who together with four other officers, overthrew the civilian government of Ismail al-Azhari. This coup was termed the "May Revolution." Nimeiry created and chaired the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC). On May 26, 1969, Nimeiry suspended the constitution, dissolved the Supreme Council, the National Assembly, and the Civil Service Commission, and ordered that all political parties disband.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Babiker and el-Battahani, 13-14.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>26</sup> Mo, 32.

<sup>27</sup> Randall Fegley, EBSCO, 2023, "Nimeiri Takes Charge in Khartoum" <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/politics-and-government/nimeiri-takes-charge-khartoum> (accessed April 22, 2025); Mo, 32-33; Babiker and el-Battahani, 14: The Global Nonviolent Action Database, Swarthmore College, "Sudanese Bring Down Dictator Abbud (October Revolution), 1964" <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/sudanese-bring-down-dictator-abbud-october-revolution-1964> (accessed April 22, 2025).

Having secured a support base in north and South Sudan, Nimeiry's government moved to build a permanent constitution for the country. Accordingly, a People's Assembly was appointed in 1972 to adopt a constitution prepared by the government. The Assembly was divided into ten committees, each of which was to give its own report on all aspects of the draft constitution. Substantial changes were made, many of which the regime accepted, including a chapter on procedural aspects of the rule of law. Sudan's 1973 constitution was adopted without any transparent constitution-making process in place; there was no popular participation or referendum. All executive and legislative powers were vested in the hands of the President, as well as the power of appointing all the judges, on advice from the High Council of the Judiciary. The constitutional system was a presidential one, emphasizing the centralization of power.<sup>28</sup> That 1973 constitution also recognized Islam as a significant source of legislation.<sup>29</sup>

In 1977, Nimeiry's government became reconciled to some of the Islamist elements in Sudan. This situation initiated a new phase, with more emphasis on Islamic ideals, influencing mainly the principles of law-making, such as strict Islamic conceptions of justice and judicial interpretations in light of strict rules of Islamic jurisprudence. Sudan's legal system was brought into stronger accord with strict Islamic legal principles. This development paved the way for declaring strict Islamic personal laws, and the Islamization of some other laws, beginning in 1983.<sup>30</sup>

The Nimeiry regime, which ruled from 1969 to 1985, ended with another popular uprising. A transitional military government, assisted by a civilian council of ministers, shared power under the 1985 Transitional Constitution of Sudan, which was based on the initial Transitional Constitution of 1956 and its later amendments, as well as the 1973 Constitution. The 1985 Transitional Constitution had two significant aspects: (1) equality before the law for all Sudanese; and (2) respect for fundamental human rights and democratic principles. An elected Constituent Assembly and a civilian cabinet assumed power in April 1986.<sup>31</sup> This relatively short period, under a transitional military government, ended on June 30, 1989 when military officers under the command of Brigadier General Omar Hassan al-Bashir, with the support of the National Islamic Front, under the leadership of Hassan al-Turabi, replaced the Sadiq al-Mahdi government with the Revolutionary Command Council for

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<sup>28</sup> Babiker and el-Battahani, 16.

<sup>29</sup> Mo, 35.

<sup>30</sup> Babiker and el-Battahani, 16-17.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 17; International Labour Organization, "Transitional Constitution of the Republic of the Sudan, 1985,"

[https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/r/natlex/fe/details?p3\\_isn=44001](https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/r/natlex/fe/details?p3_isn=44001) (accessed April 22, 2025).

National Salvation. This event initiated al-Bashir's rule which lasted until 2019.<sup>32</sup>

Following the usual pattern of previous coups in Sudan, the constitution was suspended, and political parties as well as various democratic institutions, including the parliament, were dissolved. Omar al-Bashir's military government did not quickly develop a constitution, and the country was ruled for approximately ten years through presidential decrees.<sup>33</sup> A committee of ten persons drafted the 1998 Constitution. That constitution emphasizes Islam's significant role as a source for legislation.<sup>34</sup> For example, Article 65 of that constitution states, "Islamic law and the consensus of the nation, by referendum, Constitution and custom shall be the sources of legislation; and no legislation in contravention with these fundamentals shall be made; however, the legislation shall be guided by the nation's public opinion, the learned opinion of scholars and thinkers, and then by the decision of those in charge of public affairs."<sup>35</sup> As the latter sentence suggests, the principles of Islamic law are counterbalanced with "the nation's public opinion, the learned opinion of scholars and thinkers . . . and by the decision of those in charge of public affairs."<sup>36</sup>

A similar counterbalancing between Islamic and non-Islamic principles is evident in Article 1 of Sudan's 1998 constitution, which states, "The State of Sudan is an embracing homeland, wherein races and cultures coalesce and religions conciliate. Islam is the religion of the majority of the population. Christianity and customary creeds have considerable followers."<sup>37</sup> This article of the constitution counterbalances a recognition of the importance of Islam in Sudan, on the one hand, with Christianity and customary creeds, on the other. While Omar al-Bashir's government was authoritarian and was under pressure from Islamists in the writing of Sudan's constitution and various

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<sup>32</sup> BBC News, "Profile: Sudan's President Bashir," November 25, 2003 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/3273569.stm> (accessed April 22, 2025); "Sudan's military removes al-Bashir: All the latest updates," *Al-Jazeera*, April 20, 2019 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/4/20/sudans-military-removes-al-bashir-all-the-latest-updates> (accessed April 22, 2025). For information on Hassan al-Turabi's leadership of the National Islamic Front, see Magnus Taylor, "Hassan al-Turabi's Islamist Legacy in Sudan," International Crisis Group, March 10, 2016, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/sudan/hassan-al-turabi-s-islamist-legacy-sudan> (accessed April 27, 2025).

<sup>33</sup> Babiker and el-Battahani, 18.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> The Constitution of the Republic of the Sudan, 1998, Article 65, <https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/d1b273/pdf> (accessed April 23, 2025). From the ICC [International Criminal Court] Legal Tools Database. For information about that database, see "Contact us" at <https://www.legal-tools.org/contact-us> (accessed April 23, 2025).

<sup>36</sup> The Constitution of the Republic of the Sudan, 1998, Article 65.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 1.

laws, at minimum the constitution reflects an understanding of Sudan's religious diversity, which could potentially benefit Armenians and other religious minorities in Sudan.<sup>38</sup>

In addition, Part 2 of Sudan's 1998 Constitution, which is entitled "Freedoms, Sanctities, Rights and Duties," stipulates a wide range of rights and freedoms, including the freedom and sanctity of life, right to nationality, freedom and right of movement, freedom of creed and worship, freedom of thought and expression, freedom of association and organization, and the sanctity of cultural communities.<sup>39</sup> These and related rights and freedoms had the potential of protecting all Sudanese, including Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities in Sudan. At the same time, Sudan's 2005 Interim National Constitution (INC) and that country's 2019 Draft Constitutional Charter rearticulate those and similar rights and freedoms.<sup>40</sup>

### THE INTERIM NATIONAL CONSTITUTION (INC) OF 2005

The INC of 2005, which was ratified on July 6, 2025, was the second constitution that was written by President al-Bashir's regime. The writing of that second constitution unfolded in a somewhat different context than the writing of the 1998 Constitution. The 1998 Constitution had been created by a small group of elites during a civil war, and had little popular support. The second effort for a permanent constitution, with participation by southern Sudanese, who were represented by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLM/A), may have been written with an awareness that this represented one of the last attempts to keep Sudan united.<sup>41</sup> The writing of Sudan's 1998 constitution involved, in part, a desire to constitutionalize at least some aspects of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which was signed on January 9, 2005, which was six months before signing of the INC of 2005.<sup>42</sup>

The CPA brought to an end the Second Sudanese Civil War, which took place from 1983 to 2005, that was fought between the Government of the Republic of Sudan, on one side, and the SPLM/A, which represented South Sudan, on the other side. An analysis of some similarities between the CPA

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<sup>38</sup> Mo, 49.

<sup>39</sup> The Constitution of the Republic of the Sudan, 1998, Part 2, Articles 20-27.

<sup>40</sup> *The Interim National Constitution of the Republic of the Sudan, 2005*, Preamble, <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4ba749762.pdf> (accessed April 21, 2025). Preamble, Articles 6-8; Draft Constitutional Charter for the 2019 Transitional Period, Chapter 14, <https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/Sudan%20Constitutional%20Declaration%20%28English%29.pdf> (accessed April 23, 2025).

<sup>41</sup> Mo, 52-53.

<sup>42</sup> *The Interim National Constitution*, 108-9, <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4ba749762.pdf> (accessed April 25, 2025).

and the INC of 2005 can be helpful in understanding the context and other factors related to the writing of the INC of 2005.<sup>43</sup>

Both the CPA and the INC

1. emphasize the importance of peace and stability in Sudan;<sup>44</sup>
2. outline frameworks for power sharing between political entities;<sup>45</sup>
3. articulate the importance of the protection of human rights and freedoms;<sup>46</sup>
4. state principles for electoral processes and elections;<sup>47</sup> and
5. make commitments to economic development.<sup>48</sup>

Those five sets of principle, if they had been implemented in a spirit of reconciliation and unity, could have had beneficial effects for everyone living in Sudan, including Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities.

In that vein, there are additional aspects of the INC of 2005, which are particularly relevant to Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities in Sudan.<sup>49</sup> The INC of 2005 states, “Nationally enacted legislation having effect only in respect of the Northern states of the Sudan shall have as its sources of legislation Islamic Sharia and the consensus of the people.”<sup>50</sup> Within this framework, the constitution counterbalances principles related to Islamic Sharia by articulating commitments to “uphold values of justice, equality, human dignity and equal rights and duties of men and women” while maintaining “social harmony, deepening . . . religious tolerance, and building trust and confidence in the society generally.”<sup>51</sup> The INC of 2005 also affirms a broad range of religious rights, asserting

The State shall respect the religious rights to worship or assemble in connection with any religion or belief and to establish and maintain places for these purposes; [to] write, issue and disseminate religious publications; [to] teach religion or belief in places suitable for these

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<sup>43</sup> Mo, 52-56.

<sup>44</sup> *The Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Sudan and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Sudan People’s Liberation Army* [2005], p. xi, <https://peaceaccords.nd.edu/wp-content/accords/SudanCPA.pdf>; *Interim National Constitution of the Republic of the Sudan*, 2005, Article 82e;

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 81.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, The Preamble, Principles, and The Transition Process,” p. 1, Article 1(2).

<sup>47</sup> *The Comprehensive Peace Agreement*, 12-13; *Interim National Constitution of the Republic of the Sudan*, 2005, Article 4(d).

<sup>48</sup> *The Comprehensive Peace Agreement*, 43; *Interim National Constitution of the Republic of the Sudan*, 2005, Preamble.

<sup>49</sup> *Interim National Constitution of the Republic of the Sudan*, 2005, Preamble, <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4ba749762.pdf> (accessed April 21, 2025).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 5(1). <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4ba749762.pdf> (accessed April 23, 2025).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, Preamble.

purposes; [to] train, appoint, elect or designate by succession appropriate religious leaders called for by the requirements and standards of any religion or belief; and [to] observe days of rest, celebrate holidays and ceremonies in accordance with the precepts of religious beliefs.<sup>52</sup>

In that vein, the INC of 2005 contains an extensive Bill of Rights which attempts to protect a broad range of rights including life and human dignity, personal liberty, equality before the law, privacy, freedom of creed and worship, freedom of expression and media, the rights to vote, own property, receive an education, and -- particularly significant with respect to Armenians in Sudan -- constitutional protections regarding ethnic and cultural communities.<sup>53</sup> The corresponding clause in the constitution states, "Ethnic and cultural communities shall have the right to freely enjoy and develop their particular cultures; members of such communities shall have the right to practice their beliefs, use their languages, observe their religions and raise their children within the framework of their respective cultures and customs."<sup>54</sup> At the same time, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the INC of 2005 contain provisions, which eventually led southern Sudan becoming an independent state on July 9, 2011.<sup>55</sup> South Sudanese made that decision through a referendum that was held on January 9 through 15, 2011.<sup>56</sup>

In any case, in spite of the stipulations in INC of 2005, which were intended to protect human rights and promote democratic governance, Omar al-Bashir's government continued to be oppressive, which led to the demonstrations against his government, starting on December 19, 2018 and played a significant role in his overthrow that took place on April 11, 2019.<sup>57</sup> One of many aspects of al-Bashir's rule, which was oppressive, involved the

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., Articles 6(a), 6(d), 6(e), 6(g), 6(h).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., Articles 27-48.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., Article 47.

<sup>55</sup> United Nations Mission in the Sudan (UNMIS), "Independence of South Sudan," n.d., <https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/past/unmis/referendum.shtml> (accessed April 27, 2025).

<sup>56</sup> University of Notre Dame, Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, "Independence Referendum: Sudan Comprehensive Peace Agreement; Implementations, Independence Referendum - 2005," Peace Accords Matrix, [https://peaceaccords.nd.edu/provision/independence-referendum-sudan-comprehensive-peace-agreement#:~:text=Independence%20Referendum%20%E2%80%93%202011,polling%20continued%20until%2018%20January\).&text=On%207%20February%2011%2C%20the,Abyei%20belonged%20to%20south%20Sudan.](https://peaceaccords.nd.edu/provision/independence-referendum-sudan-comprehensive-peace-agreement#:~:text=Independence%20Referendum%20%E2%80%93%202011,polling%20continued%20until%2018%20January).&text=On%207%20February%2011%2C%20the,Abyei%20belonged%20to%20south%20Sudan.) (accessed May 3, 2025).

<sup>57</sup> Draft Constitutional Charter for the 2019 Transitional Period, page 2, at Constitutionnet.org, <https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/Sudan%20Constitutional%20Declaration%20%28English%29.pdf> (accessed April 18, 2025).

atrocities that the Sudanese military committed in Darfur beginning around 2002 and 2003, for which al-Bashir has been indicted by the International Criminal Court.<sup>58</sup> The Forces for Freedom and Change, which was one of most important entities that led the protests against al-Bashir, and the Transitional Military Council were crucial participants in the writing of the 2019 Draft Constitutional Charter.<sup>59</sup> While that draft constitutional charter was originally intended to be effective for thirty-nine months, an amended constitutional declaration, beginning on February 19, 2025, has extended the 2019 draft constitutional charter's implementation for an additional thirty-nine months.<sup>60</sup>

The run-up to and writing of the 2019 draft constitutional charter of Sudan was a complex and multifaceted process, deeply intertwined with the country's political upheavals and aspirations of many Sudanese for democratic governance. Some of the reasons for the demonstrations against Omar al-Bashir, and his removal as Sudan's president included Sudan's economic crisis, corruption in al-Bashir's government, al-Bashir's oppressive tactics, his government's human rights violations, and discontent in the military with al-Bashir's leadership.<sup>61</sup>

#### DRAFT CONSTITUTIONAL CHARTER OF 2019

After the overthrow of President al-Bashir and continuing protests during the summer of 2019, the Transitional Military Council (TMC), which

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<sup>58</sup> International Criminal Court, "Darfur, Sudan; Situation in Darfur, Sudan: ICC-02/05," <https://www.icc-cpi.int/darfur> (accessed May 18, 2025); *Ibid.*, "Al Bashir Case: The Prosecutor v. Omar Hassan Ahmad Al Bashir, ICC-02/05-01/09," <https://www.icc-cpi.int/darfur/albashir> (accessed May 18, 2025); Jen Kirby, *Vox*, "Sudan's Military Says It Won't Extradite Omar al-Bashir to Face War Crimes Charges," April 12, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/world/2019/4/12/18307649/sudan-omar-al-bashir-war-crimes-icc-military> (accessed May 18, 2025). In a related matter, there are some similarities related to the Sudanese central governments' marginalization of Darfur and South Sudan. For example, both regions have significant non-Arab populations as well as valuable natural resources. In that regard, please see Roger Winter and John Prendergast, "An All-Sudan Solution: Linking Darfur and the South," Center for American Progress, November 14, 2007, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/an-all-sudan-solution-linking-darfur-and-the-south/> (accessed March 18, 2025).

<sup>59</sup> Draft Constitutional Charter for the 2019 Transitional Period, 2, at Constitutionnet.org, <https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/Sudan%20Constitutional%20Declaration%20%28English%29.pdf> (accessed April 18, 2025).

<sup>60</sup> "Amended Constitutional Declaration Extends Sudan's Transition," *Sudan Tribune*, February 23, 2025, <https://sudantribune.com/article297812/> (accessed April 18, 2025).

<sup>61</sup> "Timeline: Sudan's Political Situation since al-Bashir's Removal," *Al-Jazeera*, January 3, 2022 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/25/timeline-sudan-since-the-fall-of-omar-al-bashir> (accessed April 19, 2025).

governed Sudan after al-Bashir's overthrow, agreed to negotiate an interim constitutional framework with the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC), the grassroots movement that precipitated al-Bashir's ouster. A series of negotiations resulted in the 2019 Draft Constitutional Charter.<sup>62</sup> That Draft Constitutional Charter, which was signed on August 4, 2019, provided the legal foundation for the transitional government. It included provisions for human rights, the rule of law, and the establishment of democratic institutions.<sup>63</sup> In addition, it stipulated the establishment of a (1) sovereignty council, which has had the task of appointing a prime minister and cabinet members,<sup>64</sup> (2) a transitional cabinet, which has had the task of expending draft laws, and the draft general budget of the state,<sup>65</sup> (3) a transitional legislative council, which has had the task of enacting laws, overseeing the performance of the cabinet, and approving the general budget of the state,<sup>66</sup> and (4) national judiciary bodies, which have had the task of functioning as Sudan's court system.<sup>67</sup>

In February 2025, amendments were made to the Draft Constitutional Charter. Those amendments were driven by several key factors, primarily related to Sudan's civil war and the need for stability. The amendments were primarily aimed at consolidating the power of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF). This included eliminating references to civilian leadership. The amendments also involved deleting references to the Forces for Freedom and Change, and removing from civilians their role in serving on the Sovereignty Council. This revision was intended to centralize authority within the military and reduce the influence of civilian groups and the rival Rapid Support Forces (RSF) from the Draft Constitutional Charter.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Brooke Davies, *Sudan's 2019 Constitutional Declaration: Its Impact on the Transition*, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance [IDEA], Stockholm, Sweden, 2022, 10 <https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/sudans-2019-constitutional-declaration-its-impact-on-the-transition-en.pdf>.

<sup>63</sup> Draft Constitutional Charter for the 2019 Transitional Period, Chapters 1-8 and 14-15.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 4.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 5.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 7.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 8; Rawan Elsadig, Wehaj Kamal, and Mohamed Hesham, *The Dialectic of Governance and Justice: Conceptualising and Implementing the Rule of Law in Sudan*, Fikra for Studies & Development, n.p., 2025, 37-55, <https://mailchi.mp/abba89751669/the-dialectic-of-governance-and-justice-conceptualising-and-implementing-the-rule-of-law-in-sudan?e=462dea54a2> (accessed May 25, 2025).

<sup>68</sup> "Sudan Amends Constitution to Bolster Military's Grip on Power," *Sudan Times*, February 20, 2025, <https://thesudantimes.com/sudan/sudan-amends-constitution-to-bolster-militarys-grip-on-power/> (accessed May 25, 2025); "Legal Expert: Constitutional Amendments 'Give Sudan Military Absolute Control,'" *Dabanga*

The amendments include adding two additional seats for the armed forces in the sovereignty council, increasing their total from four to six.<sup>69</sup> The sovereignty council consists of a total of eleven members.<sup>70</sup> In addition, certain provisions referring to the “Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Rapid Support Forces, and other regular forces” have been modified to refer collectively to the “Commander-in-Chief of the Regular Forces.”<sup>71</sup> These and other amendments increase the power of the Sudanese Armed Forces in various areas related to the government and military.<sup>72</sup>

## RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS CHARTER OF THE 2019 DRAFT CONSTITUTIONAL CHARTER

While in principle “Chapter 14: Rights and Freedom Charter” of the 2019 Draft Constitutional Charter remains in place, because of Sudan’s civil war and the resulting weakening of Sudanese governmental entities, those rights are difficult to protect.<sup>73</sup> Yet, it is conceivable that after the civil war ends, and if the Sudanese government becomes stronger in its ability to enforce the constitution in post-civil war Sudan, those rights could be beneficial to many, who live in Sudan, including Armenians. In any case, the stipulations embedded in Chapter 14 of the Draft Constitutional Charter are worth considering. That chapter provides for many rights and freedoms, including rights to life and human dignity, citizenship and nationality, personal freedom, freedom from slavery and forced labor, equality before the law, gender equality, protection from torture, a right to fair trials, a right to litigation, a right to privacy, freedom of belief and worship, freedom of expression and the press, freedom of assembly and organization, a right to political participation, freedom of travel and residence, and rights to ownership, education, and decent health.<sup>74</sup> The Draft Constitutional Charter also protects the right to freely express one’s culture and ethnicity.<sup>75</sup>

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*Sudan*, February 26, 2025, <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/legal-expert-constitutional-amendments-give-sudan-military-absolute-control> (accessed May 25, 2025).

<sup>69</sup> “Key Amendments to the Constitutional Document,” *Sudan Events*, February 20, 2025, <https://sudanevents.com/index.php/2025/02/20/key-amendments-to-the-constitutional-document/> (April 19, 2025).

<sup>70</sup> Al-Jazeera. “Sudan Coup: Which Constitutional Articles Have Been Suspended?” October 26, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/26/sudan-coup-which-constitutional-articles-suspended#:~:text=It%20states%20that%20the%20sovereign,Forces%20of%20Freedom%20and%20Change>, (accessed July 26, 2025).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> “Sudan Amends Constitution to Bolster.”

<sup>73</sup> Draft Constitutional Charter for the 2019 Transitional Period, Chapter 14.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

While most or all of the constitutional rights are relevant to Armenians, the following may be particularly significant: freedom of belief and worship, freedom of travel and residence, and citizenship and nationality.<sup>76</sup> The Draft Constitutional Charter's stipulation related to freedom of belief and worship states, "Every person shall have the right to freedom of religious belief and worship. They shall have the right to profess or express their religion or belief through worship, education, practice, performance of rituals, or celebrations, in accordance with the requirements of the law and public order. No one shall be compelled to convert to a religion they do not believe in or to practice rites or rituals they do not voluntarily accept."<sup>77</sup> This stipulation is particularly important for Armenians because many of them are Christians, and Sudan is a majority-Muslim country. If the Sudanese government protects this right, it can be beneficial to Armenians because it can enable them to worship freely.

The Draft Constitutional Charter's stipulation, related to freedom of religion, co-exists with a constitutional amendment, ratified in February 2025, which makes the principles of Islamic legislation, religious beliefs, popular consensus, and the values, customs, and traditions of the Sudanese people sources of legislation.<sup>78</sup> Islam as a source of legislation may not necessarily be damaging to the religious rights of Christians because Muslims typically acknowledge Christians as *ahl al-kitab* or people of the book, who as recognized monotheists may worship in accordance with their religion.<sup>79</sup> At the same time, the amendment recognizes the religious beliefs of the Sudanese people, as a source of legislation. If Armenians, including Armenian Christians, are accepted within that framework, this could bolster their case for religious rights in Sudan. In this context, Saint Gregory Armenian Church in Khartoum has been an important center of religious life for some Armenians in Khartoum.<sup>80</sup>

Chapter 14 of the Draft Constitutional Charter also has stipulations, which relate to freedom of travel and residence. One stipulation states that every "citizen has the right to freedom of travel and free choice of place of residence,

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> "Amended Constitutional Declaration Extends Sudan's Transition," *Sudan Tribune*, February 23, 2025 <https://sudantribune.com/article297812/> .

<sup>79</sup> Mamadou Bocoum, "The Position of the 'ahl al-kitab' in the Qur'an: Case Study of the Christians," The Centre for Muslim-Christian Studies, Oxford, n.d., <https://www.cmcsoxford.org.uk/resources/multimedia/the-position-of-the-ahl-al-kitab-in-the-quran-case-study-of-the-christians> .

<sup>80</sup> "Sudan Armenian Community Has No Safety Issue yet, Armenian Church is 2km away from Military Clashes," *Armenian News-NEWS.am*, April 19, 2023, <https://news.am/eng/news/755563.html>; Betwa Sharma, "Keeping Armenia Alive in the Capital of Sudan," *Time* [magazine], June 9, 2009, <https://time.com/archive/6946907/keeping-armenia-alive-in-the-capital-of-sudan/>

except for reasons required by public health or safety, as regulated by law.”<sup>81</sup> A related stipulation states that every “citizen shall have the right to leave the country, as regulated by law, and they shall also have the right to return.”<sup>82</sup> These freedoms are important for Armenians in Sudan because of the connections, which many of them have to persons and institutions outside that country. These connections may be personal, professional, social, cultural, and/or religious. It is important for Armenians in Sudan to be able to travel freely to and from that country in order to meet such obligations. In addition, the freedom to travel and reside in various parts of Sudan provides Armenians and other persons in that country the peace of mind of being able to live in locations that please them, while potentially residing in places that may work well for them in terms of family, work, school, safety, security, and other factors.

### CITIZENSHIP, NATIONALITY, AND NATURALIZATION

The stipulations on citizenship and nationality in Chapter 14 of the Draft Constitutional Charter state

1. Citizenship is the basis of equal rights and obligations for all Sudanese;
2. Anyone born to a Sudanese mother or father has an inalienable right to possess Sudanese nationality and citizenship;
3. The law shall organize citizenship and naturalization, and no one who has acquired citizenship by naturalization shall be deprived of nationality except by law; and
4. Any Sudanese person may acquire the nationality of another country, as regulated by law.<sup>83</sup>

Constitutional stipulations regarding citizenship must be interpreted in tandem with the Nationality Act of 1994 and relevant amendments. The current version of the Nationality Act of 1994, as amended in 2005, provides that:

In respect of persons born before the coming into force of this Act, a person shall be Sudanese by birth if he satisfies the following conditions:

- (a) if he has already acquired Sudanese nationality by birth;
- (b) (i) if he was born in Sudan or his father was born in Sudan;  
(ii) if he is residing in Sudan at the coming into force of this Act and he and his ancestors from the father’s side were residing in Sudan since January 1, 1956;
- (c) if neither the person nor his father were born in Sudan, he may, if he satisfies the requirements of paragraph (b)(ii), apply to the Minister to grant him Sudanese nationality by birth.

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<sup>81</sup> Draft Constitutional Charter for the 2019 Transitional Period, Chapter 14.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

(2) A person born after the coming into force of this Act shall be Sudanese by birth if his father is Sudanese by birth at the time of his birth.

(3) A person born to a Sudanese mother by birth shall be entitled to Sudanese Nationality by birth whenever he applies for it.

(4) A person born to a parent who is a Sudanese national by naturalization shall be Sudanese by birth if his parents acquired Sudanese nationality by naturalization before his birth.

In addition, Section 5 of the Act provides that “A person shall be Sudanese by birth until the contrary is proved, if found as a deserted minor of unknown parents.”<sup>84</sup>

In terms of a person being granted Sudanese citizenship based on marriage or naturalization, the 1994 Sudanese Nationality Act entitles foreign nationals to apply for Sudanese citizenship through naturalization, provided that they satisfied certain requirements. The Minister of the Interior was accorded discretionary powers to “grant any foreign national Sudanese nationality through naturalization” if the applicant:

- (a) had reached the age of maturity;
- (b) had legal capacity;
- (c) had been resident in Sudan for five years or more;
- (d) had been of good behavior and had not previously been convicted of a criminal offence related to honour and morality; and
- (e) will swear an oath of allegiance before being naturalized.

The Minister of the Interior was also given the power to grant naturalization certificates to the applicant’s dependent minors, if the certificate was granted to the guardian father.

In relation to acquisition based on marriage, the Minister of the Interior was given discretion by Section 8 of the Act to grant naturalization to a foreign woman if (a) she was married to a Sudanese citizen in accordance with Sudanese laws; and (b) if she had resided with her Sudanese husband for at least two years before submitting an application. There is no provision in relation to the husband of a Sudanese woman. The Act also gives the President of the Republic the discretion to grant any foreign person a Sudanese certificate of naturalization, upon the recommendation of the Minister of Interior.<sup>85</sup>

Although the 1994 Nationality Act’s 2005 amendment, which occurred in tandem with the adoption of the Interim National Constitution of 2005, was a

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<sup>84</sup> Mohamed Abdelsalam Babiker, *Report on Citizenship Law: Sudan*, Country Report, RSC/GLOBALCIT-CR 2022/05, European University Institute, (San Domenico di Fiesole, Italy, 2022, 9-10 [https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/74634/RSC\\_GLOBALCIT\\_CR\\_2022\\_05.pdf?sequence=1](https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/74634/RSC_GLOBALCIT_CR_2022_05.pdf?sequence=1) (accessed April 21, 2024).

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

progressive step, as it harmonizes Sudanese nationality law with the provisions of that constitution, the Nationality Act still remains gender discriminatory, in terms of procedure: a man's citizenship is passed to his children automatically, whereas a mother's citizenship can only be passed to her children following an application process.<sup>86</sup> In other words, the amendment only allows the children of Sudanese mothers to obtain their citizenship, if they submit an application. Given the clear constitutional provision that every person born to a Sudanese mother or father shall have the right to Sudanese nationality and citizenship (Article 7(2) of the 2005 Interim National Constitution), there seem to be little or no legal rationale for enacting a law that is not fully gender equitable or to impose an application process for transfer of nationality or citizenship through mothers but not fathers.<sup>87</sup>

Moreover, the law continues to discriminate in acquisition of citizenship based on marriage, despite non-discrimination provisions in the law. Although in 2018, during the short-lived post-revolution transition, some miscellaneous amendments were made with regard to various laws, there were no further discussions to amend the law for gender equality.<sup>88</sup> In spite of the apparent gender biases in Sudanese citizenship and naturalization laws, the relative flexibility of these laws could benefit foreign-born Armenians, and other persons, who are born outside Sudan, who may want to obtain Sudanese citizenship.

## INHERITANCE LAWS

In terms of inheritance laws in Sudan, they are guided largely by Sharia (Islamic law) and the general rule is that men are entitled to twice as much as women. However, there are some rare cases, where women receive as much or more.<sup>89</sup> In cases where the inheritance is a sum of money, the heirs may divide the inheritance in accordance with the designated shares, and it is common practice to have witnesses during the process. However, if the heirs are in dispute, the parties may choose to divide the inheritance through a personal status court. In this process, the court will be entitled to three percent of the total sum as court fees. In cases where the inheritance is land, property, movables, and/or immovables, the division has to be conducted before a court, if the parties wish to divide the inheritance.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>89</sup> Vincent Hoonings, "Estate Planning in Sudan," *Wills.com*, December 10, 2024, <https://learning-center.wills.com/estate-planning-sudan/> (accessed April 21, 2024). Musawah, "Sudan: Overview of Muslim Family Laws and Practices," March 2022, 21, <https://www.musawah.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Sudan-Overview-Table.docx.pdf> (accessed April 21, 2024).

<sup>90</sup> Musawah, 21-22.

In terms of estate planning, wills (*wasiyya*) allow for partial allocation (up to one-third) of assets outside the mandated Sharia shares. Guardianship declarations are important for assigning caretakers for minor children. Power of Attorney documents grant authority to manage finances or make decisions on behalf of an individual. Property title documents are also necessary for the smooth transfer of land and real estate.<sup>91</sup> While Sharia has the potential to make inheritance more difficult for non-Muslims in Sudan, testators, who have a will, which complies with Sudan’s legal requirements, may put themselves in relatively strong position to have their intentions fulfilled after they pass away.<sup>92</sup> Yet, the existence of all laws in Sudan, and their implementation, are in the context of a horrific civil war in that country, which, began on April 15, 2023, and occurred, in part as a result of Sudan’s Rapid Support Forces (RSF), under the leadership of Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo and their allies, separating from Sudan’s government, and going to war against the Sudanese Armed Forces, under the leadership of Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and their allies.

#### SUDAN’S CIVIL WAR

At the time of this writing, that civil war is continuing, and has created enormous uncertainty for everyone, who lives in that country, including the Armenians, who may remain there. While two of the main opposing factions in that civil war consist of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and its allies, on the one side, and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and its allies on the other side, additional factions have also participated in the fighting, aligning with either major combatant or remaining opposed to both; these include the Darfur Joint Protection Force; the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) under Abdul Wahid al-Nur; and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement–North (SPLM-N) under Abdelaziz al-Hilu.<sup>93</sup> As of November 14, 2024, approximately 61,000 people have died in Khartoum State alone, of which approximately 26,000 were a direct result of the violence.<sup>94</sup> As of February 5, 2025, over 8.8 million were internally displaced and more than 3.5 million others had fled

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<sup>91</sup> Hoonings.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> “Why Sudan’s Catastrophic War is the World’s Problem,” *The Economist*, August 29, 2024, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2024/08/29/why-sudans-catastrophic-war-is-the-worlds-problem> (accessed April 17, 2025).

<sup>94</sup> Kalkidan Yibeltal and Basillioh Rukanga, “Sudan Death Toll Far Higher than Previously Reported - Study,” BBC News, November 14, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/crln9lk51dro> (accessed April 18, 2024).

the country as refugees,<sup>95</sup> and many civilians in Darfur have been reported dead as part of continuing massacres in Darfur.<sup>96</sup>

## SUDAN'S 2019 DRAFT CONSTITUTIONAL CHARTER AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Within this context, according to Amnesty International's report entitled *The State of the World's Human Rights, April 2024*, many of the rights and protections in the Draft Constitutional Charter of 2019 have been abrogated or violated.<sup>97</sup> In this vein, in July 2023, the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) said his office had started investigating recent attacks in Darfur. Three people, including former president Omar al-Bashir, all of whom faced ICC charges, were still to be handed over to the ICC for trial. On October 11, 2023, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted a resolution that established an independent international fact-finding mission for Sudan. The mechanism was mandated to investigate and establish the facts, circumstances and root causes of all alleged human rights violations and abuses, and violations of international humanitarian law, including those committed against refugees, and related crimes in the context of the ongoing armed conflict.<sup>98</sup> Many civilians have been caught in the crossfire as members of the Sudanese Armed Forces and Rapid Support Forces, often using explosive weapons with wide area effects, have launched frequent attacks in densely populated civilian neighborhoods.<sup>99</sup> Civilians have been killed and injured in targeted attacks in many parts of the country including Khartoum, but particularly in West Darfur. In this context, on May 13, 2023, members of the Rapid Support Forces broke into the Mar Girgis (Saint Georges) Coptic Church complex in the Bahri area of Khartoum. They shot and injured five members of the clergy and stole money and a gold cross.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Reliefweb, "IOM [International Organization for Migration], Sudan Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), Sudan Mobility Update (15)" February 5, 2025, <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/iom-sudan-displacement-tracking-matrix-dtm-sudan-mobility-update-15-publication-date-5-february-2025> (accessed April 18, 2025).

<sup>96</sup> "Genocide Returns to Darfur: Survivors Tell of Mass Slaughter, Murdered Babies and Kill Lists" *The Economist*, October 5, 2023, <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2023/10/05/genocide-returns-to-darfur> .

<sup>97</sup> Amnesty International, *The State of the World's Human Rights, April 2024* Amnesty International, London, UK, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/east-africa-the-horn-and-great-lakes/sudan/report-sudan/> (accessed April 25, 2024).

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 354.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 353.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*; Mohaned Elnour, "The Forgotten War on Sudan's Christians," May 9, 2024, The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, <https://timep.org/2024/05/09/the-forgotten-war-on-sudans-christians/> .

The civil war has been enormously harmful for many in Sudan, and the situation has continued to deteriorate. Over 5.8 million people have been internally displaced since April 2023, making Sudan the scene of the largest displacement crisis in the world.<sup>101</sup> Over 4.5 million of these were displaced between April 15, 2023 and October 19, 2023. The humanitarian crisis faced by internally displaced people has been exacerbated by acute shortages of food, water, medicines and fuel. The price of essential goods increased dramatically due to disrupted trade routes and limited access, making essential goods unaffordable to many persons in Sudan.<sup>102</sup>

Making matters more complicated, on April 15, 2025, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) announced their own government, which is separate from that of the Sudan Armed Forces.<sup>103</sup> Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, the head of the Rapid Security Forces, announced the signing of a transitional constitution that, in the RSF's words, is a "roadmap for a new Sudan." Among other provisions, that constitution provides for a fifteen-member presidential council, "representing all regions, symbolizing [their] voluntary unity."<sup>104</sup> As of March 21, 2025, the Rapid Support Forces control parts of southwest Sudan, while the Sudanese Armed Forces control much of the rest of the country including Khartoum, which is Sudan's capital.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 354.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 354-55.

<sup>103</sup> "Sudan Paramilitary Declares Rival Government Two Years into Civil War," *Al-Jazeera*, April 15, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/4/15/sudan-paramilitary-declares-rival-government-two-years-into-civil-war> (accessed April 26, 2025); "Sudan's Paramilitary Forces Declare Rival Government Two Years after Civil War Erupts," *France 24*, April 16, 2024, <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20250416-rapid-support-forces-declares-own-government-at-two-year-mark-of-sudan-war> (accessed April 16, 2024).

<sup>104</sup> "Sudan's Paramilitary Forces Declare," *France 24*; "My Address to the Sudanese Nation Two Years after the Outbreak of the April 15 War," *Rapid Security Forces*, April 15, 2025 (accessed April 26, 2025) <https://rapidsupportforce.com/en/news-details/April-15-War>.

<sup>105</sup> Operation Broken Silence, "War in Sudan Shifts in Favor of Army," February 2025, <https://operationbrokensilence.org/blog/war-in-sudan-shifts-in-favor-of-army> (accessed April 26, 2025); Ali Mahmoud Ali, Jalale Getachew Birru, and Nohad Eltayeb, "Two Years of War in Sudan: How the SAF is Gaining the Upper Hand," Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), April 15, 2025 <https://acleddata.com/2025/04/15/two-years-of-war-in-sudan-how-the-saf-is-gaining-the-upper-hand/#:~:text=After%2023%20months%20of%20war,and%20government%20buildings%20surrounding%20it> (accessed April 26, 2025).

## ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

As may be expected, the World Bank's economic outlook for Sudan is largely negative. In the World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook for that country, dated April 10, 2025, it states that prior to the outbreak of Sudan's civil war in April 2023, Sudan faced a severe macroeconomic crisis, driven by a 75 percent revenue loss after South Sudan's separation from Sudan on July 9, 2011.<sup>106</sup> This situation was further exacerbated by limited investment in physical and human capital, stalled structural reforms, and high vulnerability to climate-related shocks. The civil war has worsened existing challenges, resulting in significant human losses, economic damage, and a decline in state capacity.<sup>107</sup> This has led to the collapse of local markets, essential infrastructure, and important public services like health and education. Consequently, the services and industrial sectors in Khartoum have been severely impacted.<sup>108</sup>

Sudan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is estimated to have contracted by 13.5 percent in 2024 following a 29 percent contraction in 2023. Critical shortages of seeds, fertilizers, and fuel, along with disrupted trade routes, have significantly hindered food production and distribution, causing an estimated 7.6 percent contraction in the agriculture sector in 2024. The industrial sector has declined by 13 percent, reflecting damage to infrastructure, factories and disruptions in supply chains.<sup>109</sup> The shrinking tax base and decline in fiscal revenues (to 4.1 percent of GDP in 2024) resulted in reduced government spending, including substantial cuts to salaries and current transfers. The country continues to experience hyperinflation, with prices rising by 188 percent (year-on-year) in December 2024, indicating the severe depreciation of the Sudanese Pound (which devalued by 233 percent in official markets and 355 percent in the parallel market since April 2023), and conflict-related disruptions to food, housing, transport, and trade.<sup>110</sup>

According to the World Bank, Sudan's economic outlook remains highly uncertain and faces major risks. Inflation is expected to remain in double digits due to continued budget deficit monetization in the near term, but is expected to gradually ease as supply capacity improves and monetization is phased out. The current account-deficit is projected to narrow, with stronger exports and

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<sup>106</sup> World Bank, "Macro Poverty Outlook: Sudan," April 10, 2025, 1, <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2fefe5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-sdn.pdf> (accessed April 27, 2025); United Nations Mission in the Sudan (UNMIS), "Independence of South Sudan," n.d., <https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/past/unmis/referendum.shtml> (accessed April 27, 2025).

<sup>107</sup> World Bank, "Macro Poverty Outlook: Sudan," April 10, 2025, 1.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

remittances. Recovery to pre-civil war GDP levels will take years to materialize due to damage to the economy and capital losses, with the pace being dependent on reconstruction and reforms. Delays in conflict resolution and rising tensions, including the Rapid Support Force's declaration of a parallel government, pose significant risks to the outlook.<sup>111</sup>

#### RISKS TO ARMENIANS AND OTHER RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC MINORITIES IN SUDAN

Some of the most significant risks, which Armenians and other Christians living in Sudan face include (1) continuing war and violence in the country; (2) conflicts and significant tensions among tribes, clans, and ethno-linguistic groups; (3) economic disparities in the Sudan including political, economic, and military conflicts over access to Sudan's oil and its revenues; (4) the implementation of Sharia in such a way that can further marginalize and oppress Christians; (5) various Sunni Islamist groups in Sudan which would like Sharia to be strictly enforced in Sudan; and (6) increased political and economic instability in Sudan, which could directly affect Armenians and other Christians, while potentially making them vulnerable to attacks.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Tirana Hassan, "Sudan: Events of 2024," Human Rights Watch, n.d., <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/sudan> (accessed April 26, 2025).

# ETHIOPIA



Analysis now turns to Ethiopia, which is one of Sudan’s neighbors. This segment will consider Ethiopia’s various constitutions, including its most recent constitution, which is the 1995 constitution, and the relationships of Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities in Ethiopia to those constitutions. Among other topics, this segment of the chapter will consider significant aspects of the historical context for the writing of those constitutions.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Refworld, UNHCR: The UN Refugee Agency, “Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia,” August 21, 1995, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/1995/en/18206?prevDestination=search&prevPath=/search?keywords=Constitution+of+the+Federal+Democratic+Republic+of+Ethiopia&sort=score&order=desc&result=result-18206-en> (accessed April 27, 2025); Jon Armajani, “The Constitutions of North Sudan and Ethiopia, and Minority Rights,” *Armenians of Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia/2*, 12-16 <https://haigrepository.haigazian.edu.lb/items/69f069ee-7887-4ab1-8550-b0bbd00f88d6> (accessed May 20, 2025).

## RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC DEMOGRAPHICS IN ETHIOPIA

The religious and ethnic demographics of Ethiopia can provide helpful background for understanding Ethiopia's constitutional history and that country's 1995 constitution. In terms of Ethiopia's religious demographics, 43.8% of the population is Ethiopian Orthodox, 31.3% is Muslim, 22.8% is Protestant, 0.7% is Catholic, 0.6% are adherents of traditional religions, and 0.8% are categorized as "other."<sup>114</sup> In terms of Ethiopia's ethnic demographics, 35.8% is Oromo, 24.1% is Amhara, 7.2%, is Somali, 5.7% is Tigray, 4.1% is Sidama, 2.6% is Gurage, 2.3% is Welaita, 2.2% is Afar, 1.3% is Silte, 1.2% is Kefficho, and 13.5% are categorized as other.<sup>115</sup> There are approximately eight hundred Armenians living in Ethiopia and most of them live in Addis Ababa.<sup>116</sup>

## ARMENIANS IN ETHIOPIA

Armenian-Ethiopian relations are mentioned as early as the testimonies of the Armenian historian Movses Khorenatsi, who lived from 410 to the 490s.<sup>117</sup> In the seventh century, due to the difficult circumstances which some Christians in the Middle East faced as a result of the Muslim conquests, a number of Armenians emigrated from Syria, Palestine, and Egypt to Ethiopia, and settled near the present-day city of Dessie. They built the Istifanos Monastery (also known as Saint Stephan Monastery), which stood until 1527 and established an Armenian settlement, which is known in the Abyssinian chronicle as Hayk and the Armenian island.<sup>118</sup>

The Armenian community in Ethiopia was strengthened by Armenians who moved there from Egypt in the twelfth century, as well as the Armenians who migrated to Ethiopia after the fall of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia in the late fourteenth century.<sup>119</sup>

In the sixteenth century, Armenian clergymen established monasteries and schools in Ethiopia, translated the work of Gregory the Illuminator, who lived from approximately 257 to 331, as well as various speeches, and other works from Armenian to Amharic. In 1539, by the order of King Lebna Dengel, Ethiopia switched to the Armenian calendar. Over time, Armenian traders

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<sup>114</sup> "Ethiopia," *World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ethiopia/> (accessed April 28, 2025).

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> Joshua Project, "Armenian[s] in Ethiopia," [https://joshuaproject.net/people\\_groups/10429/ET](https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/10429/ET) (accessed April 30, 2025); Embassy of Armenia to Egypt, "Armenians in Ethiopia," <https://egypt.mfa.am/en/community-overview-et/> (accessed July 26, 2025).

<sup>117</sup> Government of Armenia, Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, "Ethiopia," <http://diaspora.gov.am/en/pages/38/Ethiopia> (accessed August 4, 2025).

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

imported hardware, lead, silk, cotton, glassware, and dyes to Ethiopia, and exported such commodities as beeswax, ivory, fur, and coffee. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Armenians supplied the Ethiopian army with artillery and other weapons. In the 1930s, there were 2,800 Armenians in Ethiopia, mainly living in Addis Ababa, as well as in the cities of Dire Dawa, Harar, and Zeila. As a result of the difficult economic conditions in Ethiopia, which occurred after that country's 1974 revolution, most local Armenians lost their property and emigrated from the country.<sup>120</sup>

The Ethiopian pastorate of the Armenian Apostolic Church is functioning, and it is included in the Diocese of Egypt, with the Sourp Kevork (Saint George) Church in Addis Ababa functioning as an important center for Armenian life. The Armenian National School "Kevorkoff", where the Armenian language, history, geography, religion, Amharic, English, and French have been taught, is also located in Ethiopia.<sup>121</sup>

### ETHIOPIA'S CONSTITUTION OF 1931

Haile Selassie was the Emperor of Ethiopia from 1930 to 1974, and he played a pivotal role in the creation of the 1931 Constitution.<sup>122</sup> His desire to modernize Ethiopia and consolidate his power led to the promulgation of the constitution.<sup>123</sup> That constitution granted Ethiopia's Emperor much power.<sup>124</sup> For example, according to that constitution, "supreme power rests in the hands of the emperor. He ensures the exercise thereof in conformity with the established law."<sup>125</sup> The constitution of 1931 also states that the "Emperor shall give the necessary orders to ensure the execution of the laws in force, according to the letter and the spirit thereof, for the maintenance of public order and for the development of the prosperity of the nation."<sup>126</sup> Yet, a significant development in the 1931 constitution involved the establishment

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> "Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia," *Britannica*, n.d., <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Haile-Selassie-I> (accessed April 28, 2025).

<sup>123</sup> Shumet Sishagne, "Haile Selassie is Crowned Emperor of Ethiopia," *EBSCO*, 2023, [https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/haile-selassie-crowned-emperor-ethiopia#:~:text=Haile%20Selassie%27s%20rule%20was%20characterized%20by%20efforts,diminished%20the%20influence%20of%20the%20traditional%20nobility.&text=A%20new%20constitution%20providing%20a%20legal%20framework,emperor%27s%20absolute%20power%20was%20proclaimed%20in%201931.\(accessed April 28, 2024\).](https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/haile-selassie-crowned-emperor-ethiopia#:~:text=Haile%20Selassie%27s%20rule%20was%20characterized%20by%20efforts,diminished%20the%20influence%20of%20the%20traditional%20nobility.&text=A%20new%20constitution%20providing%20a%20legal%20framework,emperor%27s%20absolute%20power%20was%20proclaimed%20in%201931.(accessed April 28, 2024).)

<sup>124</sup> Ethiopian Constitution of 1931, Chapters 1-2, Ethiopian Criminal Law Network, <https://www.ethcln.com/system/files/ethiopian-constitution-of-1931.pdf> (accessed April 28, 2025).

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., Chapter 2, Article 6.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., Chapter 2, Article 10.

of the Deliberative Chambers, which was comprised of nobility from various parts of Ethiopia and had some weak parliamentary functions.<sup>127</sup> While the function of the Deliberative Chambers was primarily advisory, that institution was an antecedent to Ethiopia's participatory government that was to be established in future decades.<sup>128</sup> The ministerial and judicial systems, which the 1931 constitution stipulated, were also forerunners for current institutions in Ethiopia's current governmental structure.<sup>129</sup>

In 1935, Italy invaded Ethiopia. After the defeat of the Ethiopian army at the Battle of Maichew in April of 1936, the emperor fled into exile in Britain, where he remained until the end of 1940.<sup>130</sup> The outbreak of World War II provided Haile Selassie with a new opportunity to win British military support and to join his warriors, who had continued the resistance against fascist Italy. Haile Selassie regained his throne on May 5, 1941, and once again resumed his attempts to modernize the country.<sup>131</sup> In 1952, the United Nations created a federation between Ethiopia and Eritrea, which were under their own respective governments.<sup>132</sup> In 1962, Ethiopia annexed Eritrea, which continued to catalyze many Eritreans' desire for independence from Ethiopia that was manifested in the War of Eritrean Independence, which lasted from 1961 until 1991. Eritrea won that war, which enabled it to gain independence from Ethiopia.<sup>133</sup> In any case, three years after the federation of Ethiopia and

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<sup>127</sup> Fasil Nahum, *Constitution for a Nation of Nations: The Ethiopian Prospect*, Red Sea Press, Lawrenceville, New Jersey, USA, 1997, 21.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23; Ethiopian Constitution of 1931, Chapter 2, Articles 7-10, and Chapter 4, Article 31.

<sup>130</sup> Sishagne.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> University of Central Arkansas, Government, Public Service, and International Studies, "Ethiopia/Eritrea (1950-1993)" [https://uca.edu/politicalscience/home/research-projects/dadm-project/sub-saharan-africa-region/ethiopiaeritrea-1950-1993/#:~:text=Pre%2DCrisis%20Phase%20\(December%202,Tedla%20Bairu%20in%20July%201955.](https://uca.edu/politicalscience/home/research-projects/dadm-project/sub-saharan-africa-region/ethiopiaeritrea-1950-1993/#:~:text=Pre%2DCrisis%20Phase%20(December%202,Tedla%20Bairu%20in%20July%201955.) (accessed April 28, 2025).

<sup>133</sup> "Eritrean War of Independence," *New World Encyclopedia*, n.d., [https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Eritrean\\_War\\_of\\_Independence#:~:text=The%20Eritrean%20War%20of%20Independence%20\(September%201%2C,before%20and%20during%20the%20Ethiopian%20Civil%20War.&text=The%20war%20lasted%20for%2030%20years%20until,in%20Eritrea%2C%20took%20control%20of%20the%20country.](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Eritrean_War_of_Independence#:~:text=The%20Eritrean%20War%20of%20Independence%20(September%201%2C,before%20and%20during%20the%20Ethiopian%20Civil%20War.&text=The%20war%20lasted%20for%2030%20years%20until,in%20Eritrea%2C%20took%20control%20of%20the%20country.) (accessed April 28, 2025); Constitutionnet, "Constitutional History of Ethiopia," <http://constitutionnet.org/country/constitutional-history-ethiopia> (accessed April 28, 2025).

Eritrea in 1952, under the direction of Emperor Haile Selassie, a revised constitution, which became Ethiopia's 1955 constitution, was written.<sup>134</sup>

#### ETHIOPIA'S CONSTITUTION OF 1955

There were several reasons that Emperor Selassie and others in Ethiopia's government believed that Ethiopia's 1931 constitution had to be revised. First, there was a recognition of the significant historical and political changes, which had taken place since 1931.<sup>135</sup> Those changes included World War II, Italy's occupation of Ethiopia from 1936 to 1941, the enhancement in speed of the movement of goods, ideas, and people, the establishment of the United Nations in 1945, and Haile Selassie's ratification of the Federal Act in 1952, which federated Eritrea and Ethiopia.<sup>136</sup> This federation necessitated incorporation the Federal Act into Ethiopia's constitutional system.<sup>137</sup> While the 1955 constitution reinvoked many of the emperor's powers, there was a gradual increase in participatory government in Ethiopia in the years after 1955.<sup>138</sup> In that regard, a 1966 imperial order was a significant development. That order stipulated, for the first time in Ethiopia's history, that the prime minister would nominate ministerial candidates to the emperor for his approval. Previously, the emperor appointed ministers on his own. The new procedure gave the prime minister greater influence on the selection of ministers.<sup>139</sup> In the years subsequent to the ratification of the 1955 constitution, Ethiopia's parliament was also becoming more active, using its

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<sup>134</sup> Yihenu Misrak, Yayew Genet, and Ketemaw Muluye, "The Demands and Contests of Constitutional Amendment in Ethiopia: Analysis on the 1995 Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Constitution," *Insight on Africa* 15(1):2023, 92-93, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/09750878221114384>; DOI: 10.1177/09750878221114384 .

<sup>135</sup> Nahum, 25.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.; Richard Pankhurst, "Education in Ethiopia during the Italian Fascist Occupation (1936-1941)," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 5(3):1972, 361-96, <https://doi.org/10.2307/217091> (accessed April 29, 2025) and <https://www.jstor.org/stable/21709>; and United Nations, "Federal Act Federating Eritrea with Ethiopia Ratified," September 11, 1952, <https://media.un.org/photo/en/asset/oun7/oun7736726> (accessed April 29, 2025).

<sup>137</sup> Nahum, 25.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 27-28. For one example of the reinvocation of the emperor's power see, the 1955 Ethiopian Constitution, Chapter 1, Article 4, <https://www.abysinnialaw.com/decisions/federal-supreme-court-cassation-decisions/the-1955-ethiopian-constitution-english-version> (accessed April 29, 2025).

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 27-28.

questioning power of the executive to point to issues related to Ethiopia's budget and other matters.<sup>140</sup>

While Ethiopia's 1931 Constitution confers certain rights to Ethiopians such as the right to be free from unreasonable domiciliary searches and the right to keep their property,<sup>141</sup> Ethiopia's 1955 constitution provides a broader range of rights.<sup>142</sup> Chapter 3 of Ethiopia's 1955 constitution is entitled "Rights and Duties of the People," and it stipulates several types of rights and freedoms, albeit with some constraints, including equal protection under Ethiopia's laws, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, prohibitions against censorship, right to due process of law, and right to engage in a wide range of occupations, among others.<sup>143</sup> The provisions related to human rights in Ethiopia's 1955 constitution may reflect influences from the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, which was ratified in 1948, as well as stipulations related to human rights in constitutions and laws of other countries.<sup>144</sup>

#### THE DERG AND ETHIOPIA'S CONSTITUTION OF 1987

Emperor Haile Selassie ruled Ethiopia until 1974 when civil unrest emerged. The Derg, a Marxist-Leninist and socialist political organization that was established in 1974 and was led by Lieutenant Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, staged a Marxist coup, which overthrew Emperor Selassie and installed a socialist military government. Mengistu, financed by the Soviet Union, implemented an authoritarian government and a large-scale militarization of the country.<sup>145</sup> From 1977 to 1979, the Derg tortured or killed thousands of suspected enemies. Having effectively silenced all opposition, the Derg officially adopted a constitution which took effect on February 22, 1987.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>141</sup> Ethiopian Constitution of 1931, Chapter 3, Articles 23-28.

<sup>142</sup> The 1955 Ethiopian Constitution Chapter 3, Articles 37-65.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> United Nations, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights: History of the Declaration," <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/udhr/history-of-the-declaration#:~:text=The%20Universal%20Declaration%20of%20Human,of%20the%20Second%20World%20War.> (accessed April 29, 2025); Adem Kassie Abebe, "Human Rights under the Ethiopian Constitution: A Descriptive Overview," *Mizan Law Review*, 5(1):2011, 41-71.

<sup>145</sup> John H. Spencer, *Ethiopia at Bay: A Personal Account of the Haile Selassie Years*, Tsehai Publishers, Hollywood, California, 2006, 350.

<sup>146</sup> Constitutionnet, "Constitutional History of Ethiopia," <http://constitutionnet.org/country/constitutional-history-ethiopia> (accessed April 30, 2025); Gashaw Ayferam, "Constitution, Constitutionalism and Foundation of Democracy in Ethiopia," *International Journal of Research*, 2(1):2015, 594, [https://www.academia.edu/28814028/Constitution\\_constitutionalism\\_and\\_foundat](https://www.academia.edu/28814028/Constitution_constitutionalism_and_foundat)

One of several ways that the Derg's Marxist-Leninist socialist ideology manifests itself in the 1987 constitution is in its stipulations about Ethiopia's economic system. For example, that constitution states that "in the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, the forms of ownership of the means of production are socialist; that is, state and cooperative ownership, private ownership and other forms of ownership as are determined by law."<sup>147</sup> It also stipulates that "state ownership is public ownership"<sup>148</sup> and that "the state shall provide the necessary support and encouragement for the expansion of the role of cooperative ownership."<sup>149</sup> That constitution also stipulates many rights and freedoms, including the right to work, free education, health care, freedom of conscience and religion, freedom of speech, press, assembly, peaceful demonstration and association.<sup>150</sup> All of these rights and freedoms, if they had been protected, would have benefited many persons in Ethiopia, including Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities in Ethiopia.

Returning to the Derg, due to its oppressive measures, rebel groups led by the Tigrayan Peoples' Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) merged to overthrow Mengistu and the Derg in 1991. A series of famines and insurrections in the Tigray region and Eritrea also contributed to the Derg's loss of power. Eritrea declared its independence from Ethiopia one week after the Derg's defeat.<sup>151</sup> The EPRDF and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) formed the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) in 1991.

## ETHIOPIA'S CONSTITUTION OF 1995

Following the 1992 elections, the TGE created a Constitutional Commission to draft a new constitution. The 1995 constitution was adopted by Ethiopia's constituent assembly on December 8, 1994, and promulgated by the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Proclamation

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ion\_of\_democracy\_in\_Ethiopia (accessed April 30, 2025);  
[https://scholar.googleusercontent.com/scholar?q=cache:HNERHvWOxpsJ:scholar.google.com/+history+of+ethiopia%27s+constitutions&hl=en&as\\_sdt=0,24](https://scholar.googleusercontent.com/scholar?q=cache:HNERHvWOxpsJ:scholar.google.com/+history+of+ethiopia%27s+constitutions&hl=en&as_sdt=0,24)  
(accessed April 30, 2025).

<sup>147</sup> "The Constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia" [1987], which is Ethiopia's 1987 constitution, Article 12, in *Review of Socialist Law* 14(2):1988, 181-208, <https://andyreiter.com/wp-content/uploads/military-justice/et/Constitutions/Ethiopia%20-%201988%20-%20Constitution.pdf>.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 13.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 14.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, Articles 35-57.

<sup>151</sup> Constitutionnet, "Constitutional History of Ethiopia,"

<http://constitutionnet.org/country/constitutional-history-ethiopia> (accessed April 30, 2025).

No. 1/1995, which entered into force on August 21, 1995.<sup>152</sup> At the time of this writing, that constitution is in effect in Ethiopia, and has not been legally amended.<sup>153</sup> That constitution stipulates a two-tiered federal structure, which, at least in principle, emphasizes the rights of ethnic groups in Ethiopia and their right to self-determination.<sup>154</sup>

This section of the chapter will focus on aspects of the 1995 constitution, which are particularly relevant to Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities in Ethiopia. One historical pattern in Ethiopia's constitutions of 1931, 1955, 1987, and 1995 is that on paper there seems to be a consistent expansion in the powers of elected entities outside the executive branch such as the Parliament; within this context, the 1995 constitution seems to provide for stronger democratic institutions than the 1931 constitution, for example.<sup>155</sup> In this vein, the 1995 constitution's preamble expresses a commitment to the "full respect of individual and people's fundamental freedoms and rights, to live together on the basis of equality and without any sexual, religious or cultural discrimination" and to maintaining "mutually supportive conditions for ensuring respect for [Ethiopians'] rights and freedoms and for the collective promotion of Ethiopians' interests" with a determination "to consolidate, as a lasting legacy, the peace and the prospect of a democratic order [in Ethiopia]."<sup>156</sup> Ethiopia's 1995 constitution asserts that "state and

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid.; *Federal Negarit Gazeta of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*, First Year, Number 1, August 21, 1995, <https://ethiopianembassy.be/wp-content/uploads/Constitution-of-the-FDRE.pdf> (accessed 27, 2025).

<sup>153</sup> Misrak, Genet, Muluye, "The Demands and Contests," 95, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/09750878221114384> and DOI: 10.1177/09750878221114384. With respect to there having been no legal amendments to the 1995 Constitution, in the above-mentioned journal article, Misrak, Genet, and Muluye state, "Although constitutional amendment is the primary agenda for political players, the 1995 FDRE constitution has not been 'legally' amended yet. The former ruling party -- Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) rarely deal with ideas to amend, replace or remak[e] the existing constitution. 'The idea of constitutional amendment has been a sort of 'political taboo...'" (95).

<sup>154</sup> Constitutionnet, "Constitutional History of Ethiopia,"

<http://constitutionnet.org/country/constitutional-history-ethiopia> (accessed April 30, 2025).

<sup>155</sup> David H. Shinn and Thomas P. Ofcansky, *Historical Dictionary of Ethiopia*, New Edition, Scarecrow Press, Lanham, Maryland, 2004, 93-96.

<sup>156</sup> Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Preamble, in Refworld: Global Law and Policy Database / UNHCR: The United Nations Refugee Agency, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/1995/en/18206?prevDestination=search&prevPath=/search?keywords=Constitution+of+the+Federal+Democratic+Republic+of+Ethiopia&sort=score&order=desc&result=result-18206-en> (accessed April 27, 2025).

religion are separate; there shall be no state religion, and that the state shall not interfere in religious matters and religion shall not interfere in state affairs.”<sup>157</sup>

The constitution also stipulates rights to life, the security of persons and liberty, rights to liberty, equality, privacy, thought, opinion, expression, honor, reputation, assembly, demonstration and petition. The 1995 constitution also grants freedom of religion, belief, opinion, association, and movement.<sup>158</sup> While all of these rights and freedoms would be important to all Ethiopians, the freedom of religion may be a freedom, which would be particularly important to Armenians in Ethiopia, given the fact that the vast majority of them are Christians. In this regard, Ethiopia’s constitution states, “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include the freedom to hold or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and the freedom, either individually or in community with others, and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.”<sup>159</sup> The 1995 constitution also states, “believers may establish institutions of religious education and administration in order to propagate and organize their religion” and “no one shall be subject to coercion or other means which would restrict or prevent his freedom to hold a belief of his choice.”<sup>160</sup> Another strength of Ethiopia’s constitution for Armenians is that it makes no reference to Islam as Ethiopia’s state religion or to Sharia as a source for that country’s laws.

Ethiopia’s 1995 constitution also emphasizes cultural rights, which, if enforced, can benefit everyone in Ethiopia, including Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities in that country. With respect to cultural rights, that constitution states, “Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has the right to speak, to write and to develop its own language; to express, to

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<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 11: Separation of State and Religion, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/1995/en/18206?prevDestination=search&prevPath=/search?keywords=Constitution+of+the+Federal+Democratic+Republic+of+Ethiopia&sort=score&order=desc&result=result-18206-en> (accessed April 27, 2025). (accessed December 1, 2017).

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 14: Rights to Life, the Security of Person and Liberty; Article 15: Right to Life; Article 16: The Right of the Security of Person; Article 17: Right to Liberty; Article 25. Right to Equality; Article 26: Right to Privacy; Article 25: Right to Equality; Article 26. Right to Privacy; Article 29. Right of Thought, Opinion and Expression; Article 30. The Right of Assembly, Demonstration and Petition; Article 27. Freedom of Religion, Belief and Opinion; Article 31. Freedom of Association; Article 32. Freedom of Movement <http://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?page=printdoc&docid=3ae6b5a84> (accessed December 1, 2017).

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 27, Section 1: Freedom of Religion, Belief and Opinion.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

develop and to promote its culture; and to preserve its history.”<sup>161</sup> In addition, “The State has the responsibility to protect and preserve historical and cultural legacies ....”<sup>162</sup> According to Ethiopia’s 1995 constitution, that country’s federal government “shall establish and implement national standards and basic policy criteria ... for the protection and preservation of cultural and historical legacies.”<sup>163</sup> In support of those principles, Ethiopia’s 1995 constitution states, the “Government shall have the duty to support, on the basis of equality, the growth and enrichment of cultures and traditions that are compatible with fundamental rights, human dignity, democratic norms and ideals, and the provisions of the Constitution.”<sup>164</sup>

## CITIZENSHIP AND NATURALIZATION IN ETHIOPIA

Regarding citizenship and naturalization in Ethiopia, that country’s 1995 constitution states, “any person of either sex shall be an Ethiopian national where both or either parent is Ethiopian; foreign nationals may acquire Ethiopian nationality; and particulars relating to nationality shall be determined by law.”<sup>165</sup> According to Ethiopia’s law, “any person born in Ethiopia or abroad, whose father or mother is Ethiopian, is an Ethiopian subject.”<sup>166</sup> In terms of marriage and citizenship, “a lawful marriage of an Ethiopian subject with a foreign woman confers the Ethiopian nationality upon her.”<sup>167</sup> In a related matter, “A lawful marriage contracted abroad of an Ethiopian woman with a foreigner deprives her of the Ethiopian nationality, if her marriage with the foreigner gives her the nationality of her husband; otherwise she keeps her Ethiopian nationality.”<sup>168</sup>

The following legal stipulations apply to the nationality of children of a marriage between Ethiopian and foreign subjects. In that regard, “Every child born in a lawful mixed marriage . . . follows the nationality of its father.”<sup>169</sup> At the same time, “A child born of an Ethiopian father and a foreign mother united by the bonds of a lawful marriage should, however, prove before the Ethiopian Authorities that he does not belong to the original nationality of his mother, if requested to do so.”<sup>170</sup> Concomitantly, “A child born in lawful

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., Article 39: Rights of Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples, Section 2.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., Article 41: Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Section 9.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., Article 51: Powers and Functions of the Federal Government, Section 3.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., Article 91: Cultural Objectives, Section 1.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., Article 6: Nationality, Sections 1-3; Alebel Ashagrie and Associates Law Office, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, “Citizenship Law in Ethiopia,”

<https://www.alebelandassociates.com/citizenship-law-in-ethiopia/> (accessed May 1, 2025).

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

marriage of an Ethiopian mother with a foreigner is always able to recover the benefit to Ethiopian nationality, provided he lives in Ethiopia and proves he is completely divested of the paternal nationality.”<sup>171</sup>

Regarding the nationality of children legitimated by lawful marriage between Ethiopian and foreign subjects, “If the lawful marriage according to the national law of the foreign father is posterior to the birth of the child issued from his relations with an Ethiopian woman, the child legitimated through this subsequent marriage follows the nationality of his foreign father only on condition that the national law of the latter confers upon him the foreign nationality with all inhering rights. Otherwise the child preserves his Ethiopian nationality.”<sup>172</sup> In a related matter, “The legitimation, without subsequent lawful marriage between the foreign father and the Ethiopian mother, of the child issued from the relation outside marriage deprives the child of his Ethiopian nationality only if the legitimation, made in accordance with the forms of law of the foreign father, confers upon the child thus legitimated the nationality of his father with all inhering right[s].”<sup>173</sup> Ethiopian law does not permit dual citizenship.<sup>174</sup> Foreigners may acquire Ethiopian nationality by request, subject to fulfilling certain requirements, including age, residency, and character criteria.<sup>175</sup> The individual must show release from his previous nationality or the possibility of obtaining such a release upon acquisition of Ethiopian nationality.<sup>176</sup> While the Ethiopian laws of naturalization have some flexibility, those laws’ prohibitions against dual nationality could pose hardships for some Armenians in the country, who may want Ethiopian citizenship, and the citizenship of another country.

#### ETHIOPIA’S CONSTITUTION, LAWS, AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN A CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

Unfortunately, certain realities on the ground in Ethiopia contradict some of the stipulations within that country’s constitution and laws. According to Amnesty International’s report entitled *The State of the World’s Human Rights, April 2025*, Ethiopian authorities suppressed the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, including by intimidating human rights

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Benyam Tafesse Dubero, “Dual Citizenship Report: Ethiopia,” Mehrteab Getu and Advocates, LLP, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, <https://www.dualcitizenshipreport.org/dual-citizenship/ethiopia/> (accessed May 1, 2025).

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

defenders and others, while blocking internet access in the Amhara region.<sup>177</sup> Activists, human rights defenders, journalists, and artists were arbitrarily arrested and detained and some people fled the country during the imposition of state of emergency laws that were used to target peaceful dissenters.<sup>178</sup> Human rights defenders, who travelled abroad to engage with international human rights bodies, said they were harassed and intimidated by the authorities upon their return. Some also reported that Ethiopian government officials, including diplomats, intimidated and harassed them in the countries to which they had travelled.<sup>179</sup>

Ethiopian governmental authorities arrested hundreds of people nationwide under the state of emergency, which had granted the government broad powers of arrest. They violated constitutional provisions, including the requirement to publicize, via the State of Emergency Inquiry Board, which is an oversight committee, the names of anyone arrested and the reasons for their arrest, within one month. People have been arrested without warrants, and detainees have been denied their rights, including legal counsel and access to courts.<sup>180</sup> Some reasons for Ethiopian Prime Minister's Abiy Ahmad's government's oppressive actions include his concerns that (1) dissenters of his government may create a situation that could lead to his overthrow and (2) Amharan militias, such as Fano, and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) may claim too much control over certain regions in Ethiopia.<sup>181</sup> While

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<sup>177</sup> Amnesty International, *The State of the World's Human Rights*, April 2025, "Ethiopia," 166, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/east-africa-the-horn-and-great-lakes/ethiopia/report-ethiopia/> (accessed May 1, 2025).

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Amnesty International, "Ethiopia: Authorities Must Stop Using State of Emergency Law to Silence Peaceful Dissent," February 19, 2024 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/02/ethiopia-authorities-must-stop-using-state-of-emergency-law-to-silence-peaceful-dissent/> (accessed May 1, 2024); Simon Vera, *The New Humanitarian*, "Who is Fano? Inside Ethiopia's Amhara Rebellion," November 12, 2024, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2024/11/12/who-fano-inside-ethiopia-amhara-rebellion> (accessed May 1, 2024); Center for Preventive Action and Council on Foreign Relations, "Conflict in Ethiopia," March 20, 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-ethiopia#:~:text=Tensions%20in%20Ethiopia's%20Tigray%20region,regional%20stability%20and%20humanitarian%20conditions.> (accessed May 3, 2025); International Crisis Group, "Ethiopia and Eritrea Slide Closer to War amid Tigray Upheaval," March 27, 2025, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopiaeritrea/ethiopia-and-eritrea-slide-closer-war-amid-tigray-upheaval> (accessed May 3, 2025); Abel Abate Demissie, "Tensions in Tigray could Spark War between Ethiopia and Eritrea - Disaster Must be Avoided," Chatham House, April 16, 2025, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/03/tensions-tigray-could->

the Ethiopian government's oppressive policies and actions could pose a danger to Armenians in that country, they may experience some level of protection if they refrain from criticizing the government and engaging in actions against it.

## ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

Ethiopia's economic conditions and outlook are important to virtually everyone in that country, including Armenians.<sup>182</sup> In this context, Ethiopia is the second most populous nation in Africa after Nigeria, and one of the fastest-growing economies in the region, with an estimated 8.1% growth in fiscal year 2023-24. However, Ethiopia also remains one of the poorest countries in the region, with a per capita gross national income of \$1,020. According to the World Bank's report, which was published in April 2025, Ethiopia's state-led development model improved infrastructure and living standards, which helped reduce the national poverty rate from 39% in 2004 to approximately 24% in 2016. However, the state-led development model relied on an overvalued currency, unsustainable debt, and strict regulations that limited private investment. This approach hurt competitiveness, fueled inflation, and drained resources. It did not boost productivity enough to transform the economy, with poverty increasing between 2016 and 2021 from 27 percent to 32 percent. Global trade integration remains limited, and growing budget constraints sharply reduced social and capital spending. Multiple crises, including COVID-19, the conflict in Ukraine, and droughts worsened economic imbalances, leading to a debt default in late 2023. Living standards deteriorated further amid double-digit inflation. At the same time, approximately fifteen million people in Ethiopia are reliant on food aid.<sup>183</sup>

According to the World Bank, Ethiopia seeks to chart a development path that is sustainable and inclusive, in order to accelerate poverty reduction and boost shared prosperity. Significant progress in job creation, as well as improved governance, will be needed to ensure that growth is equitable across society. Achieving these objectives will require addressing key challenges including the following

1. Sustaining macroeconomic and structural reforms to reduce the state's dominance of the economy, increasing trade integration, and expanding opportunities for private sector growth and job creation;

2. Addressing food insecurity, which is growing due to adverse weather events, heavy reliance on rainfed agriculture, locust invasion, conflict, and

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spark-war-between-ethiopia-and-eritrea-disaster-must-be-avoided (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>182</sup> World Bank Group, "The World Bank in Ethiopia: Overview and Context" April 24, 2025, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ethiopia/overview#1> (accessed May 4, 2025).

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

global conditions leading to high inflation of food prices. Frequent severe weather events alongside long-term impacts of climate change undermine agriculture and pastoral livelihoods as well as food security. The 2022 drought, the worst in forty years, severely affected millions in the southern and eastern parts of the country. Overall, more than 20 million people faced severe food insecurity in 2023; and

3. Generating good jobs. The country's growing workforce (with roughly 2 million people reaching working age per year) puts pressure on the absorption capacity of the labor market, and necessitates improving current jobs, while creating sufficient new jobs.

The World Bank's April 2025 analysis points to opportunities for growth and increasing prosperity from climate-informed development policies. These are especially visible in agriculture where, with the support of reforms, Ethiopia can potentially shift from being a net importer of agricultural commodities to generating sizable surpluses of as much as 20 percent (relative to domestic demand), with climate change, especially under potentially warmer and wetter conditions, increasing these surpluses to 25 percent.<sup>184</sup> While Armenians in Ethiopia have been able to thrive, even under the country's difficult economic conditions, a strengthening of the country's overall economy could benefit everyone there, including Armenians.<sup>185</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Some of the threats which Armenians and other Christians in Ethiopia face include (1) violence in the country; (2) conflicts between tribes, clans, and ethno-linguistic groups; (3) economic disparities in Ethiopia including political, economic, and military tensions over ownership of and access to land; and (4) increased political and economic instability. This instability and related conflicts can disproportionately effect, in negative ways, Armenians and other ethnic minorities in Ethiopia. The relatively small number of Armenians in both Sudan and Ethiopia make them particularly vulnerable to the significant problems, which those countries face. The situation for Armenians in Sudan is potentially made more difficult by the fact that Christians constitute less than three percent of that country's population, and strict forms of Islamism can intensify hostility toward Christians and other non-Muslims.<sup>186</sup> While Christians in Ethiopia constitute sixty-two percent of Ethiopia's population, Armenians in that country constitute a small ethnic

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Republic of Armenia, Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, "Diaspora: Ethiopia," <http://diaspora.gov.am/en/pages/38/ethiopia> (accessed May 2, 2025).

<sup>186</sup> James Copnall, "Are Christians in Sudan Facing Persecution?" *BBC News*, June 22, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-33196289> (accessed May 3, 2025).

minority vis-à-vis such ethnic groups as the Oromos, Amharas, Somalis, Tigrays, and Sidamas, for example.<sup>187</sup> One hope is that while Armenians in Sudan and Ethiopia will maintain strong bonds of unity with each other, that the Republic of Armenia and Armenians in the diaspora will provide support for the Armenians in Sudan and Ethiopia also.

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<sup>187</sup> “Ethiopia,” *World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ethiopia/> (accessed May 3, 2025).



## Chapter 8

# GREECE



Armenians have had a long-standing historic presence in Greece, have been accepted in Greek society, while thriving in and contributing to that society. With those realities in mind, first, this chapter will provide the religious and ethnic demographics of Greece. Second, it will provide a brief constitutional and political history of modern Greece. Third, it will analyze the Greek Constitution of 1975, which was revised in 1986, 2001, 2008, and 2019 that is often called the 2019 constitution. Fourth, the chapter will focus on the stipulations in that version of the constitution which apply to Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities in Greece. Fifth, the chapter will present laws and procedures related to naturalization, citizenship, and minority rights in Greece. Sixth, the chapter will discuss family and inheritance law in Greece, and its relevance to Armenians. Seventh, the chapter will discuss Greece's economic situation and its implications for Armenians. Eighth, the chapter will provide an analysis of relations between Greece and Turkey, and the implications of those relations for Armenians in Greece. Ninth, the chapter will conclude with an examination of the prospects of Armenians in Greece.

### RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC DEMOGRAPHICS

In terms of Greece's religious demographics, Greek Orthodox Christians comprise 81% to 90% of the population, Muslims comprise 2%, other

comprise 3%, persons with no religious affiliation comprise 4% to 15%, and unspecified comprise 1%.<sup>1</sup> Regarding ethnicities in Greece, ethnic Greeks comprise 91.6% of the population, Albanians comprise 4.4%, and other comprise 4%.

## OVERVIEW OF ARMENIANS IN GREECE

There are approximately thirty-thousand Armenians in Greece.<sup>2</sup> Armenians are primarily based in Athens, Thessaloniki, Alexandroupolis, Komotini, Kavala, Xanthi, Orestiada, and Didimotikho as well as on the islands of Crete and Kos. The Armenian-Greek community is represented by the rich diversity of Armenians involved in spiritual, cultural, social, and political life. Approximately forty Armenian organizations operate in Greece, including daily schools and Sunday schools, as well as various types of media, and cultural centers. The leading structures of the community are the National Prelacy and the National Board, where the National Prelacy represents the Armenian community before the state. A significant number of Armenians in Greece are artists, entrepreneurs, and doctors.<sup>3</sup> In 1996, the Parliament of the Hellenic Republic (Greece) adopted a resolution recognizing the Armenian Genocide and in 2014, the parliament passed a law that criminalized the denial of genocides, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, making it criminal to deny the genocide of Armenians, Greeks, and Pontians.<sup>4</sup> There are eleven Armenian Apostolic churches, one Armenian Catholic church, and one Evangelical Church in Greece. The Armenian Dioceses of Etchmiadzin and Cilicia are active in the country, with the dioceses of those churches located in Athens.<sup>5</sup>

## HISTORY OF ARMENIANS IN GREECE

The first Armenians settled in Byzantium after the collapse of the Armenian Kingdom of Arshagouni in 428 CE and the subsequent wars between Greece and Persia.<sup>6</sup> Another wave of Armenians followed the same route after the historic battle of Avarayr in 451 CE, which was a significant event in Armenians' efforts to preserve their Christian faith and institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> "Greece," *World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/greece/> (accessed April 8, 2025).

<sup>2</sup> Government of Republic of Armenia, Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, [Armenians in] Greece, <http://diaspora.gov.am/en/pages/64/greece> (accessed April 8, 2025).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> David Zenian, "Greece: Always a Safe Haven for Armenians." *Armenian General Benevolent Union [AGBU] News*, November 1999, <https://agbu.org/statehood-challenged/greece-always-safe-haven-armenians> (April 8, 2025).

During the centuries after that, many generations of Armenians have found refuge in Greece. Historical records about the early Armenians in Greece are scant. However, there are some towns and villages in Greece that have Armenian names. These include the Armenos region, along with the villages of Armenion, Armensti, and Armenico.<sup>7</sup> In the early ninth century CE, a number of Armenian warriors like Pedranos Mamigonian and his brother Vart led their forces in successful battles against the Muslims' expansion. They were both loyal to the Byzantine rulers of the time, and enjoyed exceptional powers in the northern regions of the Byzantine Empire.<sup>8</sup>

There was an Armenian cultural revival in the mid-fifteenth century. During that time, some Armenians and Greeks were living within the Ottoman Empire. In that context, some Armenians and Greeks supported each other as they lived as Christians under Ottoman rule. A new wave of Armenians began arriving in northeastern Greece in the early sixteenth century, during the rule of the Ottoman Sultan Selim, who sent over two hundred Armenian families to Adrianopolis to build a mosque. At the end of the construction project, however, the Armenian families remained in Greece, establishing permanent residence there. A historical document, which is dated 1737, indicates an Armenian presence in approximately thirty locations across Greece, including towns like Xánthi, Thessaloniki, Kavala, and many others which still have small Armenian populations today.<sup>9</sup>

In the years that followed the end of Ottoman rule and Greek independence in 1832, Armenians settled in Greece, initially by the hundreds, and then by the thousands. Among the early arrivals in 1872 were a group of more than one hundred Armenian builders from the town of Mush who were recruited by Germany to build the Istanbul-Thessaloniki railway when the area was under Ottoman rule. Upon the completion of the project in 1874, the Armenian builders and construction workers remained in Thessaloniki, laying the foundations of a community which exists until contemporary times. Similar types of Armenian involvement were also evident in the First Balkan War which lasted from October 1912 to May 1913 that took place between Greece and its allies, on the one hand, and Turkey, on the other. In that war, hundreds of Armenians enlisted on the Greek side. That war ended with Greece taking full control of its northern regions.<sup>10</sup>

During the Armenian Genocide, there were instances of solidarity and assistance extended by Greeks to Armenians. Many Greeks empathized with the plight of the Armenians, as they themselves faced similar threats from the Ottoman regime. Some Greek communities provided refuge and support to

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Armenian survivors, highlighting a shared sense of suffering and resilience.<sup>11</sup> The shared experiences of suffering forged strong historical and emotional ties between the Greek and Armenian communities.<sup>12</sup>

After World War I, the Armenian Genocide, and the Smyrna Catastrophe, many Armenians continued to live in Greece.<sup>13</sup> By 1924, 64,000 Armenians remained in Greece; many of those Armenians lived, under difficult conditions, in refugee camps in various parts of that country.<sup>14</sup> As Axis Powers, Bulgaria's, Italy's, and Germany's occupation of Greece from 1941 until 1944 intensified the hardships, which the Armenians in Greece experienced.<sup>15</sup> During this period, many Armenians, who lived in Greece wanted to emigrate to Armenia, which was part of the Soviet Union at the time. On August 2, 1947, the first convoys, which carried Armenians from Greece, who were headed to Soviet Armenia, departed from Thessaloniki. In this post-World War II period, the Armenian community in Greece, which numbered more than 31,000 at the start of the World War II, shrank to a little more than 10,000.<sup>16</sup> For the Armenians, who remained in Greece, the immediate post-war years were characterized by poverty and instability. However, the strong communal structures that Armenians had established earlier, which included churches, schools, newspapers, and cultural associations, played a crucial role in preserving Armenian identity.<sup>17</sup> The orphanage network for Armenian orphans in Greece also played a crucial role.<sup>18</sup> During this period, important centers for Armenians were Athens, Thessaloniki, Piraeus, and Kavala. Refugee aid from international Armenian organizations, such as the Armenia General Benevolent Union, and diaspora networks helped sustain the Armenian community through these difficult times. During this post-war period, which lasted until the end of the 1950s, Armenians engaged in crafts, small trade, and services, while contributing to the reconstruction of Greece. However, the era was also marked by

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<sup>11</sup> Ioannis K. Hassiotis, "The Armenian Genocide and the Greeks: Response and Records (1915-23)," *The Armenian Genocide: History, Politics, Ethics*, Richard G. Hovannisian ed., MacMillan, New York, 1992, 129-51.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Joceline Chabot and Sylvia Kasparian, "'On the High Seas with no Place to Land: the Smyrnaean Inferno and Humanitarian Aid to Armenian and Greek Refugees from Turkey (1922-1923)," *International Journal of Armenian Genocide Studies* 6(1):2021, 81-91 <https://agmipublications.am/index.php/ijags/article/view/4> (accessed July 26, 2025).

<sup>14</sup> Zenian, "Greece: Always a Safe Haven for Armenians."

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Near East Foundation, "Syra: The Island Orphanage," October 9, 2015, <https://neareastmuseum.com/2015/10/09/syra-the-island-orphanage/> (accessed July 26, 2025).

emigration; many Armenians left Greece for opportunities in North America, Australia, and Western Europe, for example.

The 1960s and 1970s were relatively stable for Armenians in Greece. The community began to consolidate its institutions, emphasizing cultural and educational preservation. Armenian Apostolic Churches in Greece were important to community life. Armenian churches were religious centers and cultural hubs.<sup>19</sup> Armenian schools in Athens and Thessaloniki continued to operate, teaching Armenian language, history, and culture.<sup>20</sup> Politically, Armenians in Greece were generally integrated and loyal to their host country. Many Armenians participated in Greek social and political life, while they maintained strong transnational ties to the Armenian diaspora and the Soviet Armenian Republic.<sup>21</sup>

Greece's military junta (1967-1974) imposed restrictions on political activity across the country. Yet, cultural activities within ethnic communities continued. Armenians, focusing on cultural preservation rather than politics, avoided persecution during this period.<sup>22</sup> With Greece's return to democracy in 1974 and its accession to the European Economic Community in 1981, the Armenian community in Greece continued to engage in cultural and political expression.<sup>23</sup> The economic boom of the 1980s and Greece's membership in

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<sup>19</sup> Prelacy of The Armenian Apostolic Church of Greece, The Armenian Orthodox Community of Greece, <https://armenianprelacy.gr/en/the-armenian-orthodox-community-of-greece/#:~:text=The%20vast%20majority%20of%20Armenians,Parishes%20are%20Religious%20Legal%20Entities> (accessed April 9, 2025).

<sup>20</sup> Sophie and Levon Hakobyan School, Athens, January 11, 2021. <https://hayernaysor.am/en/posts/387/2021-01-11/#:~:text=Sophie%20and%20Levon%20Hakobyan%20School%2C%20Athens> (accessed April 9, 2025).

<sup>21</sup> Leonidas Dilsijian, "Armenians Strike a Balance between their Ethnic Identity and Assimilation in Greece," *Ekathimerini*, April 24, 2007 <https://www.ekathimerini.com/news/48677/armenians-strike-a-balance-between-their-ethnic-identity-and-assimilation-in-greece/> (accessed April 9, 2025).

<sup>22</sup> David Zenian, "The Armenians of Greece: Remembering the Past and Preparing for the Future," *Armenian General Benevolent Union [AGBU] News*, November 1999, <https://agbu.org/statehood-challenged/armenians-greece-remembering-past-preparing-future> (accessed April 9, 2025).

<sup>23</sup> Tasos Kokkinidis, "The Day Democracy Was Restored in Greece After the Junta," July 24, 2024, <https://greekreporter.com/2024/07/24/democracy-restored-greece/> (accessed April 9, 2025); European Union, "History of the European Union, 1980 to 1989," [https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/1980-89\\_en#:~:text=1%20January%201981%20%E2%80%93%20Greece%20becomes,and%20democracy%20restored%20in%201974](https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/1980-89_en#:~:text=1%20January%201981%20%E2%80%93%20Greece%20becomes,and%20democracy%20restored%20in%201974) (accessed April 9, 2025); Thora Giallouri, "Armenian Life on Hellenic Soil," Armenian Youth Federation of the

the European Union enabled Greek-Armenian businesses, along with the rest of the population, to flourish. The vast majority of those Armenians owned successful businesses, while many were in administrative positions and artistic professions.<sup>24</sup> Prosperity offered the Armenian community in Greece opportunities to help Armenians, who lived in other places. For example, Armenians in Greece allocated funds to Armenians in Soviet Armenia. On numerous occasions, after Armenia gained independence in 1991, the Greek-Armenian community mobilized to assist persons in that country, contributing greatly to relief efforts after the Armenian earthquake in 1988, for instance.<sup>25</sup>

After the outbreak of the First War in Artsakh (the First Nagorno-Karabakh War), which took place from 1988 to 1994, Greek Armenians engaged in a systematic effort to assist Armenians in that region. Greece was one of the first countries to offer asylum to Armenian refugees fleeing Azeri aggression. The Greek Armenian community mobilized itself along with Greece to address the difficulties that Armenia faced during its first years of independence, mobilizing aid to combat famine, the lack of fuel resources, and the difficulties caused by the Turkish-Azeri blockade. Two kindergarten schools were also established in Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) due to donations from the Armenians of Greece.<sup>26</sup>

After 2000, some Greek corporations made financial contributions to Armenia by investing in Armenia's economy. Such ventures continue to be limited due to the difficulties investors face in Armenia's market. There have, however, been examples of successful cooperation such as the launch of a Hellenic Aid Chapter. That chapter, managed in collaboration with Armenians in Greece, is responsible for collecting fruit crops and transporting them to the markets of other European countries.<sup>27</sup> At the same time, Greece officially recognized the Armenian Genocide in 1996, a watershed moment for Greek-Armenians.<sup>28</sup>

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to a new wave of Armenian immigration to Greece. Many ethnic Armenians from Armenia, Georgia, and other post-Soviet states arrived in Greece, seeking better economic opportunities. This influx revitalized the Armenian communities in Greece,

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Western United States, March 6, 2009, <https://ayfwest.org/news/armenian-life-on-hellenic-soil/> (accessed April 9, 2025).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.; BBC News, "Firefighters Revisit the Scene of Armenia's Earthquake in 1988." December 26, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-46634593> (accessed April 9, 2025).

<sup>26</sup> Giallouri.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, Recognition [of Armenian Genocide]: Parliamentary Resolutions, Laws and Declarations, <https://www.mfa.am/en/recognition/> (accessed April 9, 2025).

while also presenting challenges of integration, as new immigrants sometimes spoke Russian or Eastern Armenian dialects that were unfamiliar to the established Western Armenian-speaking diaspora.<sup>29</sup> In the early twenty-first century, the Armenian communities in Greece became more outward-looking and transnationally connected, while also facing the pressures of globalization and assimilation.<sup>30</sup>

Greece's economic crisis (2009–2018) had a profound impact on all residents, including Armenians.<sup>31</sup> Many Armenian businesses faced closure, and unemployment rose sharply within the community. Some young Armenians emigrated to countries like Canada, the United States, and Northern Europe in search of better opportunities. Despite hardships, Armenian organizations in Greece intensified their efforts to maintain cultural life. Fundraisers, language classes, and cultural festivals continued, albeit under financial strain.<sup>32</sup> The Artsakh War (Nagorno-Karabakh War), which began in 2020, sparked renewed activism among Greek-Armenians. Demonstrations were held in Athens and Thessaloniki, and aid was organized for displaced Armenians from Artsakh.<sup>33</sup> Greek public opinion was generally sympathetic to Armenians, given Greece's own historical grievances with Turkey.<sup>34</sup> Diplomatic relations between Greece and Armenia grew stronger in

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<sup>29</sup> U.S. Department of State Archive, “Dissolution of the USSR and the Establishment of Independent Republics, 1991,” Information Released Online from January 20, 2001 to January 20, 2009, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/pcw/108229.htm#:~:text=The%20total%20collapse%20of%20the,played%20a%20role%20as%20well>. (accessed April 9, 2025).

<sup>30</sup> Zenian, “The Armenians of Greece: Remembering the Past,” <https://agbu.org/statehood-challenged/armenians-greece-remembering-past-preparing-future> (accessed April 9, 2025).

<sup>31</sup> Christopher Kinley, “The Alpha and Omega of the Greek Debt Crisis,” *Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective*, Ohio State University, August 2018, <https://origins.osu.edu/article/alpha-and-omega-greek-debt-crisis-IMF-Eurozone-EU-Grexit>.

<sup>32</sup> Vahram Hovyan, “The Armenian Community In Greece at this Stage,” Noravank, June 4, 2012 [https://www.noravank.am/eng/articles/detail.php?ELEMENT\\_ID=6526#:~:text=M%20igration%20to%20more%20developed%20European,10%20and%2011.5%20thousand%20people](https://www.noravank.am/eng/articles/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=6526#:~:text=M%20igration%20to%20more%20developed%20European,10%20and%2011.5%20thousand%20people) (accessed April 10, 2025); Vahram Hovyan, “Armenian Community of Greece,” Network Research Institute, February 2014, [http://rni.am/upload/pdf/6.Vahram\\_Hovyan\\_21\\_CENTURY\\_02\\_2014.pdf](http://rni.am/upload/pdf/6.Vahram_Hovyan_21_CENTURY_02_2014.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> “Armenians Protest the Upcoming Dissolution of Nagorno Karabakh in Athens,” Associated Press, October 2, 2023, <https://www.thenationalherald.com/armenians-protest-the-upcoming-dissolution-of-nagorno-karabakh-in-athens/> (accessed April 10, 2025).

<sup>34</sup> Tasos Kokkinidis, “Greece Offers Timid Support for Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict,” *Greek Reporter*, September 28, 2020,

this period, with increased visits by officials and defense cooperation talks, especially amid rising tensions with Turkey.<sup>35</sup> As of the early 2020s, the Armenian community in Greece remains resilient. Efforts to preserve the Armenian language and culture have adapted to modern times. Online language courses, virtual cultural events, and diaspora networks help keep younger generations engaged. The Greek government remains a key ally of Armenia in European and regional affairs. Integration into Greek society remains high, with many Armenian Greeks achieving success in various fields, including academia, business, and politics. Indeed, Armenians have benefited from Greece's democratic constitution and political system<sup>36</sup> While Armenians in Greece have maintained their cultural, ethnic, and religious identity, they have assimilated well into Greek society. Many Greeks have accepted the Armenians, who live in their midst, for many reasons including the fact that many Armenians are successful, they make significant contributions to Greek society, and they are Christians. Armenians and Greeks also share a suspicion of Turkey because of a history of Ottoman and Turkish aggression against both groups.<sup>37</sup>

## HISTORY OF DEMOCRACY AND CONSTITUTIONS IN GREECE

Democracy in Greece has its roots in ancient times when Greece set the foundations for democracy in the modern world. Although that period is significant, the present focus is on Greek constitutional and political history in modern times because of that period's relevance to Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities in Greece today. During the Greek War of Independence against the Ottoman Empire, which lasted from 1821 to 1832, the Greek National Assemblies, which were the political representatives of the Greek revolutionaries, adopted three constitutions (in 1822, 1823 and 1827).<sup>38</sup> Four influences on those constitutions were (1) the French Constitutions of

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<https://greekreporter.com/2020/09/28/greece-offers-timid-support-for-armenia-in-the-nagorno-karabakh-conflict/> (accessed April 10, 2025).

<sup>35</sup> Fuad Muxtar-Agbabali, "Armenia and Greece Bolster Military Alliance amid Persistent Azerbaijani Focus," *Eurasia Review*, March 13, 2024, <https://www.eurasiareview.com/13032024-armenia-and-greece-bolster-military-alliance-amid-persistent-azerbaijani-focus-oped/> (accessed April 10, 2025).

<sup>36</sup> Siranush Ghazanchyan, "Armenian Ambassador, Mayor of Corinth discuss perspectives of cooperation," Public Radio of Armenia, May 24, 2024 <https://en.armradio.am/2024/05/24/armenian-ambassador-mayor-of-corinth-discuss-perspectivesa-of-cooperation/> (accessed April 10, 2025); Marianna Mkrtchyan, "Armenian Ambassador to Greece Highlights Importance of Armenia's Active Participation in TIF-HELEXPO," *FinPort*, July 20, 2024, [https://finport.am/full\\_news.php?id=50784&lang=3](https://finport.am/full_news.php?id=50784&lang=3) (accessed April 10, 2025).

<sup>37</sup> Zenian, "Greece: Always A Safe Haven to Armenians,"

<sup>38</sup> Thomas W. Gallant, *Modern Greece: From the War of Independence to the Present*, 2nd ed., Bloomsbury, London, UK, 2016, 25.

1793 and 1795; (2) the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen; (3) the Draft Constitution of Rigas Velestinlis (also known as Rigas Feraios), who was a pioneer of the Greek War of Independence; and (4) the Constitutions of the Ionian Islands.<sup>39</sup>

The Greek national assemblies incorporated, into their constitutions, ideas related to human rights, liberty, freedom, and representative democracy. Those elements are embedded within Greece's 2019 constitution. King Otto (known as Othon, Όθων, in Greek), a Bavarian prince who became the first modern King of Greece in 1832 and ruled until 1862, governed for more than ten years without any constitutional restrictions, in that he did not implement the Greek Constitution of 1832.<sup>40</sup> As a result of the Greek Revolution of September 1843, the Constitution of 1844 was enacted which defined Greece as a constitutional monarchy, and provided for a bicameral parliament, consisting of a Chamber of Deputies and a Senate, which influenced Greece's 2019 constitution. Greece's constitution of 1864 lessened the monarch's power and intended to strengthen popular sovereignty.<sup>41</sup>

During the 1870s, because of political resistance to Greece's King George I, he recognized a new constitutional principle, which required Greece's ruling monarch to give the largest party in parliament the first choice in forming a government. After the Goudi Coup in 1909, Greece's 1911 constitution contained amendments to the 1864 constitution related to the protection of human rights, more effective protection of personal security, approximate equity in taxation, people's right to assemble, and increased protection of people's homes and properties, all of which influenced the 2019 constitution. The National Schism in Greece between 1910 and 1922, which occurred because of Greek King Constantine I's and Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos's disagreement over whether or not Greece should enter World War I, led to a constitutional crisis, where two governments were formed: one in Athens and another in Thessaloniki. Significant political turmoil in Greece during and after World War I led to the writing and attempted implementations of constitutions in 1925 and 1927.<sup>42</sup>

After Greece's elections in 1936, King George II appointed Ioannis Metaxas as interim Prime Minister. In May of that year, labor unrest and massive strikes gave Metaxas the opportunity to declare a state of emergency, dissolve parliament for an indefinite period, and suspend the human rights

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<sup>39</sup> George Stergiou Kaloudis, *Modern Greek Democracy: The End of a Long Journey?* University Press of America / Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group, Lanham, Maryland, 2000, 6-9.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 9, 13-17.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15, 17-18.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-23.

articles of the constitution.<sup>43</sup> After Greece's civil war between 1946 and 1949, a conservative constitution was ratified in 1952, which imposed restrictions on human rights and banned the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), which was on the losing side of that civil war. In April 1967, a group of officers led a coup that brought to power the Colonels' Regime, which was comprised of a series of military juntas that ruled Greece between 1967 and 1974. In 1972 and 1973, during Prime Minister Georgios Papadopoulos's attempts at controlled democratization, he abolished the monarchy and declared Greece a republic with himself as president, taking that office in June of 1973.<sup>44</sup>

After a plebiscite formally abolished the monarchy on July 29, 1973, a new constitution was drafted, providing for a popularly-elected president with wide-ranging powers, thus establishing a presidential republic. In the wake of a coup in November 1973, which deposed Papadopoulos, the regime retained the appearance of a republic, but came under exclusive military control until that government's collapse around the time that Turkey invaded Cyprus in August 1974. With the return of civilian rule under Konstantinos Karamanlis, who was Greece's Prime Minister between 1974 and 1980, the 1975 constitution established a parliamentary democracy with a president as head of state. In practice, however, significant power was vested in the prime minister.<sup>45</sup> This constitution was revised in 1985 and 1986 to codify this practice. It was amended again in 2001, 2008, and 2019, and that 2019 constitution is in force today.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Glenn E. Curtis, *Greece: A Country Study*, 4th ed., Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, Lanham, Maryland, 1995, 55.  
[https://www.marines.mil/Portals/59/Publications/Greece%20Study\\_1.pdf?ver=2012-10-11-163242-720](https://www.marines.mil/Portals/59/Publications/Greece%20Study_1.pdf?ver=2012-10-11-163242-720) (accessed August 26, 2018).

<sup>44</sup> George Stergiou Kaloudis, *Modern Greek Democracy: The End of a Long Journey?* University Press of America / Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group, Lanham, Maryland, 2000, 34, 43-51.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-87.

<sup>46</sup> Greece's Constitution of 1975 with Amendments through 2008,  
[https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Greece\\_2008.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Greece_2008.pdf?lang=en)  
(accessed August 26, 2018). Constituteproject.org is part of the Comparative Constitutions Project which is a scholarly endeavor that produces comprehensive data about the world's constitutions ("About the CCP" at <http://comparativeconstitutionsproject.org/about-ccp/> (accessed August 26, 2018). The Constitution of Greece: Revised by Resolution of November 25, 2019 of the IXth Revisionary Parliament  
<https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/UserFiles/f3c70a23-7696-49db-9148-f24dce6a27c8/THE%20CONSTITUTION%20OF%20GREECE.pdf> (accessed April 5, 2025).

## GREECE'S 2019 CONSTITUTION AND ARMENIANS IN GREECE

This section of the chapter will focus on the 2019 constitution and its sections which are relevant to Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities in Greece. That constitution, whose early sentence states “In the name of the Holy and Consubstantial and Indivisible Trinity,” stipulates in Article 3 that the prevailing religion in Greece is that of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ.<sup>47</sup> The 2019 constitution also states that the Orthodox Church of Greece, acknowledging Jesus Christ as its head, is “inseparably united in doctrine with the Great Church of Christ in Constantinople and with every other Church of Christ of the same doctrine, observing unwaveringly, as they do, the holy apostolic and synodal canons and sacred traditions.”<sup>48</sup> Although the vast majority of Armenians are not Greek Orthodox, many of them are Armenian Apostolic Christians or other kinds of Christians, so Greek Orthodoxy’s status as Greece’s official religion does not pose a significant obstacle to the Armenians’ Christian faith.

The Greek constitution’s statements about individual and social rights are also advantageous to Armenians in Greece. For example, Greece’s constitution states that (1) “all Greeks are equal before the law”;<sup>49</sup> (2) “all persons living within the Greek territory shall enjoy full protection of their life, honour and liberty irrespective of nationality, race or language and of religious or political beliefs”;<sup>50</sup> (3) “no person shall be arrested or imprisoned without a reasoned judicial warrant . . .”;<sup>51</sup> (4) “the general confiscation of property is prohibited”;<sup>52</sup> (5) “the private and family life of the individual is inviolable”;<sup>53</sup> (6) “Greeks . . . have the right to form nonprofit associations and unions”;<sup>54</sup> (7) “the preservation of the natural and cultural environment constitutes a duty of the State and a right of every person”;<sup>55</sup> (8) “all Greeks are entitled to free education on all levels at State educational institutions”;<sup>56</sup> and (9) “work constitutes a right and shall enjoy the protection of the state . . .”<sup>57</sup> The 2019 constitution also states that Greeks have the right to express their ideas freely unless those ideas constitute an offense against Christianity or any other religion; unless those ideas comprise an insult against Greece’s

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<sup>47</sup> The Constitution of Greece: Revised by Resolution of November 25, 2019 of the IXth Revisionary Parliament, Article 3.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 4, Section 1.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 5, Section 2.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 6, Section 1.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 7, Section 3.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 9, Section 1.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 12, Section 1.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 24, Section 1.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 16, Section 4.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 22, Section 1.

President; unless persons disclose information about Greece's armed forces or direct themselves toward the violent overthrow of the government; and/or unless a publication is obscene.<sup>58</sup>

In terms of freedom of religion, the 2019 constitution states that “freedom of religious conscience is inviolable” and that the “enjoyment of civil rights and liberties does not depend on the individual's religious beliefs.”<sup>59</sup> The constitution stipulates that “all known religions shall be free and their rites of worship shall be performed unhindered under the protection of the law.”<sup>60</sup> While all of these rights are significant for Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities in Greece, in light of the horrors of the Armenian Genocide, for Armenians the following rights are particularly important: property, work, education, assembly, free speech, fair judicial processes, preservation of culture, and freedom of religion. Greece's constitutional stipulations and laws related to citizenship have been crucial for Armenians in Greece because many of Greece's constitutional and legal protections apply to citizens of Greece.<sup>61</sup> The Greek constitution states, “All persons possessing the qualifications for citizenship as specified by law are Greek citizens.”<sup>62</sup>

#### CITIZENSHIP AND NATURALIZATION IN GREECE

In terms of naturalization, a child of a Greek citizen acquires Greek nationality at birth. The same principle applies to children born in Greece whose parents have lived legally and permanently in Greece for five or more years. Children born outside Greece, whose parents have lived legally and permanently in Greece for five years, become Greek citizens upon successful completion of six years of elementary education. Greeks born abroad may transmit citizenship to their children.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., Article 14, Sections 1-3.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., Article 13, Section 1.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., Article 13, Section 2.

<sup>61</sup> Vahram Hovyan, “Armenian Community of Greece,” *21st Century*, 2(16):2014, 95-104,

[http://www.noravank.am/upload/pdf/6.Vahram\\_Hovyan\\_21\\_CENTURY\\_02\\_2014.pdf](http://www.noravank.am/upload/pdf/6.Vahram_Hovyan_21_CENTURY_02_2014.pdf) (accessed April 5, 2025) Zenian, “Greece: Always a Safe Haven to Armenians.”

<sup>62</sup> The Constitution of Greece: Revised by Resolution of November 25, 2019 of the IXth Revisionary Parliament, Article 4, Section 3.

<sup>63</sup> Hellenic Republic, Greece in the USA. Greek Citizenship.

<https://www.mfa.gr/usa/en/services/services-for-greeks/greek-citizenship.html>

(accessed April 10, 2025): Themida Legal Consulting, “Greek Citizenship”

<https://www.themidalaw.com/greek-citizenship/#:~:text=Greek%20citizenship%20may%20be%20acquired,recorded%20birth%20and%20marriage%20certificates.>

(accessed April 11, 2025); “Greek Nationality Law,” Wikipedia,

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek\\_nationality\\_law#:~:text=Nationality%20law%](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_nationality_law#:~:text=Nationality%20law%20)

An alien born out of wedlock is automatically Greek if the mother is Greek. If the father is Greek and paternity can be proven, the child will become Greek when an application is submitted for the child to become a Greek citizen, providing the child has not reached the age of eighteen. An alien who is over eighteen years old may become Greek by naturalization. A child over eighteen, who is of a Greek father, does not require naturalization if she or he can establish a chain of Greek citizenship through properly recorded birth and marriage certificates. An ethnic Greek born outside Greece may acquire Greek citizenship by naturalization if she or he fails to qualify for registration as the child of a Greek citizen.<sup>64</sup> The applicant must prove that at least one parent or grandparent was born as a Greek national.<sup>65</sup>

Naturalization requirements are different for ethnic Greek and non-ethnic Greek aliens: the alien ethnic Greek must make a declaration -- in the presence of two witnesses, who must be Greek citizens -- before the mayor or chairman of the village council where they live, which states that they wish to be naturalized. The alien may submit this declaration to the Greek consul of their domicile, who transmits it to the Ministry of the Interior with a relevant report. An alien who is not ethnic Greek must live in Greece for seven years before the declaration. She or he must also submit an application for naturalization to the Ministry of the Interior. Children of a naturalized alien become Greeks if, at the time of completion of the naturalization proceedings, they are not married and are less than eighteen years old. At present, marriage does not entail the acquisition or loss of Greek nationality.<sup>66</sup> The flexibility in Greece's naturalization laws has enabled Armenians in Greece to become Greek citizens, benefit from that country's constitutional protections, and thrive in Greece.

Greece has a history of providing this kind of flexibility toward Armenians. For example, in 1923 as Turkey expelled approximately 150,000 Armenians from greater Izmir, Greece accepted homeless Armenians, and provided for them. In addition, the Greek government offered Greek citizenship to those Armenian refugees, many of whom declined that offer

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20of%20Greece%20is,rights%20as%20other%20EU%20citizens (accessed April 10, 2025).

<sup>64</sup> Themida Legal Consulting.

<sup>65</sup> Law 3284, Greek Nationality Code, Articles 1-8, Government Gazette of The Hellenic Republic, First Issue, Issue Number 217, November 10, 2004. <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/2004/en/75778> (Themida Legal Consulting; "Greek Nationality Law," Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek\\_nationality\\_law#:~:text=Nationality%20law%20of%20Greece%20is,rights%20as%20other%20EU%20citizens](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_nationality_law#:~:text=Nationality%20law%20of%20Greece%20is,rights%20as%20other%20EU%20citizens) (accessed April 10, 2025).

<sup>66</sup> Hovyan, "Armenian Community of Greece," 100; "Greek Nationality Law," *Wikipedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek\\_nationality\\_law](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_nationality_law) (accessed April 5, 2025).

because those refugees viewed Greece as a temporary home, and believed that they would soon return to the homes from which the Turks had forced them to flee.<sup>67</sup> More recently, on January 1, 1981, Greece became a member of the European Union (EU).<sup>68</sup> Because of Greece's EU membership, Greek citizens are also citizens of the EU under EU law, and have the right to vote in elections for the European Parliament, for example.<sup>69</sup> Ethnic Armenians, who are citizens of Greece, are also citizens of the EU.

## FAMILY AND INHERITANCE LAW IN GREECE AND ITS RELEVANCE TO ARMENIANS

Greek family and succession law recognize three forms of couple relationships: (1) marriage between persons of the opposite sex, (2) registered partnership between persons of the opposite or same sex, and (3) de facto cohabitation between two persons of the opposite or same sex.<sup>70</sup> The first two categories are regulated thoroughly by the Civil Code, while the third is only sporadically regulated by the Civil Code. Thus, marriage is confined only to opposite sex couples. De facto cohabitation is not regulated by law and no succession rights exist. The default matrimonial property regime is the separation of the property, while the spouses may contractually agree on community of property, which is also known as a contractual matrimonial property regime. Matrimonial property is governed by the principle of autonomy of the parties. In the absence of such choice, each spouse owns and manages her or his property separately.<sup>71</sup>

The spouses may formally agree on community of property. Such an agreement may be concluded before or during the marriage, but formally it has to be drawn as a notarial act registered in the special public book. The relevant notarial act determines the particular details of the system of community of property (e.g. its extent, the administration of the common property, the apportionment of the common assets after its termination etc.), but subject to the overriding principle of the equality of the spouses. The community of property may include all or some of the assets of the spouses.

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<sup>67</sup> Zenian, "Greece: Always a Safe Haven to Armenians."

<sup>68</sup> European Union, "History of the European Union 1980-89," [https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/1980-89\\_en#:~:text=1%20January%201981%20%E2%80%93%20Greece%20becomes,and%20democracy%20restored%20in%201974](https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/1980-89_en#:~:text=1%20January%201981%20%E2%80%93%20Greece%20becomes,and%20democracy%20restored%20in%201974), (accessed April 11, 2025).

<sup>69</sup> European Union, "Participate, interact and vote in the European Union," [https://european-union.europa.eu/live-work-study/participate-interact-vote\\_en](https://european-union.europa.eu/live-work-study/participate-interact-vote_en) (accessed April 11, 2025).

<sup>70</sup> EU-FamPRO (E-Training on EU Family Property Regimes), "Atlas: Greece," based on the national report prepared by Vassiliki Koumpli and Vassiliki Marazopoulou, [https://www.euro-family.eu/atlas\\_scheda-gr](https://www.euro-family.eu/atlas_scheda-gr) (accessed April 17, 2025).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

Hence, the spouses may choose between (1) the system of catholic community (every patrimonial asset acquired before or during marriage becomes common, with the exception of assets destined for personal use, rights of intellectual property etc.), or (2) the system of partial community. In the absence of a clear determination of the extent of the community of property, common property includes only whatever is acquired during the marriage.<sup>72</sup>

In terms of succession and inheritance, intestate succession takes place when there is no will or testament. Succession in intestacy is based on the kinship with the deceased. The Civil Code enlists the legal heirs of the deceased in classes. Descendants of the deceased in the first class, her or his parents and siblings in the second class, her or his grandparents in the third class, great-grandparents in the fourth class and as sole heir of the fifth class, inherits the surviving spouse. The surviving spouse from a valid marriage shall also be called as heir together with the relatives of the first class to one fourth of the estate and with the relatives of the second, third and fourth classes to one half of the estate, while in the fifth class inherits the whole estate. The surviving spouse may lose her or his right to succession and to additional accretion when the deceased spouse instituted legal proceedings for divorce against the surviving spouse based on a justified ground for divorce, which must exist at the time of devolution of the inheritance.<sup>73</sup>

The provisions of the Civil Code on compulsory heirship protect the closest relatives of the deceased (descendants, the parents, surviving spouse) in the event of testate successions. Testamentary dispositions to the prejudice of compulsory heirs or restricting their share are null. Compulsory heirs are entitled to one-half of their intestate share.

The provisions governing the matrimonial property regime and successions also apply to registered partnerships. The provisions concerning the legal effects of marriage apply to registered partners. It relates to personal and non-personal relationships, including the property rights and the right of succession. The provisions governing the matrimonial property regime govern also the property regime of registered partnerships unless the partners agree otherwise, on the condition that the principles of equality and solidarity are fulfilled.<sup>74</sup>

In terms of de facto cohabitation, the property rights of de facto cohabitation are governed by the general provisions of the Civil Code on unjustified enrichment. De facto cohabitation is not legally defined as a form of family union in Greece law, but some family rights are extended *ex lege* to them as well. The Civil Code specifically provides that issues relating to assets acquired after the commencement of cohabitation are governed by the general provisions of the Civil Code on unjustified enrichment. There is also a

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

possible analogous application of certain family law provisions of the Civil Code on specific permissible agreements of the individuals living in a de facto cohabitation. In the event of death of the de facto cohabitant, no succession rights are granted to the surviving cohabitant.<sup>75</sup>

Regarding inheritance law as it applies to non-citizens in Greece, the principal rule is that Greek inheritance law applies to assets situated in Greece, regardless of the nationality of the deceased.<sup>76</sup> This is known as the *lex rei sitae* rule. Therefore, if a non-citizen owns property in Greece, the Greek inheritance law will govern the inheritance of that property. If the father of the minors held a Golden Visa in Greece and owned a house there, the property would generally be inherited under Greek law.<sup>77</sup> Golden Visa status in Greece does not affect the inheritance rules but could have implications for the residency rights of the inheritors. For minors, specific procedures are in place. Typically, a court-appointed guardian, often the surviving parent or a close relative, will represent the interests of the minor in inheritance matters until they reach the age of majority.<sup>78</sup> The relative flexibility of Greece's marriage and inheritance laws can be beneficial for Armenians, who are citizens of that country, and Armenians, who are not. The relative clarity of the laws and the possibility that attorneys can be helpful in writing wills which conform to Greek law, while adhering to the wishes of the testator can be advantageous. In addition, the fact that inheritance law is tied to the land of Greece (*lex rei sitae*), and not to Greek citizenship can be beneficial to Armenians, who live in Greece, and are not citizens of that country.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> AnanK Lawyer, Expert, "What inheritance law applies in Greece for non-citizens," JustAnswer.com, 2024 <https://www.justanswer.com/european-law/mze6t-inheritance-law-applies-greece-none-citizens.html#:~:text=When%20it%20comes%20to%20inheritance,where%20the%20property%20is%20located>, (accessed April 17, 2025). Justanswer.com is accredited by the Better Business Bureau in the United States, has been in business since July 19, 2006, provides extensive information about its leadership team and board of directors, and has the following corporate address: JustAnswer, LLC; 440 North Barranca Avenue, #7508; Covina, California 91723 USA. Please see Better Business Bureau, "Business Profile, Ecommerce: JustAnswer," <https://www.bbb.org/us/ca/san-francisco/profile/ecommerce/justanswer-1116-82403/#sealclick> (accessed April 17, 2025); JustAnswer.com, "Meet our Leadership Team"; "Board of Directors"; and "Contact" <https://www.justanswer.com/about> (accessed April 17, 2025).

<sup>77</sup> Information about Golden Visas for Greece is at Henley and Partners, "Greece: Key Advantages of the Greece Golden Visa Program," <https://www.henleyglobal.com/residence-investment/greece> (accessed April 17, 2025).

<sup>78</sup> AnanK Lawyer, Expert. "What inheritance law applies in Greece for non-citizens."

## GREECE'S ECONOMY AND ARMENIANS

Looking to the future, while Armenians have thrived in Greece, that country's economic situation could be promising for Armenians and others living in Greece. For example, in 2023, Greece's labor force participation has increased from 50% in 2020 to 52% in 2023.<sup>79</sup> Greece's gross domestic product has increased from \$191.36 billion in 2020 to \$243.5 billion in 2023.<sup>80</sup> Greece's per capita gross national income increased from \$11,022 in 2020 to \$13,179 in 2023.<sup>81</sup> The fact that in 2024 a total of 54,417 refugees and asylum-seekers arrived in Greece may be a factor in attempting to forecast Greece's economic future.<sup>82</sup>

The International Monetary Fund's (IMF's) report on Greece's economy indicates a favorable outlook for the near-term.<sup>83</sup> The IMF forecasts that Greece's real GDP will sustain its robust expansion. Real GDP growth is projected to remain high at 2.1 percent in 2025, with investment continuing to be a key driver. Private consumption growth will remain stable, and it will be undergirded by favorable employment and income growth. The IMF also views Greece's banking system favorably. According to the IMF's report, potential headwinds include a growth slowdown in major euro area countries, a deterioration with respect to regional conflicts, and global policy uncertainty.<sup>84</sup> The positive IMF report, and favorable factors which relate to it, provide reasons for optimism regarding the future of Armenians in Greece and others who live there.

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<sup>79</sup> The World Bank, Line Graph at "Labor force participation rate, total (% of total population ages 15+) (modeled ILO estimate) - Greece," January 7, 2025, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.ZS?locations=GR> (accessed April 5, 2025).

<sup>80</sup> The World Bank, Line Graph at "Greece GDP, (current US\$)," Greece, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=GR> (accessed April 5, 2025).

<sup>81</sup> The World Bank, Line Graph at "GNI Per Capita, Atlas Method (Current US\$)," Greece, November 2017, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.CD> (accessed April 5, 2025).

<sup>82</sup> Reliefweb, "Greece Sea Arrivals Dashboard (December 2024)," January 31, 2025, <https://reliefweb.int/report/greece/greece-sea-arrivals-dashboard-december-2024#:~:text=In%202024%2C%20a%20total%20of,and%20other%20islands%20at%2015%25> (accessed April 5, 2025).

<sup>83</sup> International Monetary Fund, "IMF Executive Board Concludes 2025 Article IV Consultation with Greece," Press Release No. 25/89, April 4, 2025, <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2025/04/04/pr2589-greece-imf-executive-board-concludes-2025-article-iv-consultation#:~:text=Greece%27s%20near%2Dterm%20economic%20outlook,supported%20by%20NGEU%2Dfunded%20projects>.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

## GREEK-TURKISH RELATIONS AND ARMENIANS IN GREECE

Relations between Greece and Turkey are a significant factor, in terms of Greece's security, which could affect everyone living in Greece including Armenians. On the positive side, Greek-Turkish relations since 1999, have been marked by the establishment of various dialogue mechanisms such as regular political consultations, exploratory contacts on Aegean Issues, and High-Level Cooperation Council meetings as well as high-level visits and contacts. Yet, there continue to be differences and disagreements between the two countries. According to the Greek government, developments in Turkey in 2024 and 2025 created significant challenges in organizing further meetings of the High-Level Cooperation Council.<sup>85</sup>

For example, the jailing, on March 23, 2025, of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, who was a potential rival to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, is one potential hindrance to Greek-Turkish relations. Because of Greece's democratic constitutional principles and its membership in the European Union, it opposes President Erdogan's apparent autocratic tactics against Mayor Imamoglu. Yet, in other respects, Greek-Turkish relations have improved between 2023 and early 2025, especially following a period of heightened tensions in 2020-2021 over issues like maritime boundaries, energy exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean, and military confrontations, all of which continue to pose problems in relations between Greece and Turkey. Yet, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and President Erdogan have met multiple times, emphasizing dialogue and de-escalation, while problems in relations between those two countries persist.<sup>86</sup>

In terms of maritime boundaries, the delimitation of maritime zones in the Aegean Sea and Eastern Mediterranean remains a contentious issue. Both countries have conflicting claims over territorial waters and exclusive economic zones, leading to frequent disputes and military standoffs.<sup>87</sup> Migration and refugee flows continue to be significant issues. Both countries

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<sup>85</sup> Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Relations between Türkiye and Greece," n.d. <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/reasons-between-turkiye-and-greece.en.mfa#:~:text=The%20HLCC%20aims%20at%20addressing,have%20so%20far%20been%20held> .

<sup>86</sup> Tasos Kokkinidis, "Athens Hints at Delay in Greece-Turkey Talks," *Greek Reporter*, March 24, 2025, <https://greekreporter.com/2025/03/24/athens-hints-delay-greece-turkey-talks/> .

<sup>87</sup> Renee Maltezou, "Greece, Turkey to keep talking on maritime boundaries agenda, ministers say," *Reuters*, November 8, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/greece-turkey-talks-demarcating-maritime-boundaries-continue-greek-foreign-2024-11-08/> .

face challenges in handling and responsibility of migrants, which sometimes leads to disputes.<sup>88</sup>

Although there have been efforts to improve relations, military incidents and standoffs, particularly in the Aegean Sea, have continued to occur. These incidents highlight the fragile nature of Greek-Turkish relations. For example, in February 2025, Turkey withdrew some of its forces from the NATO Steadfast Dart 2025 exercise following a standoff with Greece over airspace and search-and-rescue jurisdiction in the Aegean Sea. The disagreement centered on Turkey's attempts to impose its views on the exercise's planning document, which Greece opposed. Greece refused to accept exclusive Turkish claims over the Aegean, threatening to cancel the exercise, if the terms were altered. The Turkish Defense Ministry stated that issues in the exercise's design contradicted Turkey's national rights and international law.<sup>89</sup> In terms of energy exploration, conflicts over energy resources, particularly natural gas exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean, continue to strain relations between Greece and Turkey. Those countries have overlapping claims on potential energy-rich areas, which have led to tensions and confrontations.<sup>90</sup> The division of Cyprus also remains an unresolved issue between Greece and Turkey, with the northern part of Cyprus occupied by Turkish forces and the southern part being the Republic of Cyprus. This problem continues to be a major point of contention, affecting bilateral relations between Greece and Turkey.<sup>91</sup>

Tense relations between Greece and Turkey could pose potential hardships for Armenians and others living in Greece. The strengthening of Turkish nationalism and Islam in Turkey, and that country's foreign policies could pose a threat to Armenians in Greece and ethnic Greeks in that country, particularly if Turkey decides to use nationalism and Islam as means of expanding its influence in the Mediterranean region. Indeed, continuing territorial disputes with respect to the Aegean Sea, the Turkish military's repeated violations of Greek airspace, and disagreements related to a NATO

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<sup>88</sup> Gerasimos Tsourapas, "Migration Diplomacy and Greek-Turkish Relations: A Three-Level Game Analysis" *International Migration*, January 8, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.70004> .

<sup>89</sup> Vassilis Nedos and Manolis Kostidis, "Turkey withdraws some forces from NATO drill," *ekathimerini.com*, February 14, 2025, <https://www.ekathimerini.com/politics/foreign-policy/1261639/turkey-withdraws-some-forces-from-nato-drill/> .

<sup>90</sup> Miriam Zeballos Rivero, "Growing tension between Turkey and Greece over Mediterranean gas reserves" Universidad de Navarra [University of Navarra], Global Affairs, March 22, 2023, <https://en.unav.edu/web/global-affairs/creciente-tension-entre-turquia-y-grecia-por-reservas-de-gas-en-el-mediterraneo> .

<sup>91</sup> International Crisis Group, "An Island Divided: Next Steps for Troubled Cyprus," April 17, 2023, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/western-europemediterranean/cyprus/268-island-divided-next-steps-troubled-cyprus> .

military drill in 2025, are some of many causes for concern. Yet, in conclusion, Armenians' deep roots in Greek society and Greece's apparent commitment to protect Armenians are some factors that bode well for Greece's Armenians.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Fotis Kapetopoulos, "Turkey Threatens Invasion of Greece, But Why Do So Few Care?" *Daily Review* (Australia), February 25, 2018 <https://dailyreview.com.au/turkey-threatens-invasion-greece-care/71725/> (accessed September 10, 2018); Yiannis Baboulias, "Greece and Turkey Are Inching Toward War," *Foreign Policy*, April 18, 2018 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/04/18/greece-and-turkey-are-inching-toward-war/> ; <https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:fuzppGkJFvoJ:https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/04/18/greece-and-turkey-are-inching-toward-war/+&cd=20&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us> (accessed September 10, 2018).

## CYPRUS



Armenians have had a long-standing historic presence in Cyprus, have been accepted in Cypriot society, while thriving in and contributing to that society. With those realities in mind, first, this chapter will provide information about religious and ethnic demographics in Cyprus. Second, it will provide an analysis of crucial aspects of the history of independent Cyprus in the late 1950s and early 1960s, as that history relates to Cyprus's constitution and laws. Third, this chapter will discuss the most recent version of Cyprus's constitution, which includes the revisions that were made in 2024, and stipulations of that constitution, which are relevant to Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities in Cyprus. Fourth, the chapter will provide an overview of the history of Armenians in Cyprus. Fifth, the chapter will discuss Turkey's 1974 invasion of Cyprus, its long-term consequences, and its implications for Cyprus, including its constitutions and laws, as well as Armenians in that country. Sixth, the chapter will discuss aspects of Cyprus's post-1974 political history, including negotiations about Cyprus's future status, with attention to its implications for Cyprus's constitution, laws, as well as Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities in that country. Seventh, the chapter will analyze Cyprus's citizenship and naturalization laws, and how they relate to Armenians in that country. Eighth, the chapter will discuss family and inheritance laws and their implications for Armenians in Cyprus. Ninth, the chapter will analyze Cyprus's economy and its implications for Armenians and other persons in the country. Tenth, the chapter will conclude with an analysis of prospects of the Armenians' future in Cyprus.

## ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHICS

While the island of Cyprus is divided between the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) and the Republic of Cyprus, this chapter will focus on the Republic of Cyprus. The Republic of Cyprus is 98.8% Greek, 1% Maronite, Armenian, and Turkish-Cypriot, and 0.2% unspecified.<sup>1</sup> In terms of religious demographics, Cyprus is 89.1% Eastern Orthodox Christian, 2.9% Roman Catholic, Protestant/Anglican 2%, 1.8% Muslim, 1% Buddhist, 1.4% other (which includes Maronite Catholic, Armenian Apostolic, Hindu), 1.1% unknown, 0.6% none/atheist.<sup>2</sup> There are approximately 19,000 Armenians in Cyprus,<sup>3</sup> and many of them live in Nicosia, Larnaca, and Limassol.<sup>4</sup>

## HISTORY OF INDEPENDENT CYPRUS, ITS CONSTITUTION, AND ARMENIANS

Independent Cyprus came into existence as a result of the Zurich-London Agreements in 1959 among Greece, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the Cypriot leaders of the Greek and Turkish communities. These agreements formed the basis of three treaties and the Republic of Cyprus's constitution. The *Treaty of Establishment*, which was one of those treaties, defined the territory of Cyprus, excluding two enclaves on the south shore of the island, which were to be retained as British Sovereign Base Areas.<sup>5</sup> The *Treaty of Guarantee*, the second of the three treaties, provided for the maintenance of the constitutional and territorial integrity of the Republic of Cyprus by prohibiting the union of Cyprus with any other state, while also prohibiting the partition of the island. The *Treaty of Alliance*, the final of the three treaties,

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<sup>1</sup> "Cyprus," *World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/cyprus/> (accessed April 12, 2025).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> World Population Review, "Armenian Population by Country 2025," <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/armenian-population-by-country> (accessed April 12, 2025).

<sup>4</sup> Cyprus Armenians-Gibrahayer, "Introduction," <http://www.hayem.org/en/introduction> (accessed April 12, 2025).

<sup>5</sup> "Treaty No. 5476. United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Greece and Turkey and Cyprus" [Treaty of Establishment], Hellenic Republic [Greece], Ministry of Foreign Affairs [https://www.mfa.gr/images/docs/kypriako/treaty\\_of\\_establishment.pdf](https://www.mfa.gr/images/docs/kypriako/treaty_of_establishment.pdf) ; "No. 5475. Treaty of Guarantee. Signed At Nicosia On 16 August 1960," Hellenic Republic [Greece], Ministry of Foreign Affairs [https://www.mfa.gr/images/docs/kypriako/treaty\\_of\\_guarantee.pdf](https://www.mfa.gr/images/docs/kypriako/treaty_of_guarantee.pdf) ; "Treaty of Alliance" Hellenic Republic [Greece], Ministry of Foreign Affairs [http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/mfa2016.nsf/FB80B3D87DE5A915C2257F95002BE30E/\\$file/The%20Treaty%20of%20Alliance.pdf](http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/mfa2016.nsf/FB80B3D87DE5A915C2257F95002BE30E/$file/The%20Treaty%20of%20Alliance.pdf) (accessed July 24, 2019).

pledged the cooperation of Greece and Turkey in preserving the peace, security, and common defense of the Republic.<sup>6</sup>

The Republic of Cyprus's constitution of 1960 is the only constitution, which that Republic has had, and it continues to be that country's constitution. That constitution has been amended in 1989, 1996, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2019, 2020, 2022, 2023, and 2024.<sup>7</sup> The amendments of the Constitution of Cyprus were deemed necessary by the legislature and the executive for three primary reasons: (1) harmonizing Cyprus law with EU law, (2) meeting Cyprus's human rights obligations undertaken by virtue of international treaties, and (3) adapting to modern facts and perceptions.<sup>8</sup>

Parts of this chapter focus on that constitution's provisions which are relevant to Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities in Cyprus. That constitution grants Cypriots the right to (1) life and corporal integrity<sup>9</sup>; (2) a decent existence and to social security;<sup>10</sup> (3) liberty and security of person<sup>11</sup>; (4) respect for persons' private and family lives;<sup>12</sup> (5) freedom of thought, conscience and religion;<sup>13</sup> (6) freedom of speech and expression;<sup>14</sup> (7) freedom of peaceful assembly<sup>15</sup>; (8) freedom of practicing any

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<sup>6</sup> T. W. Adams, "The First Republic of Cyprus: A Review of an Unworkable Constitution," *The Western Political Quarterly*, 19(3):1966, 475.

<sup>7</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus, (English translation and consolidation), Office of the Law Commissioner, Nicosia, Including Revisions Made in 2024, Published in January 2025, 1, [https://www.olc.gov.cy/olc/olc.nsf/26097CAF0B50C8DCC2258C190023A082/\\$file/CONSTITUTION.pdf](https://www.olc.gov.cy/olc/olc.nsf/26097CAF0B50C8DCC2258C190023A082/$file/CONSTITUTION.pdf) (accessed April 11, 2025).

<sup>8</sup> "Note for the Reader" in the Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus, (English translation and consolidation), Office of the Law Commissioner, Nicosia, January 2025, 3, [https://www.olc.gov.cy/olc/olc.nsf/26097CAF0B50C8DCC2258C190023A082/\\$file/CONSTITUTION.pdf](https://www.olc.gov.cy/olc/olc.nsf/26097CAF0B50C8DCC2258C190023A082/$file/CONSTITUTION.pdf) (accessed April 11, 2025).

<sup>9</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus Article 7, Section 1. For an analysis of aspects of that constitution, please see Theognosia Kouspi and Achilles C. Emilianides, "From Process Misstep to Environmental Milestone: Cyprus's New Constitutional Right," ConstitutionNet, International IDEA, April 1, 2025 <https://constitutionnet.org/news/voices/process-misstep-environmental-milestone-cypruss-new-constitutional-right#:~:text=The%20Cypriot%20House%20of%20Representatives,to%20the%201960%20Cypriot%20Constitution> (accessed April 11, 2025).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 9.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 11.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 15, Section 1.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 18, Sections 1 and 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 19, Section 1.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 21, Section 1.

profession;<sup>16</sup> and (9) freedom of acquiring and possessing property.<sup>17</sup> In addition, according to Cyprus's constitution, all religions are equal before the law,<sup>18</sup> all persons are equal before the law and are entitled to equal treatment under it,<sup>19</sup> and all persons have the right to a fair public hearing by an independent, impartial, and competent court.<sup>20</sup> There is also a seat reserved for an Armenian representative in the Cypriot parliament, which is called the House of Representatives.<sup>21</sup> The Armenian representative participates in the House Standing Committee on Education, attends plenary meetings of the House, and expresses their views on matters concerning Armenians without having a right to vote. The representative also enjoys the same rights and privileges as other Representatives, which include non-liability, immunity, remuneration, and tax exemptions.<sup>22</sup> These provisions are advantageous to Armenians, who live in Cyprus, in that those provisions protect some of the most important rights and freedoms for Armenians, which is especially significant because Armenians are a minority in Cyprus.

## HISTORY OF ARMENIANS IN CYPRUS

There is a longstanding relationship between the Armenians and Cyprus, possibly dating back to the fifth century BCE.<sup>23</sup> Armenians have had a continuous documented presence on the island since 578 CE. During Byzantine General Maurice the Cappadocian's campaign against the Persian King Khosrow I (King Chosroes I), he and his army captured 10,090 Armenians in Arzanene, also known as Aghdznik, which is in southern Asia minor, south of lake Van. Among those Armenians, approximately 3,350 were transferred to Cyprus. Judging by the strategic position of the colonies that they established in Armenokhori, Arminou, Kornokipos, Patriki, Platani,

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., Article 25, Section 1.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., Article 23, Section 1.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., Article 18, Sections 1 and 3.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., Article 28, Section 1.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., Article 30, Sections 1 and 2.

<sup>21</sup> IPU Parline [Inter-Parliamentary Union Online], "Cyprus: House of Representatives," <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/CY/CY-LC01/#:~:text=Members,Yes> (August 27, 2025).

<sup>22</sup> Cyprus Republic, House of Representatives, "Election, Composition and Dissolution of the House" <https://www.parliament.cy/en/general-information/election-composition-and-dissolution-of-the-house-of-representatives#:~:text=Ever%20since%20then%2C%20the%20three,without%2C%20however%2C%20a%20right%20to> (accessed August 7, 2025).

<sup>23</sup> Alexander-Michael Hadjilyra, who did the research and text on behalf of the Armenian religious group, *The Armenians of Cyprus*, Press and Information Office, Republic of Cyprus, n.d, 8 ([http://www.hayem.org/media/files/cyprus-armenians/the\\_armenians\\_of\\_cyprus\\_en.pdf](http://www.hayem.org/media/files/cyprus-armenians/the_armenians_of_cyprus_en.pdf) (accessed April 13, 2023)).

Spathariko and perhaps Mousere, it is very likely that those Armenians served Byzantium as soldiers and frontiersmen.<sup>24</sup>

Additional Armenians arrived in the subsequent centuries, for political, commercial and military reasons. During the mid-Byzantine period, Armenian generals and governors served in Cyprus. Those persons included Alexios Mousere (868-874), Basil Haigaz (958), Vahram (965), Elpidios Vrakhamios (1075-1085) and Leo of Symbatices (910-911), who undertook the construction of Saint Lazarus' Basilica in Larnaca. In 973, Catholicos Khatchig I established the Armenian Bishopric in Nicosia. After Isaac Comnenus's wedding to the daughter of the Armenian prince Thoros II in 1185, Armenian nobles and warriors came with him to Cyprus, many of whom defended the island against Richard the Lionheart in 1191 and the Knights Templar in 1192.<sup>25</sup>

After the purchase of Cyprus in 1192 by the Frankish King of Jerusalem Guy de Lusignan, a massive immigration of Armenian and other bourgeois, noblepersons, knights, and warriors from Western Europe, Cilicia, and the Levant took place. These persons were granted fiefs, manors, and privileges. The kingdoms of Cyprus and Cilicia became linked to each other because of their proximity, their commercial ties, and a series of marriages. In light of the decline of Lesser Armenia (Cilicia), its last King, who was Levon V, was taken prisoner by the Mamluks in 1375 and forcibly expatriated to Egypt.<sup>26</sup> After his death in Paris in 1393, his title and privileges were transferred to his cousin, King James I de Lusignan in 1396; subsequently, the royal crest also bore the lion of Armenia.<sup>27</sup>

During the Frankish and the Venetian Eras (1192-1489 and 1489-1570 respectively), there were Armenian churches in Nicosia, Famagusta, Spathariko, Kornokipos, Platani, and elsewhere, while Armenian was one of the official languages in Cyprus. The Armenians of Nicosia had their Prelature and lived in their own quarter, called Armenia or Armenoyitonia. In Famagusta, a Bishopric was established in the twelfth century, and Armenians lived around the Syrian quarter; historical documents suggest the presence of an important monastic and theological center there, at which Saint Nerses Lampronatsi (1153-1198) is said to have studied. By 1425, the Magaravank (Sourp Magar) monastery in Cyprus, which was originally the Coptic monastery of Saint Makarios near Halevga, came under Armenian possession,

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> *Keghart*, "King Levon V, The Last King of Cilician Armenia," June 14, 2015, [https://keghart.org/king-levon-v-the-last-king-of-cilician-armenia/#:~:text=an%20Armenian%20ceremony,-,Within%20ten%20months%20\(April%2013%2C%201375\)%20this%20last%20,0](https://keghart.org/king-levon-v-the-last-king-of-cilician-armenia/#:~:text=an%20Armenian%20ceremony,-,Within%20ten%20months%20(April%2013%2C%201375)%20this%20last%20,0) (accessed July 27, 2025).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 9.

as did, sometime before 1504, the Benedictine nunnery of Notre Dame de Tyre or Tortosa.<sup>28</sup>

During the Ottoman conquest of the island of Cyprus, which took place from 1570 to 1571, approximately 40,000 Ottoman-Armenian craftspersons were recruited. Many of those who survived the conquest settled mainly in Nicosia, where the Armenian Prelature was recognized as an Ethnarchy, via the Ottomans' millet system. However, the Bishopric in Famagusta was abolished, as the entire walled city became forbidden to non-Muslims.<sup>29</sup> During this period, some Armenians practiced lucrative professions. In the beginning of the seventeenth century, Persian-Armenians (Iranian-Armenians) settled in Cyprus as silk traders, as did some affluent Ottoman-Armenian families in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>30</sup>

However, the number of Armenians and other Christians dramatically declined due to the taxation and harshness of the Ottoman administration, compelling many Christians to become Linobambaki (Crypto-Christians) or to embrace Islam, which is one reason that some former Armenian villages, such as Armenokhori, Artemi, Ayios Iakovos, Ayios Khariton, Kornokipos, Melounda, and Platani and were inhabited by Turkish-Cypriots at the end of the nineteenth century. There were some improvements for Armenians during the Ottoman Empire's Tanzimat period from 1839 to 1876, when some reforms were implemented in that empire. The Tanzimat reforms resulted, in part, in the participation of the Armenian Bishop in the provincial council (*Idare Meclisi*) and the employment of some Armenians in the civil service.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 benefited Armenians and others who lived in Cyprus, because of the increase in shipping and trade.<sup>32</sup>

With the arrival of the British in Cyprus in July 1878 and their administration, the already prosperous, yet small, Armenian community of the island was particularly strengthened. Several Armenians arrived in Cyprus to

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 10; Yaron Harel, *Syrian Jewry in Transition, 1840-1880*, Liverpool University Press, 112-48, 2010, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/syrian-jewry-in-transition-18401880/raaya-and-the-machinery-of-the-ottoman-state/7C86516826939FD3FB19345AF5A3886D>

<sup>32</sup> Alexander-Michael Hadjilyra, *Armenians of Cyprus*, (n.p.: Kalaydjian Foundation, May 2009), 10 [https://www.academia.edu/578323/The\\_Armenians\\_of\\_Cyprus?auto=download](https://www.academia.edu/578323/The_Armenians_of_Cyprus?auto=download) (accessed December 7, 2025); Sevgi Korkmaz and Sadiye Tutsak, "A Historical Background of Foreign Trade in Cyprus (1923-1938)," *Journal of Accounting, Finance and Auditing Studies*, 9(4), (December 2023): 449-467. <https://doi.org/10.56578/jafas090405> (accessed May 24, 2025); [https://library.acadlore.com/JAFAS/2023/9/4/JAFAS\\_09.04\\_05.pdf](https://library.acadlore.com/JAFAS/2023/9/4/JAFAS_09.04_05.pdf) (accessed May 24, 2025).

work as interpreters and public servants in the British consulates and other parts of Britain's administration in Cyprus.<sup>33</sup> The number of Armenians in Cyprus increased significantly after the massive deportations, the horrific massacres, and the genocide perpetrated by the Ottomans and the Young Turks in various areas outside Cyprus from 1894 to 1896, in 1909, and from 1915 to 1923.<sup>34</sup> During these periods, many Armenian refugees arrived in Cyprus from Cilicia, Smyrna and Constantinople, while approximately 1,500 of them made Cyprus their new home. In a relatively short period of time, these Armenians thrived and established themselves in the arts, letters and sciences, and as entrepreneurs and merchants, craftspersons and photographers, as well as pioneering professionals, who introduced new crafts and culinary offerings to the island. In doing so, the Armenians contributed significantly to Cyprus's socio-economic and cultural development.<sup>35</sup>

Some Armenian Cypriots had a high profile with the British administration. At the same time, there were Armenians who became conscientious civil servants and disciplined police officers. Others were employed at the Cyprus Government Railway, and Cable and Wireless. From the 1920s until the 1950s, some worked at the asbestos mines at Amiandos, while others worked in the copper mines at Mavrovouni and Skouriotissa.<sup>36</sup>

There were Armenians from Cyprus, who participated in the 1897 Greco-Turkish War, World War I (1914-1918), World War II (1939-1945), and the EOKA liberation struggle (1955-1959) against British colonial rule in Cyprus.<sup>37</sup> Also, the Eastern Legion (later called the Armenian Legion) was formed and trained between 1916-1918 in Monarga village. Some Armenian refugees arrived from Palestine between 1947 and 1949, and from Egypt between 1956 and 1957. The Armenian-Cypriot community prospered throughout the British Era, from 1878 to 1960, by establishing associations, choirs, scouting groups, sports teams, musical ensembles, churches, cemeteries and schools, including the Melkonian Educational Institute, which was an Armenian boarding school that was established in 1926.<sup>38</sup>

Cyprus gained independence from Britain in 1960. That independence brought a new era for the Armenians in Cyprus, who were recognized as a religious group, as they chose to belong to the Greek Cypriot community, and were represented in parliament by an elected Armenian representative.<sup>39</sup> However, the population of the Armenian community in Cyprus had been reduced due to the emigration of approximately nine hundred Armenian-

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<sup>33</sup> Alexander-Michael Hadjilyra, *Armenians of Cyprus*, 10.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

Cypriots to the United Kingdom, because of the emergency situation at the time of EOKA's (National Organization of Cypriot Fighters) anti-colonial liberation struggle, much of which took place between 1955 and 1959. Another factor that contributed to the reduction of the Armenian community's population was the emigration of approximately six hundred Armenian-Cypriots to Soviet Armenia, as part of the Pan-Armenian movement for repatriation from 1962 until 1964.<sup>40</sup>

During the 1963-1964 inter-communal troubles, the Armenian-Cypriot community suffered major losses, as the Armenian quarter of Nicosia and the Ganchvor church in Famagusta were captured by Turkish-Cypriots. Two-hundred and thirty-one Armenian-Cypriot families became victims to the Turks and hundreds of Armenian-Cypriots left for Australia, Canada, Great Britain, and the United States. As a result of the 1974 military invasion of Cyprus by Turkey, the Armenian-Cypriot community suffered additional losses; approximately eighty families became refugees. The renowned Magaravank monastery was taken by Turkish soldiers, the Melkonian Educational Institute's boys building was bombed by the Turkish Air Force, while the Agios Dometios cemetery and the Agios Georgios Church fell within the buffer zone. As a result of these and related events, many Armenian-Cypriots emigrated, mainly to Great Britain.<sup>41</sup>

Despite the Armenian community's losses, and with the support of Cyprus's government, the Armenian community of Cyprus continued to prosper in various urban areas, contributing culturally and socio-economically to the development of Cyprus. On April 24, 1975, Cyprus became the first European country, and the second worldwide, after Uruguay, to recognize the Armenian Genocide, with Resolution 36/1975 of the House of Representatives. Cyprus was also the first country to bring the matter before the United Nations General Assembly in 1965.<sup>42</sup>

Over the decades, the dynamics of the Armenian-Cypriot community have changed, in light of the increased number of marriages with Greek-Cypriots and the arrival, in Cyprus, of a large number of Armenian political and economic immigrants. These persons came to Cyprus because of the civil war in Lebanon (1975-1990), instability in Syria, the Islamic revolution in Iran, the Iran-Iraq war, the Armenian earthquake (1988), and the dissolution of the Soviet Union (1991). Some of those immigrants have settled permanently in Cyprus.<sup>43</sup> According to the European Charter for Regional or Minority

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>43</sup> Alexander-Michael Hadjilyra, "The History of Armenians in Cyprus from Antiquity to this Day," September 22, 2017, *SCRIBD*, 3, <https://www.scribd.com/document/359690209/The-History-of-Armenians-in->

Languages of the Council of Europe, Armenian was recognized as a minority language of Cyprus as of December 1, 2002.<sup>44</sup>

The Armenian community in Cyprus has its own Archbishop. The prelatore and rest home for senior citizens are in Nicosia. There are churches, schools, clubs, associations, foundations, monuments, and cemeteries in Larnaca, Limassol, Nicosia, and Paphos.<sup>45</sup> The Armenian community has a football academy, a bowling team, three dancing groups, a theater group, a scouting group, two choirs, a daily radio program, a monthly newspaper, and two monthly e-magazines. Members of the Armenian community have also organized various charity, cultural, educational, social, and youth events and programs.<sup>46</sup> Yet, all of these aspects of Armenians' lives in Cyprus are within a historic and political context.

### CYPRUS'S POST-INDEPENDENCE HISTORY, TURKEY'S INVASION, AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

The structure and status of Cyprus's government have been controversial topics for most of Cyprus's history since its independence in 1960.<sup>47</sup> Politics in the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities, which have been governed separately since 1964 and have been physically separated since 1974, have been dominated by unclear consensus, both between and within the two communities, over the identity of the state and the structure of its government. The original political arrangements, which Cyprus's 1960 constitution stipulated, were in effect for only three years. By 1963, after proposals by Cypriot President Archbishop Makarios III, to amend the constitution in ways that Turkish Cypriots viewed as favoring the Greek Cypriot population, Turkish Cypriots withdrew from many national institutions. In that vein, they began self-government in the Turkish quarters of the island's towns and cities.<sup>48</sup>

After the 1974 Turkish invasion of Cyprus, and the dislocation and resettlement of large numbers of Greek and Turkish Cypriots, two separate

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Cyprus-from-Antiquity-to-this-Day-speech (accessed April 15, 2025); Alexander-Michael Hadjilyra, *Armenians of Cyprus*, 15.

<sup>44</sup> Alexander-Michael Hadjilyra, *Armenians of Cyprus*, 15.

<sup>45</sup> Alexander-Michael Hadjilyra, "The History of Armenians in Cyprus from Antiquity to this Day," 3.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. See also George Tsangaris, "The Armenians of Cyprus: History, Identification and Community," *Armenian Weekly*, November 8, 2018 <https://armenianweekly.com/2018/11/08/the-armenians-of-cyprus-history-identification-and-community/> (accessed April 16, 2024)

<sup>47</sup> Eric Solsten, ed., "Government and Politics," *Cyprus: A Country Study*, United States Government Publishing Office, Washington, D.C., GPO, for the United States Library of Congress, 1991, <http://countrystudies.us/cyprus/50.htm> (accessed April 11, 2025).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

governments emerged on the island, with only the Greek Cypriot government having received international recognition as being legitimate.<sup>49</sup> In February 1975, the provisional Turkish Cypriot administration declared itself the “Turkish Federated State of Cyprus” (“TFSC”), although it stated its intention to move toward a federal solution with the Greek Cypriots and pledged not to seek recognition as an independent state. In October 1983, after the continued stalemate of United Nations efforts toward a settlement, Turkish Cypriots renamed, what they considered to be their state, the “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” (“TRNC”). While restating their commitment to working toward a federal solution, Turkish Cypriot authorities launched an international campaign for recognition of their state, arguing that recognition would facilitate a solution, by according equal status to the island’s two political entities. Turkey’s government continues to be the only one in the world which recognizes the TRNC.<sup>50</sup>

Greek Cypriots maintained that the Republic of Cyprus, which was established in 1960, continued to exist, with functioning institutions, even without Turkish Cypriot participation.<sup>51</sup> The status of the 1959 treaties that established the republic in 1960 remained in dispute, posing a challenge to the Greek Cypriot claim of legal authority and sovereignty over the whole island (except for the British base areas). The Greek Cypriot position on the legal status of the 1959 agreements is not completely clear. The late president Makarios III attempted to invalidate the Treaty of Guarantee, and later Greek Cypriot leaders claimed it violated their sovereignty, but on occasion they have tried to invoke it. For example, after the 1983 Turkish Cypriot declaration of statehood, the republic's president, Spyros Kyprianou, tried to persuade the British government to intervene under the terms of the Treaty of Guarantee in order to protect Cypriot independence and Greek Cypriots.<sup>52</sup>

In 1974, two significant events occurred with respect to Cyprus’s history. The first was the coup d’état which took place on July 15, 1974, where the coup plotters ousted President Makarios III and replaced him with pro-Enosis nationalist Nikos Sampson as Cyprus’s de facto President, who ruled for eight days, from July 15 to July 23, 1974. The Sampson government’s goal was Greece’s annexation of Cyprus. In the short term, the coupists proclaimed the establishment of the “Hellenic Republic of Cyprus.” The United Nations viewed the coup as illegal. The coup took place because Dimitrios Ioannidis, who was the de facto leader of Greece’s junta at the time, believed that President Makarios was not fully committed to enosis.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.; Barnaby J. Feder, “Britain Asks Consultations on Cyprus,” *New York Times*, November 16, 1983 <https://www.nytimes.com/1983/11/16/world/britain-asks-consultations-on-cyprus.html> (accessed April 11, 2025).

The coup also took place because Ioannidis wanted to strengthen Greece's political influence in Cyprus. In mid-July 1974, the coupists captured the Presidential Palace and forced President Makarios to flee from it.<sup>53</sup> In response to the coup, on July 20, 1974 the Turkish military invaded Cyprus, stating that its action complied with the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee, in that this treaty recognized Cyprus's independence and territorial integrity, while the 1974 coup violated it because Greece's support of that coup contradicted Cyprus's independence and territorial integrity.<sup>54</sup> During that period in July, Turkish forces captured three percent of Cyprus before a ceasefire was declared.<sup>55</sup> The Greek military junta came to an end on July 23, 1974.<sup>56</sup> Then, in August 1974, Turkey invaded Cyprus again, enabling it to capture approximately forty percent of the island.<sup>57</sup> The ceasefire line, which was implemented in August 1974, became the United Nations Buffer Zone in Cyprus, and is called the Green Line.<sup>58</sup>

## NEGOTIATIONS

The search for a settlement, through the establishment of a new federal republic, continued in the late 1980s and in 1990. Negotiations intensified after George Vassiliou's election as President of the Republic of Cyprus in 1988. The United Nations-sponsored negotiations between Greek and Turkish Cypriots, in 1988 through 1990, aimed at outlining a framework for establishing a federal republic that would be bicommunal with respect to constitutional issues and bizonal with respect to territorial concerns. Early

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<sup>53</sup> Lawrence Van Gelder, "Army Takes Over Cyprus in a Coup Led by Greeks; Makarios's Fate in Doubt," *New York Times*, July 16, 1974  
<https://www.nytimes.com/1974/07/16/archives/army-takes-over-cyprus-in-a-coup-led-by-greeks-makarios-fate-in.html> (accessed April 11, 2025).

<sup>54</sup> "No. 5475: Treaty of Guarantee. Signed at Nicosia on 16 August 1960," Article 1, Hellenic Republic [Greece] Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
[https://www.mfa.gr/images/docs/kypriako/treaty\\_of\\_guarantee.pdf](https://www.mfa.gr/images/docs/kypriako/treaty_of_guarantee.pdf) (accessed April 11, 2025).

<sup>55</sup> Patricia Claus, "The Uncanny Parallels Between the Cyprus and Ukraine Invasions," *The Greek Reporter*, July 20, 2022  
<https://greekreporter.com/2022/07/20/turkey-cyprus-invasion-ukraine-russia/> (accessed April 17, 2025).

<sup>56</sup> "The 1974 Turkish Intervention in Cyprus," Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, <https://adst.org/2014/07/the-1974-turkish-intervention-in-cyprus/> (accessed April 17, 2025).

<sup>57</sup> "Turkish invasion of Cyprus, July 20, 1974," *Hellenic Net*,  
<https://www.hellenicnet.org/2024/07/turkish-invasion-of-cyprus-july-20-1974.html> (accessed April 17, 2025).

<sup>58</sup> "About the Buffer Zone," United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), <https://unficyp.unmissions.org/about-buffer-zone> (accessed April 17, 2025).

optimism that President Vassiliou would be the catalytic force to bring the talks to a successful conclusion was dampened when those negotiations concluded unsuccessfully in early 1990. There had been tentative progress on closing the gap between Greek Cypriot demands for freedom of movement, property, and settlement, on the one hand, and the Turkish Cypriot demand for strict bizonality with considerable authority to the two provinces or states, on the other. However, the negotiations were encumbered by deep mistrust between the two sides and a growing conviction that the Turkish Cypriot side was more inclined to work for its separate status than for power sharing in a unitary state with Greek Cypriots.<sup>59</sup>

United Nations-led talks on the status of Cyprus resumed in December 1999 to prepare the ground for meaningful negotiations leading to a comprehensive settlement. The Republic of Cyprus's government did not recognize any sovereignty that the Northern Cypriot administration may have had, and therefore the Republic of Cyprus did not allow international flights or free trade with the north. In the run-up to 2004, the Annan Plan for Cyprus, a United Nations proposal for reunification and broad political power-sharing between Greek and Turkish Cypriots was developed, calling for simultaneous referendums, one in northern Cyprus and the other in the south.<sup>60</sup> These referendums which were held on April 24, 2004 resulted in the majority Greek Cypriot population voting against the UN Plan (with 75% of those voters voting against it), whereas the Turkish Cypriot population voted in favor of the plan (with 65% voting in favor of it). These outcomes resulted in the plan's defeat.<sup>61</sup> Subsequent attempts to resolve this political problem in Cyprus have

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<sup>59</sup> Solsten.

<sup>60</sup> Susan Sachs, "Greek Cypriots Reject a U.N. Peace Plan," *New York Times*, April 25, 2004 <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/25/world/greek-cypriots-reject-a-un-peace-plan.html> (accessed April 11, 2025).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. On February 11, 2014, the leaders of the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities, Nicos Anastasiades and Derviş Eroğlu, respectively, announced a joint declaration which stated that (1) the status quo was unacceptable; (2) they were committed to structured negotiations in a results-oriented manner with all core issues on the table; (3) the final settlement will be based on a bi-communal, bi-zonal federation with political equality, as stated in the relevant Security Council Resolutions and related agreements; (4) the united Cyprus federation shall result, after the settlement's approval through separate simultaneous referendums; and (5) the appointed representatives would be fully empowered to discuss any issue at any time and should enjoy parallel access to all stakeholders and interested parties in the process (Jean Christou, "Joint Declaration: Final Version as Agreed Between the Two Leaders," *Cyprus Mail Archives*, February 11, 2014 <https://archive.cyprus-mail.com/2014/02/11/joint-declaration-final-version-as-agreed-between-the-two-leaders/> (accessed April 16, 2025). For ongoing updates about the Cyprus Talks, see "Cyprus Talks: In-Depth Coverage of Ongoing Peace Negotiations and Diplomatic Efforts on the Cyprus Problem, Offering Detailed Insights into the Process," *Cyprus*

had, at best, limited success.<sup>62</sup>

Along these lines, relations between Greek and Turkish Cypriots have continued to be tense since 2017, when negotiations under the United Nations' auspices to reunify Cyprus as a bizonal, bicomunal federation came to a pause. The ongoing Cyprus talks are significant because sovereignty disputes between Greek and Turkish Cypriots leave the latter isolated in the island's north, inhibit development (including of offshore hydrocarbon deposits), hinder efforts to address issues of mutual concern, and further heighten frictions in an increasingly militarized region.<sup>63</sup> From 2005 onwards, negotiations have focused on the redefinition of the political status of Cyprus and the search for a bicomunal solution. During this period, there have been several rounds of talks mediated by the Special Representatives of the United Nations Secretary General.<sup>64</sup>

In March 2025, Greek Cypriot leader, Nikos Christodoulides, and Turkish Cypriot Leader, Ersin Tatar, gathered in Geneva, Switzerland along with

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*Mail*, <https://cyprus-mail.com/category/cyprus/cyprus-talks/> (accessed April 16, 2025).

<sup>62</sup> In October 2014, the talks stalled as a result of a crisis ensuing from Turkey's sending of a warship to the Republic of Cyprus-controlled waters, as part of a crisis over the exploration of offshore natural gas reserves. Anastasiades refused to attend the meeting on October 9, 2014. Talks did not resume until May 2015, after the election of Mustafa Akıncı as the Turkish Cypriot president in April 2015. As of September 2, 2018, public discussions continued about the possibility of restarting negotiations ("Turkey 'Disappointed' over Stalled Cyprus Talks" *Anadolu Agency*, November 4, 2014, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/turkey-disappointed-over-stalled-cyprus-talks/104851> (accessed April 16, 2024); "Anastasiadis forwarded his decision to the UN!" *Kıbrıs Postası*, October 7, 2014, [https://www.kibrispostasi.com/c35-KIBRIS\\_HABERLERI/n143438-anastasiadis-kararini-bmye-ilettiler](https://www.kibrispostasi.com/c35-KIBRIS_HABERLERI/n143438-anastasiadis-kararini-bmye-ilettiler) (accessed April 16, 2024; translated into English by Google Translate); "Greek, Turkish Cypriot Leaders to Discuss Stalled Peace Talks," *Voice of America* and *Reuters*, April 28, 2015 <https://www.voanews.com/a/greek-turkish-cypriot-leaders-to-discuss-stalled-peace-talks/2737460.html> (accessed April 16, 2025); "2014 Cyprus Talks" [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014\\_Cyprus\\_talks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014_Cyprus_talks) (accessed April 16, 2025); "Lute's Consultations will Judge whether Settlement is Desired, FM [Foreign Minister] Says," *CyprusMail Online*, September 2, 2018 <https://archive.cyprus-mail.com/2018/09/02/lutes-consultations-will-judge-whether-settlement-is-desired-fm-says/> (accessed April 11, 2025); "Cyprus Talks Archives" at *CyprusMail Online* <https://cyprus-mail.com/category/cyprus/cyprus-talks/> (accessed April 11, 2025).

<sup>63</sup> "An Island Divided: Next Steps for Troubled Cyprus"; BBC News, "Cyprus Profile - Timeline," October 17, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17219505> (accessed April, 16, 2024).

<sup>64</sup> Meryem Harac, "Cyprus Negotiation Process: A Historical Analysis," *EuroPolitika*, October 18, 2023, <https://www.europolitika.com/cyprus-negotiation-process-a-historical-analysis/>.

negotiators from Greece, Turkey, and the United Kingdom at the request of the United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres.<sup>65</sup> The Secretary General stated that Christodoulides and Tatar agreed to the following initiatives, in order to build trust: (1) the opening of four crossing points; (2) demining; (3) the creation of a technical committee on youth, together with initiatives on the environment and climate change, including the impacts on mining areas; and (4) the establishment of solar energy in the buffer zone as well as the restoration of cemeteries.<sup>66</sup>

In the absence of a permanent agreement, the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), which was established in 1964, remains in Cyprus in order to supervise ceasefire lines and a buffer zone, while working to support humanitarian activities.<sup>67</sup> Guterres stated that the negotiations in March 2025 had made “meaningful progress.” He also expressed his hope that the confidence-building measures, together with the decision to have a subsequent meeting and the acceptance by all of the appointment of a Special Envoy on Cyprus to prepare the next steps, demonstrate the sense of commitment and urgency that he believed were important.<sup>68</sup> Increased stability in Cyprus, and the possible success of future negotiations, can have a positive impact on Armenians in Cyprus, in that as an ethnic and religious minority, Armenians can benefit from peace and security on the island.<sup>69</sup>

#### CYPRUS’S LAWS RELATED TO CITIZENSHIP AND NATURALIZATION

Regarding citizenship with respect to Armenians and others living in Cyprus,<sup>70</sup> when Cyprus became independent in 1960, persons of Cypriot

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<sup>65</sup> “Cyprus Talks Show ‘New Atmosphere’ Between Divided Island’s Leaders: Guterres” *UN News* [United Nations News], March 18, 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/03/1161226> (accessed April 16, 2025).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* For additional information about negotiations related to Cyprus, see Cyprus Dialogue Forum, Lib Guides, “Political Guide: Chronology” <https://libguides.cydialogue.org/political> (accessed April 16, 2024) and United Nations Digital Library, Security Council, “Cyprus,” [https://digitallibrary.un.org/search?cc=Security+Council&ln=en&p=Cyprus&f=&action\\_search=Search&rm=&sf=year&so=d&rg=100&c=Security+Council&c=&of=hb&fti=0&fct\\_\\_1=Reports&fct\\_\\_2=Security+Council&fti=0](https://digitallibrary.un.org/search?cc=Security+Council&ln=en&p=Cyprus&f=&action_search=Search&rm=&sf=year&so=d&rg=100&c=Security+Council&c=&of=hb&fti=0&fct__1=Reports&fct__2=Security+Council&fti=0) (accessed April 16, 2024).

<sup>69</sup> “Cyprus Talks Show ‘New Atmosphere’ Between Divided Island’s Leaders: Guterres.”

<sup>70</sup> Constitution of Cyprus, Articles 15-18; Treaty No. 5476. United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Greece and Turkey and Cyprus. Treaty (with annexes, schedules and detailed plans) concerning the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus. Signed at Nicosia, on 16 August 1960. (commonly called the

origin became citizens of the Republic of Cyprus.<sup>71</sup> Some had previously been Ottoman citizens. However, on November 5, 1914 Britain declared war on the Ottoman Empire and annexed Cyprus, at which time all Ottoman citizens, who were ordinarily residents of Cyprus, became British subjects because of that annexation. In 1925, Britain declared Cyprus a British crown colony. In 1948, under the British Nationality Act, persons of Cypriot origin became citizens of Britain, its colonies, and Cyprus. Being a British subject carried important rights to live and work in Britain, including employment in Crown service, and the right to vote in elections.<sup>72</sup>

One goal of independence-legislation for Cyprus involved embedding provisions related to citizenship into treaty law, which was established in the late 1950s, and into Cyprus's 1960 constitution.<sup>73</sup> Annex D of Cyprus's 1960 Treaty of Establishment provides for the automatic acquisition of Cypriot citizenship by all persons born in Cyprus before Cypriot independence or descended in a male line from Cypriots ordinarily resident in Cyprus at any time during the five years before independence on August 16, 1960. All other persons of Cypriot origin, not ordinarily resident in Cyprus, could be granted citizenship on application, subject to specific conditions. As for people who were born after August 16, 1960, a person became a Cypriot citizen if his father, and after 1999 his mother, was a citizen of Cyprus at the time of the person's birth.<sup>74</sup>

These laws applied to Armenians living in Cyprus. Some of those Armenians became British citizens and left Cyprus for Britain. While Armenians left Cyprus for Britain at different times, some left Cyprus in the years after 1960 because of their fears of instability in Cyprus after Cypriot independence. These Armenians' beliefs about the possibilities of greater career opportunities in Britain, as British citizens, were some of the factors that motivated them to move there. The hostility, which some Turkish Cypriots directed against the Armenians in 1963 and 1964, for example, combined with Armenians' memories of the Armenian Genocide, also

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“Treaty of Establishment”), Annex D, Sections 1-8, Hellenic Republic [Greece] Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [https://www.mfa.gr/images/docs/kypriako/treaty\\_of\\_establishment.pdf](https://www.mfa.gr/images/docs/kypriako/treaty_of_establishment.pdf) (accessed April 11, 2025).

<sup>71</sup> Alper Ali Riza, “Cypriot Origin Equals Cypriot Citizenship,” *CyprusMail Online*, February 18, 2018 <https://archive.cyprus-mail.com/2018/02/18/cypriot-origin-equals-cypriot-citizenship/> (accessed May 24, 2025).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

catalyzed Armenians' decisions to leave Cyprus for Britain, Soviet Armenia, and other places.<sup>75</sup>

With respect to naturalization in Cyprus, in accordance with the amendments to Cyprus's Civil Registry Laws 2002-2023, which were published in the official gazette on December 19, 2023, the criteria for obtaining Cypriot citizenship through naturalization, by persons who have been legal residents of Cyprus, were revised.<sup>76</sup> Some goals of those changes involved a desire to streamline the citizenship acquisition process, rectify past deficiencies, and enhance safeguards. Regarding general requirements for naturalization, applicants must have a minimum of seven years of legal residence in Cyprus within the ten years preceding the application. In addition, there must be a continuous legal stay of twelve months immediately prior to the submission of the application. Absences of up to ninety days within this twelve-month period do not disrupt continuity.<sup>77</sup> Applicants are required to demonstrate good character, by providing a clean criminal-record certificate or certificates. In addition, applicants must demonstrate language proficiency in Greek, knowledge of Cyprus's social and political status, proof of a suitable place of residence in Cyprus, evidence of financial stability, and intent to stay in Cyprus.<sup>78</sup>

There are special provisions of Cyprus's naturalization laws, which apply to highly- skilled employees. Such laws apply to highly-skilled professionals of specific classifications of companies, including companies of foreign interests, or companies operating in the shipping, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, technology, or innovation sectors.<sup>79</sup> In order to fall under the criteria of highly-skilled employees, such persons must be (1) holders of a temporary residence permit, employed as director, specialist, or key personnel; or (2) holders of any type of immigration status in Cyprus, in a position relevant to their academic and professional qualifications and past experience, while being remunerated by a minimum monthly gross salary of EUR 2,500. There are also requirements for a residency period, language requirements, provisions for family members, and an option to have the naturalization application processed in an expedited manner, for an additional

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<sup>75</sup> Interviews with a scholar of Armenian Studies in May and June of 2019; Alexander-Michael Hadjilyra, *The Armenians of Cyprus*, Kalaydjian Foundation, n.p., 2009, 16-17 [https://www.academia.edu/578323/The\\_Armenians\\_of\\_Cyprus](https://www.academia.edu/578323/The_Armenians_of_Cyprus) (accessed April 17, 2025).

<sup>76</sup> Deloitte, "Update on requirements for citizenship through naturalization," *Deloitte tax@hand*, December 2, 2024, <https://www.taxathand.com/article/38180/Cyprus/2024/Update-on-requirements-for-citizenship-through-naturalization> (accessed May 24, 2025).

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

fee.<sup>80</sup> In light of the fact that there are many highly-educated Armenians in Cyprus, the naturalization laws related to highly-skilled professionals may be applicable to at least some of them. More generally, the flexibility of the naturalization laws and the fact that Armenians are held in high regard in Cyprus, bodes well for naturalization for at least some Armenians, who live in that country.

## LAWS RELATED TO INHERITANCE

The Civil Code is one of the most complex sets of laws in Cyprus. It contains provisions on some of the most important matters related to family relations, including wills and succession.<sup>81</sup> The Cyprus Inheritance Law is one of the most important acts providing for the division of an estate upon death. According to Cyprus's inheritance law, succession applies to an estate, while local courts can decide on the succession of real estate property owned by foreign citizens in Cyprus. There are two ways of dividing an estate: (1) based on the last will of the deceased or (2) based on intestacy regulations which apply, when there is no will.<sup>82</sup> Cypriot citizens and non-Cypriots, who own assets in that country and want to organize the division of their belongings upon their deaths, may arrange with lawyers in Cyprus to have wills established, which could be beneficial to the owners and potential inheritors of such assets.<sup>83</sup>

The rules of inheritance apply to all Cypriot citizens and to citizens of other countries, who own real estate in Cyprus. Moreover, the inheritance rules apply to foreign citizens living in Cyprus and persons who intend to relocate to the country.<sup>84</sup> The principles applied in cases of inheritance depend on the following factors:

1. in case the deceased has no spouse and children, then the inheritance is distributed to the deceased's parents or descendants;
2. in case the deceased has a surviving spouse, then the surviving spouse will inherit half of the estate and the other half is devolved to the deceased's parents or descendants;
3. in case the deceased is not married but has children, then the succession is divided between them;
4. if the deceased has a spouse and children, then the estate is divided between them in equal shares.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> E.R. Team Global Consultants, "Inheritance in Cyprus," Lawyers-Cyprus.com, <https://lawyers-cyprus.com/inheritance-in-cyprus/> (accessed April 16, 2025).

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

Cyprus's inheritance law is divided into two parts: the first one covers the disposable section, where the assets are divided based on what is written in the will, and the compulsory section, where the assets are divided in accordance with the Wills and Succession Law in Cyprus. Foreign citizens, who own assets in Cyprus and abroad and have already drafted a will for assets located outside this country and want to arrange part of the estate in Cyprus, may consult with lawyers in Cyprus to have their wills written in such a way that will enable their heirs to inherit their assets, in accordance with the testators' wishes and the law. In such cases, it is important for the two wills to contain similar dispositions, in order for the heirs to benefit from the testators' wishes. In cases where deceased persons have no will, the Cypriot laws determine the inheritance according to the rules of forced heirship. In these cases, the Cypriot estate will be divided into a disposable section and a compulsory section. The disposable section depends on the surviving relatives, who will receive between a quarter and half, or even the entire estate. Even if similar to the disposable section in terms of surviving relatives, the compulsory section refers to the spouse receiving a certain share of the estate, the other parts of the estate being divided between the remaining heirs.<sup>86</sup>

According to Cyprus's inheritance law, the statutory portion of an estate is divided between close relatives of a deceased person. These are the spouse and natural children or grandchildren; in case the parents have passed away. The division of assets is made under the following rules: the living spouse will receive fifty percent of the estate and/or the descendants can receive up to seventy-five percent based on how many there are. If there are no close relatives, the entire estate will be divided in accordance with the dispositions of the will. Those, who have drafted wills in Cyprus, can have between twenty-five and fifty percent of their estate divided according to their wishes. Any portion surpassing these percentages can lead to the invalidity of the will.<sup>87</sup>

In terms of taxes, after a person passes away, a transfer tax must be paid to the tax authorities, in accordance with the following stipulations:

1. a four percent tax of the value of the estate must be paid, if the transfer is made from parents to children;
2. the tax is eight percent, if the transfer is made between spouses;
3. an eight percent tax applies, if the assets are transferred between third-degree family members.<sup>88</sup>

The relative flexibility of inheritance laws in Cyprus may be advantageous for Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities in that country, in that those laws permit citizens of Cyprus and non-citizens, who reside there, to

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

live under those laws, while potentially benefiting from them, as both testators and heirs. Armenian testators, who may be citizens of another country and live in Cyprus, can, with the assistance of an attorney, have their wills written in such a way that their non-Cypriot and Cypriot wills are consistent, so as to increase the probability that the heirs, whom they designate, will receive the kind of inheritance which the testators indicate. This flexibility can provide significant peace of mind for Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities, who live in Cyprus.<sup>89</sup>

## CYPRUS'S ECONOMY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR ARMENIANS IN CYPRUS

Cyprus's economic crisis, which lasted from 2010 to 2017, had a negative impact on many people in that country including Armenians. Within the context of that crisis, there was significant damage to Cyprus's banks, severe restrictions in the availability of credit to businesses, increased public debt, as well as widespread discontent.<sup>90</sup> Yet, the future for Armenians in Cyprus seems moderately positive, in that they are well-embedded in Cypriot culture and have founded many organizations that have flourished. Armenians can also worship and practice their religion freely. At the same time, prospects for Cyprus's future, economically, may be promising. For example, according to the most recent statistics from the World Bank, Cyprus's labor-force participation-rate rose from 64% in 2015 to 68% in 2023;<sup>91</sup> Cyprus's gross domestic product rose from \$19.91 billion in 2015 to \$33.89 in 2023;<sup>92</sup> and its per capita gross national income rose from \$26,090 in 2015 to \$32,090 in 2023.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Gregoris Ioannou and Giorgos Charalambous, "The Social and Political Impact of the Cyprus Economic Crisis (2010-2017)," Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, November 2017, [https://cyprus.fes.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/documents/CyprusEconomicCrisis\\_en\\_v03\\_DIGITAL\\_\\_002\\_.pdf](https://cyprus.fes.de/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/CyprusEconomicCrisis_en_v03_DIGITAL__002_.pdf) (accessed July 17, 2025).

<sup>91</sup> The World Bank, Line Graph at "Labor Force Participation Rate, Total (% of Total Population Ages 15+) (Modeled ILO [International Labour Organization] Estimate)," Cyprus, January 07, 2025, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.ZS?locations=CY> (accessed April 11, 2025).

<sup>92</sup> The World Bank, Line Graph at "Cyprus GDP (current US\$), 1975-2023" <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=CY> (accessed April 11, 2025).

<sup>93</sup> The World Bank, Line Graph at "GNI Per Capita, Atlas Method (current US\$): 1977-2023," Cyprus, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.CD?locations=CY> (accessed April 11, 2025).

In terms of the future prospects for Cyprus's economy, according to an International Monetary Fund (IMF) report, dated March 28, 2025, Cyprus has demonstrated significant flexibility to some negative pressures on its economy. Cyprus's growth has remained among the highest with respect to other countries that use the Euro. That country has been mainly supported by foreign investment, strong tourism, and a boom in the information and communication technology sector. While inflation is declining, it remains above two percent and there may be indications of moderate overheating. The IMF team states that Cyprus's fiscal performance continues to be strong, with the country's debt "on a firm downward trajectory."<sup>94</sup> While the IMF expressed some concern about inflation in Cyprus, its overall projection about Cyprus's economy, in the near future, is positive, which bodes well for most of Cyprus's population, including the Armenians, who live there.<sup>95</sup>

In conclusion, the strengthening of Turkish nationalism and Islam in Turkey and its foreign policies could pose a threat to Greek and Armenian Cypriots, particularly if Turkey decides to use nationalism and Islam as a means of expanding its political influence in Cyprus.<sup>96</sup> In this vein, Turkey's expansionism and that of its allies with regard to many areas including Armenia, Artsakh, Azerbaijan, the Black Sea, Iraq, the Mediterranean Sea, and Syria is a cause for significant concern, for Armenians inside and outside Cyprus.<sup>97</sup> Yet, the fact that Armenians are embedded in Cypriot society, together with Greece's commitment to protect its interests in the Republic of Cyprus, may bode well for the future of the Armenians in Cyprus.

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<sup>94</sup> International Monetary Fund, "Cyprus: Staff Concluding Statement of the 2025 Article IV Mission," March 28, 2025, <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2025/03/27/cs-032825-cyprus-staff-concluding-statement-of-the-2025-article-iv-mission> (accessed May 24, 2025).

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Baboulias.

<sup>97</sup> Kali Robinson, "Turkey's Growing Foreign Policy Ambitions," Council on Foreign Relations, July 11, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/turkeys-growing-foreign-policy-ambitions> (May 24, 2025).

## SAUDI ARABIA



### RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC DEMOGRAPHICS

Saudi Arabia has a population of approximately 36.5 million.<sup>1</sup> Ninety percent of Saudi Arabia's population is comprised of Arabs from the Arabian Peninsula, or areas of the Middle East that are close to it, and ten percent are comprised of Afro-Asians.<sup>2</sup> Approximately 85% to 90% of Saudi citizens are Sunni Muslims, and approximately 10% to 12% are Shia Muslims. The rest of the population is comprised of small numbers of Eastern Orthodox Christians, Protestants, Roman Catholics, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and Sikhs,

<sup>1</sup> "Saudi Arabia," *World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/saudi-arabia/#people-and-society> (accessed August 4, 2025).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

almost all of whom are expatriates, who live in Saudi Arabia.<sup>3</sup> Approximately 1500 Armenians live in Saudi Arabia.<sup>4</sup> Even though Saudi Arabia has a large expatriate community of various religions, which comprises more than 30% of the country's population, Saudi law restricts most forms of public religious expression, which are inconsistent with the government-sanctioned interpretation of Sunni Islam.<sup>5</sup>

#### ARMENIANS IN SAUDI ARABIA

Armenian-Saudi Arabian relations in recent history date back to the Genocide during World War I, when Armenians were deported by the Ottoman government as far south as Transjordan and Palestine.<sup>6</sup> While many Armenians perished because of exposure, hunger, diseases, and outright massacres, others survived by engaging in odd jobs or being absorbed among Arab tribes in the region. When the British and Arab forces of Sharif Hussein of Mecca, who was Prince and King of the Hijaz and ruled from 1908 to 1924, began to capture the two aforementioned territories from the Ottomans, Sharif Hussein issued proclamations ordering Arab tribesmen to relinquish the Armenian captives, who were held among them, to the Armenian nation. His son, Amir Faisal, ruler of Syria from 1918 to 1920, showed the same humanitarian zeal vis-à-vis enslaved Armenians. Despite the good intentions, many Armenians were not liberated, and over time were assimilated within Muslim Arab society. Today, some twenty-one royal Saudis are known to carry Armenian blood.<sup>7</sup>

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was established in 1932, and six years later large oil reserves were discovered there. The Arab American Oil Company (ARAMCO) took charge of the oil industry in Saudi Arabia. During the 1970s and 1980s, the control of oil gradually passed to the Saudi Arabian government, which eventually took over ARAMCO and renamed it Saudi ARAMCO in 1988.<sup>8</sup> The oil revenues amounted to \$40 billion by 1977 and \$90 billion by 1980. This drastic increase allowed the Saudi financial system to develop and expand. The government set up an economic development plan which enabled the transformation of Saudi Arabia from a traditional tribal economy to a modern industrialized society. The government began to build the kingdom's infrastructure and tried to improve the well-being of its citizens.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Joshua Project, "Armenian[s] in Saudi Arabia," [https://joshuaproject.net/people\\_groups/10429/SA](https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/10429/SA) (accessed August 4, 2025).

<sup>5</sup> "Saudi Arabia," *World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/saudi-arabia/#people-and-society> (accessed August 4, 2025).

<sup>6</sup> Hasmig Kelligian Baran, "Armenian Temporary Migrants in Saudi Arabia between the 1970s and 1990s," *Armenians of the Gulf Arab States*, 53.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 53-54.

The construction of roads, bridges, hospitals, military bases, airports, universities, schools, and housing facilities began to take place. This economic boom required foreign labor. Armenian professionals from Syria, Lebanon, the United States, and the United Kingdom constituted a portion of that labor force.<sup>9</sup>

Two factors contributed to the participation of the Armenians in Saudi development: (1) the Second Five-Year Development Plan of the Saudi government, which was launched in 1975 and (2) Lebanon's civil war, which began in that year.<sup>10</sup> The Second Five-Year Development Plan aimed to modernize and industrialize the entire country in a few years. The inadequate number of local professionals to meet the demands made the employment of foreign workers necessary in such fields as oil, construction, energy, commerce, finance, education, and health services. This situation prompted the government and private sector to offer lucrative employment terms that attracted foreigners from the West and the Arab world. By early 1980, foreigners outnumbered Saudis in the labor force by nearly two-to-one.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, the onset of the Lebanese Civil war in 1975 and the related political uncertainties created unsafe conditions for the people in the region. The presence of Syrian troops in Lebanon presented a potential threat to Syrian nationals who were working in Lebanon without work permits or who had escaped mandatory military service. Therefore, searching for safer havens for living and working outside of Lebanon became necessary. ARAMCO's and other companies' active recruitment for employment in Saudi Arabia attracted young Armenian professionals in various fields. The Saudi government encouraged local businesses and independent Saudi contractors and manufacturers to expand their ventures. Consequently, Lebanese and Syrian firms began to open branches in Saudi Arabia in partnership with local businessmen, and transfer their employees there.<sup>12</sup>

The inception of an economic development plan in 1970 had a great impact on the improvement of health care in Saudi Arabia. Health care professionals were recruited from outside the country. Armenians were among the recruits who worked at the Riyadh Military Hospital, for example.<sup>13</sup> The Armenians primarily lived and worked in the Eastern, Western, and Middle provinces of Saudi Arabia. In the Eastern Province, the centers were Dhahran, Dammam, and al-Khobar, and various Aramco sites, such as Jubail, Ras Tannura, Abqaiq, and Udailiyah. In the Western Province, Armenians worked in Jeddah. Most Armenians worked in Riyadh, which is in the Middle Province.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-55.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

Most contracts included high salaries, housing accommodations, transportation, school tuition, paid tickets for vacation, domestic services, and drivers among other benefits. In general, expatriates were able to save most of their earnings because there was no state income tax, and the cost of living was relatively low.<sup>15</sup>

By the 1990s, incomes were not as lucrative as before, given the slowing down of some infrastructure projects. There were no schools for children beyond middle school, so certain families left to provide their children with the opportunity to further their education. The desire to preserve Armenian identity similarly compelled families to depart. Others had made adequate savings to start new lives elsewhere, especially in the United States and Canada. Usually, Saudi-Armenian business partnerships did not continue abroad. However, most Armenians pursued similar careers after leaving Saudi Arabia; only a small percentage pursued other occupations. At the same time, the Armenians maintained their social networks and bonds among themselves in the new host countries of the West. Yet, some Armenians continue to work in Saudi Arabia. However, the development of other Gulf countries in recent decades has provided alternate destination points for Armenian workers, especially those from other parts of the Middle East.<sup>16</sup> Armenians have continued to live and work in Saudi Arabia until the present. Most of those Armenians work in highly skilled professional fields.<sup>17</sup> Yet, they face similar restrictions as most other Christians in Saudi Arabia, in that they are not allowed to worship freely.<sup>18</sup>

## INTRODUCTION TO CONSTITUTIONAL HISTORY OF SAUDI ARABIA

Following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990 and the First Gulf War, which took place from August 1990 to April 1991, Saudi Arabia's King Fahd issued the following royal decree, on March 1, 1992, which is the date that the kingdom established its constitution:<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>17</sup> James Drummond, "Armenians Have Sought Their Fortunes and Found Sanctuary in Arab Countries for Centuries," *Arab News*, December 23, 2021, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1991596/middle-east> (accessed August 5, 2025).

<sup>18</sup> "Saudi Arabia," *World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/saudi-arabia/> (accessed August 5, 2025).

<sup>19</sup> Ali M. Mehaimed, "The Constitutional System of Saudi Arabia: A Conspectus." *Arab Law Quarterly*, 8(1):1993, 30; Jon Armajani, "Saudi Arabia's Constitution and Expatriates," *Armenians of the Gulf Arab States*, 33-52, <https://haigrepository.haigazian.edu.lb/items/f58f80bc-19ac-41c3-b4f5-37b5d247a4e1> (accessed May 20, 2025).

With the help of God, we, Fahd Bin Abdulaziz al-Saud, Monarch of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, having taken into consideration the public interest, and in view of the progress of the State in various fields and out of the desire to achieve the objectives we are pursuing, have decreed the following: That the promulgation of the Basic Law of Governance is as the attached text. That all regulations, orders and decrees in force shall remain valid when this Basic Law comes into force, until they are amended to conform with it. That this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette, and shall come into force on the date of its publication.<sup>20</sup>

The writing of this 1992 constitution was comprised of the codifying of principles which the writers derived from Islamic, traditional, and international sources.<sup>21</sup> Thus, this constitution did not establish a new constitutional framework. Rather, it formalized laws and customs which government officials had been applying for many decades. People in the Arabian Peninsula had lived under those laws and customs for centuries before the establishment of the modern Saudi State in 1932.<sup>22</sup>

#### BEFORE THE CONSTITUTION

Saudi Arabia did not have a constitution before March 1, 1992. Prior to that date, the kingdom was governed by a system of royal decrees.<sup>23</sup> During that period, the Saudi king had almost absolute power and could issue decrees on various matters. On January 8, 1926, Abdulaziz was crowned king (malik) of the Hijaz, adding this title to his existing position as “Sultan of Najd and its Dependencies.” The new king declared that Sharia was the law of the land and that all four Sunni schools of law deserved respect. In the same year, he promulgated a “constitution” for the Hijaz, named the “Basic Directives of the Kingdom of Hijaz,” which declared that region as a “consultative Islamic State.” The Basic Directives allowed for the formation of a Consultative Council (majlis al-shura) and a Council of Deputies (majlis al-wukala) to be involved in state policymaking, respectively as representative and administrative bodies. The Consultative Council was instructed to develop a

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<sup>20</sup> The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Washington, D.C. “Basic Law of Governance [Constitution],” <https://www.saudiembassy.net/basic-law-governance> (accessed May 12, 2025).

<sup>21</sup> Mehaimeed, 30.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Robert L. Maddex, *Constitutions of the World*, Routledge, London, 1996, 243.

new judicial organization for the Hijaz. When Abdulaziz conquered the Hijaz in 1925, he founded a judicial organization influenced by the Ottomans.<sup>24</sup>

The Ottomans had implemented a system of sharia courts, the panels of which were comprised of one Hanafi chief judge, because the Hanafi school was official in the Ottoman Empire, and three assistant judges, one from each school of law, in view of the fact that many persons in the Hijaz followed the Shafi'i school. In 1927, the king issued a decree stating that the stipulations of the Ottoman laws would remain effective up and until they were replaced by new stipulations. However, many members of the ulama in the Hijaz resisted that decision. At a conference which was held in Mecca in 1927, they issued a fatwa (or Islamic legal opinion), in which they demanded the immediate cancellation of any man-made (in this case Ottoman) laws that had been applicable in the Hijaz, and they contended that only sharia provisions should be applied.<sup>25</sup>

Largely ignoring the reluctant attitude of the ulama toward state-interference in what members of the ulama believed was their domain, Abdulaziz adopted a framework for the courts of the Hijaz in 1927. It was a more elaborate judicial organization with multiple-judge courts, which were, most importantly, summary courts. This legal system initially only applied to the Hijaz. Later, between 1957 and 1960, the system was implemented in the rest of the country.<sup>26</sup>

In Najd, the Wahhabi homeland, a different judicial system had continued to exist until the unification in the late 1950s. Traditionally, the ruler appointed single judges to the major towns, who worked closely with the local governor (amir). A judge was only involved after the attempts of the governor to resolve a conflict amicably had failed. Then, the governor would refer cases to the judge for a ruling according to sharia, and, after judgment, the case would be submitted to the governor for enforcement, if the losing party did not willingly accept the outcome. In the early 1920s, various Sunni schools of law influenced life in the Arabian Peninsula. For example, in Najd, the Hanbali school of law prevailed, whereas in the Hijaz, the Shafi'i and the Hanafi schools of law were predominant.<sup>27</sup>

In 1927, Abdulaziz suggested that a law code based on rulings of all Sunni schools of law be introduced. He faced strong resistance from the Hanbali scholars. In the same year, all Hijazi sharia judges were ordered to apply the Hanbali fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence). Only when this school of law could not provide an answer to a particular question could one refer to the Hanafi,

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<sup>24</sup> Esther Van Eijk, "Sharia and National Law in Saudi Arabia," *Sharia Incorporated: A Comparative Overview of the Legal Systems of Twelve Muslim Countries in Past and Present*, Jan Michiel Otto ed., Leiden University Press, Leiden, 2010, 144.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 144-45.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 145.

Shafi'i, or Maliki schools of law. The Saudi kingdom promoted itself as the cradle of Islam and, as such, the guardian of the holy sites in Mecca and Medina. Likewise, the Saudi legal system claimed an age-old, untainted continuity without interference from Western rulers.<sup>28</sup> In 1938, oil was discovered on the Arabian Peninsula, which had long been a region with economic limitations. The young Saudi kingdom thereby obtained a stable source of income and, after World War II, the country rapidly became more prosperous. In several domains, new legislation was promulgated, in order to keep pace with the economic developments and to advance the transformation of Saudi Arabia into a modern nation-state.<sup>29</sup>

King Abdulaziz died in 1953 and left behind a unified kingdom with a central government, administrative legislation, and a remodeled judicial system. The Saudi royal family firmly held its power. Abdulaziz was succeeded in rule by his sons Saud (1953-1964), Faisal (1964-1975), Khalid (1975-1982), Fahd (1982-2005), Abdullah (2005-2015), and Salman (2015-Present).<sup>30</sup> At the time of this writing, although King Salman is alive, his seventh son Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman, who was appointed as Saudi Arabia's prime minister in 2022 functions as the de facto leader of that country.<sup>31</sup>

In November 1953, a month before King Abdulaziz's death, he ordered the establishment of a Council of Ministers. However, it took King Saud until 1958 to promulgate a regulation for the Council of Ministers, establishing the regulatory authority of the government. It granted the council authority to formulate policies related to domestic, foreign, financial, economic, and all other public affairs. The regulation determined that an ordinance (nizam) could only be proclaimed by royal decree when it had been approved by the Council of Ministers, and would only become effective after it had been published in the official government gazette. The ulama had no formal role in this legislative process. Yet, they were usually consulted in order to ensure that a nizam was in accordance with sharia.<sup>32</sup>

Beginning in 1957, King Saud embarked on implementing the above-mentioned unification of the judiciary throughout the kingdom. Three years later, both systems were united under the Presidency of the Judiciary, located in Riyadh. The Presidency of the Judiciary remained responsible for many

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>31</sup> Karen Elliott House, "Profile of a Prince: Promise and Peril in Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030," Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, April 2019, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/profile-prince-promise-and-peril-mohammed-bin-salmans-vision-2030> (accessed May 13, 2025).

<sup>32</sup> Esther Van Eijk, 147.

religious and legal matters, such as the issuing of fatwas, supervision of religious education, and appointments of persons in important religious positions until it ceased to exist in 1975. In 1964, on the royal family's initiative, King Saud was replaced by Crown Prince Faisal.<sup>33</sup>

King Faisal introduced a series of far-reaching reforms, in areas such as finance, education, health care, and the legal system. From 1970 to 1975 the national court system was further developed and formalized under the Judiciary Regulation of 1975. The Presidency of the Judiciary ceased to exist, and its tasks were assigned to new institutions, among which were the Supreme Judicial Council, the Council of Senior Ulama, and the Ministry of Justice which was established in 1970.

After that, the courts fell under the administrative domain of the Ministry of Justice.<sup>34</sup> In 1971, King Faisal set up the Council of Senior Ulama with the primary task of providing advice to the king and his government. The council has played a crucial role in the development of government policy since that time.<sup>35</sup> Alongside this modernization, the Saudi government attempted to maintain its position as the guardian of Islam, with the Saud family as the rulers. They believed that their governance was based on the Quran and sharia. King Faisal stated that a constitution was unnecessary because his government has the Quran, which from his perspective, is the best constitution. King Faisal was murdered by one of his nephews in 1975, and he was succeeded by his brother Khalid.<sup>36</sup>

King Khalid delegated much of his power to Crown Prince Fahd. During the 1970s, modernization in education and health care improved the lives of many Saudis. The Saudi government, which was Sunni Muslim, viewed with suspicion the success of Iran's Islamic revolution, in 1979, that was led by the Shia leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. The Saudi government continued to invest large amounts of money to spread Wahhabi Islam, in part to resist the spread of the Shia revolution's effects. At the same time, the Saudi regime contributed millions of dollars to the building of mosques, Islamic centers, and schools in many parts of the world. In June 1982, King Khalid died, and was succeeded by his brother Fahd who later added the title "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques" to his name.<sup>37</sup>

In August 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait. King Fahd, with the support of the Council of Senior Ulama, gave permission for the stationing of foreign, mostly American, troops on Saudi territory as part of the military operation Desert Storm in order to liberate Kuwait from Iraq. Large expenses as a result of the First Gulf War, from 1990 until 1991, and a sharp decline in oil revenues

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 149-50.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 150.

following the decrease in oil prices in the 1980s had a negative impact on the Saudi economy. Social services could no longer be financed, and employment opportunities declined. The deteriorating economic situation and permanent presence of American troops led to a growing dissatisfaction among the population.<sup>38</sup>

## WRITING OF THE CONSTITUTION

In 1990, a group of businessmen, academics, and journalists in Saudi Arabia submitted a petition for political reform. They asked for the creation of a new consultative council, equality among all citizens, more freedom of the press, and an improvement in the position of women. On November 6, 1990, forty women drove in a convoy of cars through the streets of Riyadh, protesting the custom that forbade women from driving cars. This protest, however, had the opposite effect: the government punished the women involved and proclaimed a formal law forbidding women to drive cars. On the other side of the spectrum, traditionalists called for stricter observance of sharia and a greater role for the ulama in decision-making. Some Islamists, often young Saudis from urban middle-class backgrounds, claimed that the government fell short of observing Islamic tenets. They blamed the government for being corrupt and incompetent, worsened by the increasing Western influence and Saudi dependence on the West.<sup>39</sup>

Faced with domestic pressure for change, King Fahd felt compelled to introduce political reforms. On March 1, 1992, he promulgated the “Basic Ordinance of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia,” the “Ordinance of the Consultative Council,” and the “Ordinance of the Provinces.” These laws formed the first codified constitutional framework for Saudi Arabia. In an interview three weeks after the introduction of the Basic Ordinance, King Fahd clearly stated that it was not Saudi Arabia’s intention to transform the country into a Western democracy.<sup>40</sup>

The Basic Ordinance met the petitioners’ demand for a new consultative council (*majlis al-shura*), replacing the one that was established in 1926. The 1992 Consultative Council was entitled to implement regulations and bylaws to address the public’s interest, in accordance with the principles of sharia. The Council was originally comprised of sixty members, all of whom were appointed by the king for a period of four years. Membership of the Council has increased several times: in 1997 and later in 2005, for example, bringing the total number of members to one hundred and fifty. Seated in the Council are ulama, academics, businesspersons, and diplomats. In November 2003, the powers of the Council were expanded. After that, the Council was permitted to initiate legislation without prior approval from the king. The Council’s

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

influence over legislation and policy has steadily increased, as its legislative proposals have usually been adopted by the king. In addition, on more than one occasion, the Council has taken stances against governmental efforts to impose taxes and fees.<sup>41</sup>

## RESPONSES TO THE CONSTITUTION

King Fahd's attempts to introduce reforms were, however, unsuccessful in quelling the voices of some Islamists and reform-minded liberals. Young Islamists in particular insisted that the Saudi monarchy should enforce the Islamic norms more strictly. In the 1990s, radical Islamists attacked foreign targets within Saudi Arabia. In June 1996, for example, a truck bomb near an American military compound near Dhahran killed nineteen persons and wounded hundreds of people. As a result of the Saudi government's reaction, some Islamists moved to other countries, such as Sudan and Afghanistan. One example was Usama Bin Laden, whose Saudi citizenship was removed by the Saudi government.<sup>42</sup>

In this context, fifteen of the nineteen militants of the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States were Saudi nationals. As a result, under pressure from some western countries, King Fahd openly started a war on the Islamists and Islamist groups, who opposed the Saudi government, and he declared that the militant actions of groups, such as al-Qaida, are prohibited within Islam. However, Islamist militants continued to engage in attacks in Saudi Arabia. In May 2003, a series of coordinated attacks were executed on Western residential compounds in Riyadh, killing thirty-five and wounding another one hundred and ninety-four persons. After that, the number of clashes between security forces and armed militants, as well as attacks on Western targets and oil companies, increased in frequency and magnitude.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to violence and political tensions, the kingdom had also faced, during the early 2000s, enormous debts, trade deficits, and significant population growth. While previously the state had been able to use oil revenues to invest in social services, the costs had become too high. The existing gap between the rich and the underprivileged also continued to grow, and the unemployment rate among Saudi nationals, especially among the younger generation increased significantly, during that period, with reported estimates as high as twenty to thirty percent.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 152; Embassy of Saudi Arabia, About Saudi Arabia, "Majlis al-Shura (Consultative Council)," <https://www.saudiembassy.net/majlis-al-shura-consultative-council> (accessed May 12, 2025).

<sup>42</sup> Van Eijk, "152.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

## THE CONSTITUTION: SOURCES, STIPULATIONS, AND EXPATRIATES

The most important sources for the Saudi Constitution are Islamic, namely the Quran, Sunnah, Hadith, Sharia, and fiqh as interpreted from the Sunni perspective of the Saudi government.<sup>45</sup> The writers of Saudi Arabia's constitution also adapted legal principles from Arab countries, non-Arab majority-Muslim countries, and other nation-states.<sup>46</sup> According to an article by Ali al-Mehaimeed in the *Arab Law Quarterly*, four characteristics of the Saudi constitution are: (1) the Islamic identity of Saudi Arabia as a state and society;<sup>47</sup> (2) planned development in the economic, social, educational, and cultural spheres; (3) preservation of national traditions while adopting the most advanced and productive means for advancement; and (4) emphasis on the rule of justice, consultation, and equality as the foundations for government.<sup>48</sup>

In terms of Armenians, because the vast majority of them are Christians, the fact that Islam is Saudi Arabia's state religion is significant. As one may expect, the terms "Islam," "Muslim," and "prophet" appear over thirty times in the Saudi constitution, and Islam influences almost every aspect of that document. Provisions of the Saudi constitution which may be relevant to Armenians and other expatriates in that country relate to justice,<sup>49</sup> benevolence,<sup>50</sup> right to property and prohibitions on its expropriation,<sup>51</sup> protection of human rights in accordance with Sharia,<sup>52</sup> protection from unjustified detention and imprisonment,<sup>53</sup> right to privacy,<sup>54</sup> punishment within legal parameters,<sup>55</sup> and equal rights to litigation.<sup>56</sup> The constitution's

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<sup>45</sup> Mehaimed, 30.

<sup>46</sup> Mehaimed, 30.

<sup>47</sup> Saudi Arabia's Constitution of 1992 with Amendments through 2005, Basic Law, Part 1: Articles 1-4; System of Government, Part 2: System of Government, Articles 5-8.

[https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Saudi\\_Arabia\\_2005.pdf](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Saudi_Arabia_2005.pdf) (accessed May 12, 2025).

<sup>48</sup> Mehaimed, 36; *Saudi Arabia's 1992 Constitution*, Basic Law, Part 2: System of Government, Article 8.

<sup>49</sup> *Saudi Arabia's 1992 Constitution*, Basic Law, Part 2: System of Government, Article 8.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, Basic Law, Part 3: Constituents of Saudi Society, Article 11.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, Basic Law, Part 4: Economic Principles, Articles 16-18; Basic Law, Part 5: Rights and Duties, Article 37.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, Basic Law, Part 5: Rights and Duties, Article 26.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, Basic Law, Part 5: Rights and Duties, Article 36.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, Basic Law, Part 4: Economic Principles, Article 17; Basic Law, Part 5: Rights and Duties, Article 40;

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, Basic Law, Part 5: Rights and Duties, Article 38.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, Basic Law, Part 6: Powers of the State, Article 47.

articles which mention expatriates and foreign residents relate to unjustified detention and imprisonment,<sup>57</sup> protection of property,<sup>58</sup> foreign residents' obligation to comply with Saudi Arabia's regulations,<sup>59</sup> and their equal rights to litigation.<sup>60</sup> Yet, the Saudi Constitution contains no provisions protecting religious freedoms, which is one reason that Christians in Saudi Arabia, including Armenian Christians, face restrictions. Yet all Muslims, whether or not they are Saudi citizens, may worship in accordance with Islam.

Saudi Arabia allows Christians to enter the country as foreign workers for temporary work, but does not allow them to practice their faith openly. Because of that, Christians generally worship within private homes.<sup>61</sup> Items and articles belonging to religions other than Islam are prohibited. These prohibited items include Bibles, crucifixes, statues, carvings, and items with religious symbols, for example.<sup>62</sup> The Saudi Arabian Mutaween مطوعين, or Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice prohibits the practice of any religion other than Islam.<sup>63</sup> Conversion of a Muslim to another religion is considered apostasy, a crime punishable by death if the accused does not recant.<sup>64</sup> Saudi Arabia does not have a religious worker visa category; however non-Muslim clergy have been allowed to enter the country to minister to their communities. Non-Muslim clergy also were able to bring religious items, including books, when traveling.<sup>65</sup> Yet, the Saudi government's stated policy remained for its diplomatic and consular missions abroad to inform foreign workers applying for visas that they had the right to worship privately and to possess personal religious materials. The Saudi

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., Basic Law, Part 5: Rights and Duties, Article 36.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., Basic Law, Part 4: Economic Principles, Articles 16-18; Basic Law, Part 5: Rights and Duties, Article 37.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., Basic Law, Part 5: Rights and Duties, Article 41.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., Part 6: Powers of the State, Article 47.

<sup>61</sup> United States Department of State Archive, "Saudi Arabia: International Religious Freedom Report 2008," released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor <https://2001-2009.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2008/108492.htm> (accessed May 12, 2025); United States Department of State, "2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Saudi Arabia," <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/saudi-arabia/> (accessed May 13, 2025).

<sup>62</sup> United States Department of State, "2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Saudi Arabia."

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid; William L. Ochsenwald, Harry St. John Bridger Philby, et al., "Saudi Arabia, Religion," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., n.p.: June 29, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Saudi-Arabia/Religion> (accessed May 12, 2025).

government also provided the names of offices to which one could report violations of this policy.<sup>66</sup>

In contrast, recently the Saudi government has displayed a more open approach to Christianity than in the past. For example, on September 20, 2017, Pope Francis received Saudi citizen Muhammad al-Issa, Secretary General of the World Muslim League, which the Saudi government funds, accompanied by al-Issa's delegation.<sup>67</sup> The next day, an informal meeting was held in the offices of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue between Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the Dicastery, and al-Issa and his delegation where a statement was issued reaffirming the incompatibility of religion and violence, and the idea that religions can promote peace.<sup>68</sup> During a meeting which included Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman and Coptic Orthodox Pope Tawadros II, in March 2018 in Rome, Italy, Muhammad Bin Salman suggested establishing an interfaith dialogue initiative between the region's Muslims and Christians, which has come to fruition, in part, through the establishment of the King Abdullah International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID).<sup>69</sup> On November 1, 2019, Muhammad Bin Salman met in Riyadh with a group of American Protestant leaders,<sup>70</sup> and on December 2, 2018, Bishop Ava Morkos, who is a senior Coptic official, presided over the first Coptic mass in Saudi Arabia.<sup>71</sup> It is also possible that the first Christian church in Saudi Arabia could be built in the new

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<sup>66</sup> United States Department of State, "2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Saudi Arabia."

<sup>67</sup> "Press Release of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue: Visit to the Vatican of H.E. Dr. Muhammad Al-Issa, Secretary General of the World Muslim League," Holy See Press Office, September 21, 2017, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2017/09/21/170921i.html> (May 12, 2025).

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. See also KAICIID Dialogue Centre [King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue], "KAICIID Secretary General Welcomes Meeting between Pope Francis and Dr. Al-Issa, Leader of the Muslim World League" <https://www.kaiciid.org/stories/news/kaiciid-secretary-general-welcomes-meeting-between-pope-francis-and-dr-al-issa-leader> (accessed May 25, 2025) and International Dialogue Centre, KAICIID, <https://www.kaiciid.org/> (accessed May 25, 2025).

<sup>70</sup> "Saudi Arabia's Crown Princes (sic) Hosts Christian Evangelical Leaders," *NBC News* and *Reuters*, November 2, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/saudi-arabia-s-crown-princes-hosts-christian-evangelical-leaders-n930201> (accessed May 12, 2025).

<sup>71</sup> Amr Emam, "First Christian Mass Held in Saudi Arabia," *The Arab Weekly*, December 9, 2018 <https://theArabweekly.com/first-christian-mass-held-saudi-arabia> (accessed May 12, 2025).

northwestern city of Neom.<sup>72</sup> In addition, the Vatican Apostolic Library participated, with several works from its collections, in the al-Madar section of the Islamic Arts Biennale, which was held from January 25 to May 25, 2025, in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.<sup>73</sup> Hosted at the Hajj Terminal of King Abdulaziz International Airport, a gateway for millions of Muslim pilgrims, the event is intended to foster interreligious dialogue, with the Vatican's contribution serving as a symbol of unity and mutual respect.<sup>74</sup> If this opening toward Christians continues, it could bode well for Armenians in Saudi Arabia who may wish to practice their religion more freely.

Because virtually all Armenians, who live in Saudi Arabia, are expatriates, that country's laws governing expatriates are worth considering. There are two categories under which expatriates can work in Saudi Arabia: one category is premium residency and the second is as a sponsored foreign worker.<sup>75</sup> With respect to premium residency, in May 2019, Saudi Arabia's Shura Council approved a draft law regulating the issuance of residence permits for highly-skilled and wealthy foreign nationals without the need of a sponsor.<sup>76</sup> In the Saudi government's efforts to attract more foreign investors and entrepreneurs, the Shura Council approved the initiative, similar to the Green Card in the United States, as the Saudi government attempts to open its economy to foreign investors. Eligible foreign nationals will be able to obtain one renewable residence permit for up to one year or another one for an unlimited period.<sup>77</sup> Applicants will be required to show that they have

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<sup>72</sup> "Hosannahs in the Sand? Saudi Arabia May Relax its Ban on Christian Churches," *The Economist*, August 2, 2018 <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2018/08/02/saudi-arabia-may-relax-its-ban-on-christian-churches> (accessed May 12, 2025). The following website provides information about leaders of the Armenian Apostolic Church in the Middle East and countries of the Persian Gulf: <https://www.armenianorthodoxchurch.org/ղուսույժը> (accessed May 12, 2025).

<sup>73</sup> Vatican Library, "The Vatican Library Participates in the Islamic Arts Biennale in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, from January 25 to May 25, 2025," September 25, 2024, [https://press.vatican.va/content/dam/salastampa/it/fuori-bollettino/EN\\_CS%20BAV.pdf](https://press.vatican.va/content/dam/salastampa/it/fuori-bollettino/EN_CS%20BAV.pdf).

<sup>74</sup> Zenit Staff, "Vatican in Saudi Arabia thanks to Vatican Apostolic Library," *Zenit*, September 25, 2024, <https://zenit.org/2024/09/25/vatican-in-saudi-arabia-thanks-to-vatican-apostolic-library/>.

<sup>75</sup> Sam Bridge, "Saudi Arabia Approves Plan for Green Card-Style System," *Arabian Business*, May 13, 2019 <https://www.arabianbusiness.com/politics-economics/419868-saudi-arabia-approves-plan-for-green-card-style-system> (accessed May 12, 2025).

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> "In a Move to Attract Foreign Investors and Entrepreneurs, Saudi Arabia Approves a Green Card-Style System to Issue Residence Permits for Highly-Skilled and Wealthy Foreign Nationals," *Magnitt*, May 14, 2019,

sufficient financial resources, are medically fit, and have no criminal record.<sup>78</sup> Persons, who possess premium residency, are allowed to reside in Saudi Arabia with their families, recruit domestic workers from abroad, own real estate for residential, commercial, and industrial purposes (except for property in Mecca and Medina), work at private establishments with the ability to change jobs, leave and re-enter Saudi Arabia as they wish, and engage in business activities in accordance with Saudi foreign investment law.<sup>79</sup> This premium residency has a one-time fee of \$213,000. A one-year renewable premium residency card, which costs \$26,600 per year, constitutes a second type of premium residency.<sup>80</sup> These residency programs could carry significant benefits for Armenians and other expatriates in Saudi Arabia, who can afford it, because they could root themselves more deeply in that country through longer-term residency, employment, and financial investments.

Another category for foreigners, who want to work in Saudi Arabia long-term, involves their applying for a work visa and residency permit. In addition to other requirements, applicants must be sponsored by a Saudi employer and have a valid employment contract, medical reports, and educational degree.<sup>81</sup> Both Premium Residency and work visa categories are significant for Armenians working in Saudi Arabia because at least some of them may be under one or more of those categories.

## FAMILY AND PERSONAL STATUS LAW

In March 2022, the Saudi government introduced a new personal status law, as part of its reforms efforts, and that new law came into force on June 18, 2022.<sup>82</sup> The reform of the Personal Status Law took place within the

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<https://magnitt.com/news/move-attract-foreign-investors-and-entrepreneurs-saudi-arabia-approves-green-card-style-system-issue-46940> (accessed May 12, 2025).

<sup>78</sup> “Saudi Arabia Approves Plan for Green Card-Style System”; “Saudi ‘Green Card’ Online Platform is Open for Business,” *Arab News*, June 23, 2019, updated June 24, 2019, <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1514921/saudi-arabia> (accessed May 12, 2025); Rawan Radwan, “No Sponsor? No Problem: Saudi Shoura Council Approves New ‘Green Card’ Residency,” *Arab News*, May 8, 2019, updated May 10, 2019, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1494371/saudi-arabia> (accessed May 12, 2025).

<sup>79</sup> “Saudi ‘Green Card’ Online Platform is Open for Business,” *Arab News*, June 23, 2019, <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1514921/saudi-arabia> (accessed May 12, 2025); Radwan.

<sup>80</sup> Al Tassis, “Saudi Arabia’s Premium Residency: An Irresistible Attraction for Global Investors and Talents,” <https://altaasis.sa/blog/premium-residency-visa-in-saudi-arabia/> (accessed May 13, 2025).

<sup>81</sup> Al Hamd Travels, Private, Limited, “[Immigration]: Saudi [Arabia]” <https://alhamdgroup.in/immigration-saudi.html> (accessed May 12, 2025).

<sup>82</sup> Tarek Antaki, “Saudi Arabia: Introduction of a New Personal Status Law,” Rödl & Partner, December 21, 2022, <https://www.roedl.com/insights/saudi-arabia-personal-status-law-reform-human-rights> (accessed May 12, 2025).

framework of the reform of the legal system initiated and supervised by Muhammad Bin Salman. The reform of the law is consistent with Saudi Vision 2030, which aims to enhance the quality of life and integrity, protect human rights, enhance the efficiency of systems, and improve services. The new law aims to ensure a clear legal framework for families and is intended to support the stability of families. Moreover, the law seeks to improve the status of families and children. It also aims to limit the discretionary power of judges, in order to prevent discrepancies of judicial rulings. The new law is designed to solve some of the problems which families in Saudi Arabia have experienced. It grants women the legal freedom to choose whom they will marry. A legal guardian cannot prevent the marriage, if the woman wants to marry someone who is equal to her. Women are permitted to file lawsuits and review their marriage contracts.<sup>83</sup>

A spouse may demand the annulment of the marriage contract if one of the spouses fails to fulfill an agreed condition. The wife has the right to unilaterally dissolve the marriage contract. Without the consent of a court, persons under eighteen years of age are not permitted to marry. Both the fiancé and the fiancée have the right to dissolve the engagement. The fiancé's offer to the fiancée during the courtship period is considered a gift unless the fiancé declares that it is part of the dowry.

If one of the engaged persons changes the engagement for a reason attributable only to him or her, he or she does not have the right to reclaim the gifts. However, the other party is entitled to reclaim the gift, if it is still available, and only to the extent of the value of the gift on the day that the gift was given. This does not apply if the gift is consumed by nature. The return of gifts is excluded if the engagement ends with death or for a reason for which neither party is responsible. The dowry is the property of the wife, and she is not obliged to give it to others or have anyone else responsible for it.

The new law contains regulation of marriage from engagement to divorce and khul that is a procedure, through which a woman can divorce her husband in Islam. Parentage, alimony, and children's custody are also regulated. For the first time, the law explicitly states that the mother receives custody of the children. The husband is obliged to provide food, shelter, clothing, and other necessities for his wife, even if she is wealthy. A divorce in which the word divorce is repeated several times is considered to be only one divorce. The new law provides transparency to many status-related questions like alimony, visiting children, and divorce in a state of anger. There are expectations that the new law will help dissolve differences related to civil status issues, in general, and those related to the family, in particular, before they reach the courts. Some believe that the new law strengthens the rights of divorced women who have raised children without financial support from the father of

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

the child or a father who has had no contact with his children. It is expected that, in the future, family law disputes can be settled quickly and effectively, as there is now a legal system that clearly defines rights and duties.<sup>84</sup>

In terms of expatriates, according to Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Justice, visitors to the Kingdom can get married on a transit visa. An expatriate resident can get married in a court in Saudi Arabia, and have the contract attested even if the wife is in the Kingdom on a transit visa. A stipulation is that the father of both the husband and wife are residents of the kingdom. It is also required that both spouses be registered with the Absher app which is a smartphone application and web portal that allows citizens and residents of Saudi Arabia to use a variety of governmental services.<sup>85</sup> Before changes in the law were implemented, a Saudi man, who was married to an expatriate woman, could use the Absher app to divorce his wife and have a final exit visa issued that would require her immediate departure from the kingdom. A change in the law made it impossible for Saudis to obtain a final exit visa simply to settle a score because they wanted to punish their spouses or have a divorce. Estranged expatriate spouses are permitted to remain in Saudi Arabia to complete their divorce cases. The new regulation also allows domestic court judges to determine how long it would take to finalize a divorce case and stay a deportation order. The expatriate spouse can grant power of attorney to another individual who can follow-up on the case in their absence.<sup>86</sup>

In terms of temporary work visas in Saudi Arabia, employers in the kingdom can hire foreign workers for three months. Through the Qiwa app, which provides users with access to several government services, the work visa can be extended for an additional three months.<sup>87</sup> Through the Saudi Arabian temporary work visa, companies are not required to issue a separate work permit along with the visa. However, companies are required to formally

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.; Beata Polok and Zubair Abbasi, "Personal Status Law and the End of Secret Divorce in Saudi Arabia," *The London School of Economics and Political Science*, February 10, 2025, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/religionglobalsociety/2025/02/personal-status-law-and-the-end-of-secret-divorce-in-saudi-arabia/> (accessed May 18, 2025).

<sup>85</sup> "Saudi Arabia Changes Expat Marriage Laws," *Arabian Business*, February 5, 2023, <https://www.arabianbusiness.com/gcc/saudi-arabia/saudi-arabia-changes-expat-marriage-laws#:~:text=An%20expat%20resident%20can%20get,are%20residents%20of%20the%20Kingdom> (accessed May 12, 2025).

<sup>86</sup> Rob L. Wagner, "More Rights for Expat Spouses in Saudi Arabia," *The Arab Weekly*, October 16, 2016, October 16, 2016, <https://theArabweekly.com/more-rights-expat-spouses-saudi-arabia> (accessed May 12, 2025).

<sup>87</sup> Danita Yadav, "Saudi Arabia's New Temporary Work Visa Allows Foreigners to Work for 3 Months: All You Need to Know," *Times Now*, April 26, 2023, <https://www.timesnownews.com/jobs/saudi-arabias-new-temporary-work-visa-allows-foreigners-to-work-for-3-months-all-you-need-to-know-article-99793473> (accessed May 12, 2025).

submit the request for the workers, on the Qiwa app. If the visa is approved by the Saudi government, then the worker is not required to have another document. The visa costs 1,000 Saudi riyals, which is approximately 267 U.S. dollars.<sup>88</sup>

## MUHAMMAD BIN SALMAN

The Saudi government's increasing flexibility toward work visas, foreign workers, and Christianity relate to Muhammad Bin Salman's goal of diversifying that country's economy, so it will become less dependent on oil revenue as more countries increase their use of non-petroleum fuel sources, and as the Saudi government has concerns about when its oil supply may be depleted.<sup>89</sup> In this context, on April 25, 2016, Muhammad Bin Salman announced "Saudi Vision 2030," which is a plan to reduce Saudi Arabia's dependence on oil, diversify its economy, and develop public service sectors such as health, education, infrastructure, recreation, and tourism. The plan's goals include reinforcing economic and investment activities, increasing non-oil industry trade between countries through goods and consumer products, while escalating government spending on high-technology, the military, and manufacturing.<sup>90</sup> Attempting to rebrand Saudi Arabia's conservative image, Muhammad Bin Salman has also pursued religious and social liberalization, implemented policies which permit women to drive, and legalized cinemas and concerts.<sup>91</sup> He has also attempted to diminish the power of the religious establishment which, if successful, could ease the path toward making other reforms.<sup>92</sup> At the time of this writing, Saudi Arabia continues to make progress

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ian Black, "Saudi Arabia Approves Ambitious Plan to Move Economy beyond Oil," *The Guardian*, April 25, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/25/saudi-arabia-approves-ambitious-plan-to-move-economy-beyond-oil> (accessed May 12, 2025); Ellen R. Wald, "Why It Matters How Much Oil Saudi Arabia Has," *Forbes*, January 9, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ellenwald/2019/01/09/why-it-matters-how-much-oil-saudi-arabia-has/#62c8dfce5137> (accessed May 12, 2025).

<sup>90</sup> Black. See also the official website for Saudi Vision 2030 at <https://vision2030.gov.sa/en> (accessed May 12, 2025).

<sup>91</sup> Sabena Siddiqui, *The New Arab*, October 5, 2022, "MbS as PM: The Implications of Saudi Arabia's Reshuffle," <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/mbs-pm-implications-saudi-arabias-reshuffle#:~:text=Attempting%20to%20rebrand%20Saudi%20Arabia%27s,and%20legalised%20cinemas%20and%20concerts> (accessed May 12, 2025).

<sup>92</sup> Rosie Bsheer, "How Mohammed bin Salman Has Transformed Saudi Arabia," *The Nation*, May 21, 2018, <https://www.hlrn.org/img/violation/Salman%20Rein.pdf> (accessed May 12, 2025).

toward the goals of Saudi Vision 2030.<sup>93</sup> If Saudi Arabia succeeds in achieving the goals of this ambitious plan, it could have positive implications for Armenians and other expatriates in Saudi Arabia because they could potentially benefit from the diverse opportunities, which it may generate.

## THE ECONOMY OF SAUDI ARABIA AND DEMOGRAPHICS OF EXPATRIATES

According to the World Bank's April 2025 outlook for Saudi Arabia, the performance of that country's non-oil sector remains robust, driven by Saudi Arabia's diversification agenda. Fiscal pressures in that country have increased due to higher spending. Inflation remains low and stable, except for housing prices. Challenges for Saudi Arabia include oil price and production uncertainty, a slowdown in global growth, and lack of productivity growth.<sup>94</sup> Growth is forecasted to increase in the medium term, beginning in March 2025. That growth will be driven by increased oil production from 8.9 million barrels per day in March 2025, to 9.98 million barrels per day toward the end of 2026. With the full resumption of oil production (anticipated to further increase in 2027 to an average of 10.4 million barrels per day), oil Gross Domestic Product growth is expected to accelerate starting in 2026, forecasted to grow at 6.7 and 6.1 percent respectively for 2026 and 2027. Meanwhile, the non-oil sector is estimated to maintain steady yearly growth (3.6 percent on average) between 2025 and 2027. However, rising global economic uncertainty remains an impediment to stronger non-oil sector growth.<sup>95</sup> In light of these statistics, there is reason to be cautiously optimistic for the economic future of Armenians and other expatriates in Saudi Arabia.

An additional factor that may bode well for those Armenians is the fact that the Saudi government has been attempting to recruit expatriates from Dubai.<sup>96</sup> In an interview, Saudi Investment Minister Khalid al-Falih stated that by the end of 2022, almost eighty companies applied for licenses to move their

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<sup>93</sup> "Saudi Arabia is Pulling Off an Astonishing Transformation," *The Economist*, May 8, 2025, [https://www.economist.com/leaders/2025/05/08/saudi-arabia-is-pulling-off-an-astonishing-transformation?utm\\_content=ed-picks-image-link-1&etear=nl\\_weekly\\_1&utm\\_campaign=r.the-economist-this-week&utm\\_medium=email.internal-newsletter.np&utm\\_source=salesforce-marketing-cloud&utm\\_term=5/8/2025&utm\\_id=2078641](https://www.economist.com/leaders/2025/05/08/saudi-arabia-is-pulling-off-an-astonishing-transformation?utm_content=ed-picks-image-link-1&etear=nl_weekly_1&utm_campaign=r.the-economist-this-week&utm_medium=email.internal-newsletter.np&utm_source=salesforce-marketing-cloud&utm_term=5/8/2025&utm_id=2078641) (accessed May 13, 2025).

<sup>94</sup> World Bank, Macro Poverty Outlook, "Saudi Arabia," April 10, 2025, 1, <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/65cf93926fdb3ea23b72f277fc249a72-0500042021/related/mpo-sau.pdf>.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>96</sup> Sam Dagher, "Saudi Arabia's Drive to Get Expats to Ditch Dubai is off to a Rocky Start," NDTV [New Delhi Television], April 11, 2023, <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/saudi-arabias-drive-to-get-expats-to-ditch-dubai-is-off-to-a-rocky-start-3937623> (accessed May 12, 2025).

headquarters to Riyadh, and that the city would become “the grand capital of the Middle East, politically and economically.” For example, Control Risks, a global risk consultancy firm, is establishing its regional headquarters in Riyadh because the company wants to comply with recent Saudi rules that restrict state entities from doing business with international companies which do not have their regional headquarters in the country by January 2024.<sup>97</sup>

In addition, Princess Sara bint Mashhour, the wife of Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince, is paving the way for science and technology in Riyadh. Ilmi, which means “my knowledge” in Arabic, will be an advanced center for Science, Technology, Reading, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STREAM) in that city. Regarding Ilmi’s launch, Princess Sara stated that it “will be a beacon of creativity, learning, and accessibility. It will offer all [of] Saudi Arabia’s young and lifelong learners the ability to realize their potential, drive further advances in the Kingdom, and help shape the future. Together, I hope that we will all create Ilmi and inspire and support the next generation.” The regularly refreshed course will offer and train persons with relevant information incorporating STREAM content. The center will be located in Muhammad Bin Salman City and spread across 27,000 square meters (6.7 acres). This educational hub will have three permanent exhibits based on themes like our world, ourselves, and our inventions, with the goal of educating young persons and other persons about topics such as space, ecosystems, and Artificial Intelligence. Visitors can expect an assemblage of co-created installations, events, talks, performances, and learning partner programs in this new community in Saudi Arabia.<sup>98</sup>

Indeed, Muhammad Bin Salman City intends to support innovation and entrepreneurship while educating future leaders by defining non-profit work in its internal operational concept and in terms of opportunities and youth training programs that it will provide. In addition, the project will provide services that contribute to creating an attractive environment for all the beneficiaries of the city’s offerings.<sup>99</sup> With these goals in mind, the institute

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Neha Tandon Sharma, “Princess Sara, the wife of Saudi Arabia’s crown prince MBS is building a massive science and technology center in Riyadh which will be almost two times bigger than New York’s famed Museum of Modern Art,” *Luxury Launches*, May 26, 2023, [https://luxurylaunches.com/other\\_stuff/princess-sara-building-science-and-technology-center-in-riyadh.php](https://luxurylaunches.com/other_stuff/princess-sara-building-science-and-technology-center-in-riyadh.php) (accessed May 12, 2025); “HRH Princess Sarah Bint Mashhour Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, wife of HRH Crown Prince Launches New Science and Technology Initiative ‘ilmi’ to Ignite Scientific Curiosity and Develop Skills in Saudi Arabia,” Saudi Press Agency, May 20 2023, <https://www.spa.gov.sa/w1905688> (accessed May 12, 2025); Ilmi Center, <https://ilmi.sa/en/center/> (accessed May 13, 2025).

<sup>99</sup> “The Destination for the Youth: Rooted in the Vision of HRH Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz,” Mohammed bin Salman City, Nonprofit, <https://miskcity.sa/en/home-page?id=371047> (accessed May 12, 2025).

has signed agreements with partner organizations and has plans for relevant building projects.<sup>100</sup> These measures are intended to enhance the lives of Saudis while attracting foreign investment and workers. They are part of Muhammad Bin Salman's goal of opening the country to international markets, which may put Riyadh among the world's ten richest city-economies, while more than doubling its population to at least fifteen to twenty million by 2030, despite many traditional barriers related to the country's strict interpretation of sharia.<sup>101</sup>

One significant question is whether the Saudi government is prepared for an influx of foreign white-collar workers and their families in terms of infrastructure (such as housing, water, and roads) as well as administrative largess. It is also unknown as to whether people will be prepared to leave Dubai which is freer, more cosmopolitan and expensive, in order to move to Riyadh. Saudi Arabia is behind Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates as a desirable destination for expatriates, according to a ranking by the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC). Oil-rich Saudi Arabia has the finances to implement the necessary changes, yet it has work to do, in order to make those changes. While the Saudi government has permitted the football (soccer) player Cristiano Ronaldo to live with his girlfriend, Georgina Rodriguez, after he joined a Saudi football team in 2022, few others are given the same privilege. Some foreigners also complain about the length of time it takes to secure a work visa, although tourism passes are easier to obtain. A metro system in Riyadh, which was planned to be completed by 2019, opened on December 1, 2024.<sup>102</sup>

In this context, the Saudi government's efforts to nationalize the workforce in Saudi Arabia is significant. This policy is called Saudization, or *nitaqat* in Arabic, and it intends to increase the number of Saudis in the workforce and reduce unemployment among Saudis.<sup>103</sup> The policy is based on a quota system that varies among sectors. Historically, Saudi Arabia has relied heavily on foreign workers to fill its workforce. However, with over half of the Saudi population under thirty-five years of age, the Saudi government aims to

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<sup>100</sup> "City News: Read and Watch the Latest News from Mohammed bin Salman Nonprofit City" Mohammed bin Salman City, Nonprofit, <https://miskcity.sa/en/news> (accessed May 12, 2025).

<sup>101</sup> Frank Kane, "Saudi Crown Prince Unveils Plan to Make Riyadh One of World's 10 Largest City Economies," *Arab News*, January 29, 2021 <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1800231/business-economy> (accessed May 12, 2025).

<sup>102</sup> Dagher, "Saudi Arabia's Drive to Get Expats to Ditch Dubai is off to a Rocky Start"; Saudi Press Agency, "Riyadh Metro Opens Its Doors to the Public Today," December 1, 2024, <https://www.spa.gov.sa/en/N2216717> (accessed May 13, 2025).

<sup>103</sup> Danny Bateman, "Saudization: What It Is and How to Comply" Centuro Global, March 5, 2025, <https://www.centuroglobal.com/article/saudization/>.

increase the number of nationals in the workforce. As part of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 policy, the Saudi government is targeting a reduction in domestic unemployment from its 2018 peak of 12.9% to 7% by the beginning of 2030.<sup>104</sup> By increasing the share of income generated by Saudi nationals and mandating their inclusion in high-value industries, the Saudi government seeks to develop its human capital.<sup>105</sup> Saudization could have a negative impact on Armenians and other non-Saudi citizens, who live in that country, because it could cause them to lose their jobs, in light of the possibility that at least some of them may be replaced by Saudi citizens.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

In terms of the broader demographic context regarding expatriates in Saudi Arabia, it is a prime destination and source of remittances from workers for many countries in Asia and the Arab world. Non-Saudis comprise 44.4 percent of the Kingdom's population.<sup>106</sup> At the same time, the total number of non-Saudis in Saudi Arabia is 16.41 million, including 2.59 million Bangladeshis, 2.31 million Indians, 2.23 million Pakistanis, 2.21 Yemenis, and 1.8 million Egyptians, who comprise the five largest groups.<sup>107</sup> There are approximately 1,800 Armenians in Saudi Arabia.<sup>108</sup> Non-Saudi workers in Saudi Arabia contribute to sectors such as construction, healthcare, retail, and Information Technology.<sup>109</sup> In this context, the fact that most Armenians in Saudi Arabia have high-skilled white-collar positions provides them with significant protection.

Many Saudi laws apply to expatriates in a similar manner as they do to Saudi citizens.<sup>110</sup> Cultural life in Saudi Arabia rests within the limits of strict interpretations of the Quran. In practice, this means that the visual arts, for example, are limited to geometric, floral or abstract designs, as representations of humanity are forbidden. Although there are some cinemas in larger cities, relinquishing the joys of theater comes with the territory for expatriates relocating to Saudi Arabia. Music, dance, and Bedouin poetry comprise

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> "Saudi Arabia Population Statistics 2025," *Global Media Insight*, April 4, 2023, <https://www.globalmediainsight.com/blog/saudi-arabia-population-statistics/#:~:text=More%20than%20a%20third%20of,Asia%2C%20Europe%2C%20and%20America> (accessed May 12, 2025).

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Joshua Project, "Armenian[s] in Saudi Arabia," [https://joshuaproject.net/people\\_groups/10429/SA](https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/10429/SA) (accessed May 13, 2025).

<sup>109</sup> "Saudi Arabia Population Statistics 2025," *Global Media Insight*, April 4, 2023.

<sup>110</sup> "A Practical Guide to the Way of Life in Saudi Arabia," Internations, <https://www.internations.org/saudi-arabia-expats/guide/living-short#:~:text=While%20female%20expats%20living%20in,home%20they%20may%20find%20them> (accessed May 12, 2025).

important parts of Arab culture. However, literature in general is kept in check by strict censorship rules. Alcohol, sex outside of marriage, and same-sex romantic relationships are banned.<sup>111</sup> Yet, women and men, who would like to stay in the same hotel room, do not have to prove that they are married, and unaccompanied women are allowed to stay in a hotel room by themselves. These changes are consistent with Muhammad Bin Salman's goal of opening Saudi Arabia for tourists, with the hope that the country will have one-hundred million visits per year by 2030.<sup>112</sup>

## HUMAN RIGHTS

Although Armenians in Saudi Arabia have not been seriously affected by the Saudi government's violations of human rights, some of those violations are worth considering in light of the Saudi constitution's emphasis on justice and the potentially difficult situation any government's human rights record could pose for expatriates in a given country. According to Amnesty International's report entitled *The State of the World's Human Rights, April 2025*, the authorities continued to arbitrarily detain individuals without giving them opportunities to challenge the lawfulness of their detentions, and in many cases sentenced people to lengthy prison terms or the death penalty on vague, charges that seem to criminalize peaceful expression as terrorism, in violation of their fair trial and due process rights, as well as their right to freedom of expression. The Specialized Criminal Court (SCC), which was established to try terrorism-related crimes, continued to convict and sentence individuals to lengthy prison terms following apparently unfair trials for seemingly exercising their rights to freedom of expression and association, including online on X (which was formerly known as Twitter).<sup>113</sup> Unfortunately, various forms of brutal punishments, including capital punishment, continue to be enforced in Saudi Arabia.<sup>114</sup> Some of these brutal punishments include floggings, amputations, and cross amputations, torture, and beheadings.<sup>115</sup> These brutal forms of punishment can be a concern for all persons in Saudi

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> "Saudi Arabia: Reforms Allow Women and Unmarried Foreign Couples to Take Hotel Rooms," *Sky News*, October 8, 2019 <https://news.sky.com/story/saudi-arabia-reforms-allow-women-and-unmarried-foreign-couples-to-take-hotel-rooms-11829012> (accessed May 12, 2025).

<sup>113</sup> Amnesty International, *The State of the World's Human Rights, April 2025*, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/middle-east/saudi-arabia/report-saudi-arabia/> (accessed May 13, 2025).

<sup>114</sup> Amnesty International, "Saudi Arabia: 10 Brutal Facts Beyond the Raif Badawi Case" March 5, 2015, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/03/saudi-arabia-in-ten-brutal-facts> (accessed July 28, 2025).

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

Arabia, including Armenians, in light of the harsh, and in some cases irrevocable, nature of these forms of punishment.

While Armenians in Saudi Arabia may not have been directly affected by human rights violations, and would probably leave Saudi Arabia if they feared that the government were to act against them, this troubling situation is worth considering. Another potential risk to Armenians and other expatriates in Saudi Arabia is possible political instability which such Sunni Islamist groups such as ISIS or al-Qaida may cause. This is worth noting, in light of several previous militant attacks in Saudi Arabia and these groups' goal of overthrowing the Saudi government and replacing it with a government that would implement Sharia more strictly.<sup>116</sup> In the context of the opportunities and risks for Armenians in Saudi Arabia, there is reason for cautious optimism especially because of the preference that the Saudi government is showing for highly-skilled upper-class workers and Muhammad bin Salman's liberalization policies. The Saudi government's welcoming attitudes and policies toward expatriates provide additional grounds for hope about the future prospects of Armenians and other expatriates in that country.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Washington, DC, "ISIS Leader Threatens Saudi Arabia in Latest Speech," <https://www.saudiembassy.net/news/isis-leader-threatens-saudi-arabia-latest-speech> (accessed May 12, 2025); "Alleged Islamic State Group Militants Killed in Foiled Attack in Saudi Arabia" *Australian Broadcasting Corporation* and *Reuters*, April 21, 2019 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-04-22/four-killed-in-failed-is-attack-on-saudi-state-building/11035252> (accessed May 12, 2025).

<sup>117</sup> Marco Ferrari, "Saudi Arabia Sees Surge in Expats as the Kingdom Attracts Foreign Business," *Al Arabiya*, January 30, 2023, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/saudi-arabia/2023/01/24/Saudi-Arabia-sees-surge-in-expats-as-it-attracts-foreign-business> (accessed May 12, 2025).

Chapter 11

**KUWAIT AND THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES**



This chapter explores Kuwait's and the United Arab Emirates' constitutions and expatriates in those countries, in light of several factors including those countries' histories, the histories of their constitutions, and policies which affect the expatriates. The first portion of this chapter analyzes those topics with respect to Kuwait, and the second portion analyzes those topics in terms of the United Arab Emirates.

**EXPATRIATES IN KUWAIT:  
DEMOGRAPHICS AND GOVERNMENTAL POLICIES**

Kuwait has a total population of 3.1 million persons, with non-Kuwaitis accounting for approximately seventy percent of the population.<sup>1</sup> Specifically,

<sup>1</sup> "Kuwait," *World Factbook* <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/kuwait/> (accessed May 14, 2025); Jon Armajani, "Kuwait's and

Kuwaitis comprise 30.4% of the country's population; non-Kuwaiti Arabs comprise 27.4%; Asians comprise 40.3%; Africans comprise 1%; and members of other groups which include Europeans, North and South Americans, and Australians comprise 0.9%.<sup>2</sup> Indians are the largest expatriate group in that country, while the Egyptians are the second largest.<sup>3</sup> Approximately four thousand Armenians live in Kuwait.<sup>4</sup> In terms of religious demographics, 74.6% of Kuwait's population is Muslim, 18.2% is Christian, and 7.2% is unspecified. This data represents the total population. Approximately 72% of Kuwait's population consists of immigrants.<sup>5</sup>

## ARMENIANS IN KUWAIT

The first known Armenian presence in Kuwait came in the late 1890s and early 1900s.<sup>6</sup> Armenians in Kuwait have a longer history than Armenians do in the other Gulf states.<sup>7</sup> Armenians who went to Kuwait in the 1950s primarily went to look for work. Many of these Armenians were from Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, and Iran.<sup>8</sup> The Armenians established the first Armenian school in Kuwait in 1960, and the first Armenian church was established in that country in the 1960s.<sup>9</sup> The Armenian community is concentrated mostly in the capital, al-Kuwait. the majority of Armenians reside in Havali, which is part of the al-Salmiya district where Saint Vardanants Church is also located. Community organizations and the National

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the United Arab Emirates' Constitutions, and Expatriates in those Countries," *Armenians of the Gulf Arab*, 109-125, <https://haigrepository.haigazian.edu.lb/items/f58f80bc-19ac-41c3-b4f5-37b5d247a4e1> (accessed May 20, 2025).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> World Population Review, "Kuwait," 2025, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/kuwait> (accessed May 16, 2025).

<sup>4</sup> The Government of the Republic of Armenia, Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, "Diaspora - Kuwait," <http://diaspora.gov.am/en/pages/49/kuwait> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>5</sup> "Kuwait," *World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/kuwait/> (accessed August 5, 2025).

<sup>6</sup> Salwa Alghanim, *The Reign of Mubarak-Al-Sabah: Shaikh of Kuwait 1896-1915*. (Bloomsbury Academic, 1998), 17-18.

<sup>7</sup> Personal communication from a scholar of Armenian Studies, July 7, 2025.

<sup>8</sup> The Government of the Republic of Armenia, Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, "Diaspora - Kuwait," <http://diaspora.gov.am/en/pages/49/kuwait> (accessed August 5, 2025).

<sup>9</sup> David Zenian, "The Armenians of Kuwait: Rebuilding after the Gulf War," *AGBU News*, February 1994, <https://agbu.org/yerablur-price-war/armenians-kuwait-rebuilding-after-gulf-war> (August 5, 2025).

College are located there.<sup>10</sup> Armenian community organizations in Kuwait include the Armenian Prelacy of Kuwait,<sup>11</sup> the Kuwaiti chapter of the Armenian Relief Society,<sup>12</sup> Homenetmen in Kuwait,<sup>13</sup> the Kuwait National School,<sup>14</sup> and the Hamazkayin Armenian Educational and Cultural Society.<sup>15</sup> Armenians in Kuwait are represented as a national community and nearly all speak Armenian. Seventy percent of Kuwaiti-Armenians are Syrian-Armenians, the rest are from Lebanon and other countries. The Lebanese-Armenians are mainly from Anjar. The National Board is the highest executive body, which manages community life. There are scouting and youth organizations, charitable associations, as well as political and cultural groups in the community.<sup>16</sup>

The community is integrated into the Kuwaiti society. It enjoys the respect of the country's authorities, who highly value the activities of Armenians, especially in various sectors of the country's economy. The authorities do not impede the national-cultural activities of the Armenian community. The

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<sup>10</sup> The Government of the Republic of Armenia, Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, "Diaspora - Kuwait," <http://diaspora.gov.am/en/pages/49/kuwait> (accessed August 5, 2025).

<sup>11</sup> The Armenian Prelacy of Kuwait, <https://www.armenianorthodoxchurch.org/en/archives/prelaices/prelacy-of-kuwait> (accessed August 5, 2025).

<sup>12</sup> Armenian Relief Society, "Kuwait," <https://ars1910.org/entity/kuwait/#:~:text=Armenian%20Relief%20Society%20Kuwait%20%2D%20Armenian%20Relief%20Society> (accessed August 5, 2025).

<sup>13</sup> Instagram, "Homenetmen Kuwait," [https://www.instagram.com/homenetmen\\_kuwait/?hl=en](https://www.instagram.com/homenetmen_kuwait/?hl=en) (accessed August 5, 2025).

<sup>14</sup> Gohar Hakobyan, "Deputy Director of Kuwait National School: 'Armenians of Our Community Gather Around the Church and the School,'" *Aravot*, August 3, 2018, <https://en.aravot.am/2018/08/03/216711/#:~:text=After%20a%20while%20the%20number,Ministry%20of%20Education%20and%20Science.%E2%80%9D&text=Media%20can%20quote%20materials%20of,first%20passage%20of%20the%20text.> (August 5, 2025).

<sup>15</sup> Hamazkayin Armenian Educational and Cultural Society, "Cultural Evening (Kuwait)," 2022, <https://hamazkayin.com/en/news/%D5%A3%D5%A5%D5%B2%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A5%D5BD%D5BF%D5%A1%D5%AF%D5%A1%D5%B6-%D5%A5%D6%80%D5%A5%D5%AF%D5%B8%D5%B5-%D6%84%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A7%D5%B5%D5%A9/#:~:text=The%20first%20event%20of%20the,2017%20at%207:%2030%20pm.&text=Then%2C%20Chair%20of%20the%20first,Haykuhi%20Bazeyan%20and%20Tamar%20Temamian.> (accessed August 5, 2025).

<sup>16</sup> The Government of the Republic of Armenia, Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, "Diaspora - Kuwait," <http://diaspora.gov.am/en/pages/49/kuwait> (accessed August 5, 2025).

Armenians are skilled workers in different fields. They have done work as auto body technicians, mechanics, and electricians. There are also Armenians in Kuwait, who are teachers, doctors, and businesspersons, among other occupations.<sup>17</sup>

## EXPATRIATES AND KUWAITI GOVERNMENTAL POLICIES

Oil fields in Kuwait were discovered in the 1930s. By 1952, the country had become the largest exporter of oil in the Gulf region. From the onset of the country's development process, which has been sustained by oil wealth, labor immigrants had a crucial role in building the national economy and infrastructure. The first immigrants originated from Europe, North America and the Asian subcontinent, yet Arabs became the largest foreign community. They comprised fifty to sixty five percent of expatriates between 1965 and 1989. Foreign residents outnumbered Kuwaiti citizens as early as 1960. In spite of their stake in Kuwait's developmental process, most foreigners were hired as contract workers and were not entitled to social and political rights or to naturalization.<sup>18</sup>

Nonetheless, before the first Gulf War of 1990 and 1991, some migrants had been settled in Kuwait for decades. Among these long-term migrants were, first, Palestinians, who accounted for half of the Arab resident population in the late 1980s. Mostly involved in the development of the education and health care sectors, some had arrived in Kuwait in the 1950s when the country had opened to migrant laborers. The Palestinians had been forced out of Palestine by the creation of Israel in 1948. Other Palestinians came after 1950 when Jordan annexed the West Bank.<sup>19</sup>

As result, the latter carried Jordanian nationality. The Palestinians, who found refuge in Syria and Lebanon, had travel documents from the United Nations. A new wave of migrants went to Kuwait and other oil-producing countries after the 1973 oil boom. Another category of non-nationals were the *Biduns* (i.e., "without" in Arabic), who are stateless persons originating from three broad categories: (1) the descendants of nomadic Bedouin populations, whose ancestors had not applied for Kuwaiti citizenship when the 1959

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<sup>17</sup> Hagop Ohanessian, "Armenian Community of Kuwait," *Hye Sharzhoom / Armenian Action*, <https://hyesharzhoom.com/armenian-community-of-kuwait/#:~:text=Armenian%20Community%20of%20Kuwait%20%E2%80%93%20Hye%20Sharzhoom> (accessed August 5, 2025); Zenian, "The Armenians of Kuwait."

<sup>18</sup> Françoise De Bel-Air, *Demography, Migration, and Labour Market in Kuwait* Migration Policy Center, European University Institute, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, and Gulf Research Center, n.p., 2019, 3 [https://gulfmigration.grc.net/media/pubs/exno/GLMM\\_EN\\_2019\\_03.pdf](https://gulfmigration.grc.net/media/pubs/exno/GLMM_EN_2019_03.pdf) (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

Nationality Law came into effect; (2) the persons, who had been recruited to work in Kuwait's army or police force during the 1960s, who settled in Kuwait with their families; many in this category came from Iraq, Jordan, and Syria; (3) the children of Kuwaiti mothers and stateless or foreign fathers. Because citizenship in Kuwait is transmitted by patrilineal descent, the children of a Kuwaiti mother and of a non-Kuwaiti father, who has citizenship in another country, inherit the father's nationality. Those children are stateless if the father is stateless.<sup>20</sup>

Yet, initially, from the early 1960s to 1986 Kuwait tolerated the gray area between nationals and foreigners, as a legacy of tribal nomadic practices, but also as a convenient way to staff its security forces. As result, Kuwait's *Biduns* shared a number of socio-economic privileges with Kuwaiti citizens, such as employment on par with nationals and access to free health and education in the governmental sector, for instance. *Biduns* were also exempted from the obligation of seeking sponsorship and holding a residency permit. They were aggregated with the Kuwaiti population in statistics. It was estimated that *Biduns* residing in Kuwait in the mid-1980s numbered around 250,000.<sup>21</sup>

A deepening economic crisis due to falling oil prices, the emergence of regional and domestic political tensions after 1985 due to the Iran-Iraq war, and deteriorating ties with Iraq led to drastic changes in migration policies and dynamics.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, as Kuwait has been grappling with continuing economic challenges, public discussions related to Kuwait's expatriates have been intense, with Kuwaiti citizens blaming expatriates for draining the country's resources and diverting money away from social spending for Kuwaiti citizens.<sup>23</sup> In this context, in 1985 Asian laborers began replacing Arabs in the workforce, as the latter were deemed too politically active. Then, accused of collusion with political foes in the region (chiefly Iraq), Kuwait's *Biduns* were suddenly made illegal residents, and were placed under the threat of deportation.<sup>24</sup>

After 1986, *Biduns* were progressively deprived of all the socio-economic privileges which they had previously shared with Kuwaiti citizens, and were dismissed from their positions in the security services and public sector. Without sources of income or access to public infrastructure, they found themselves in forced exile abroad or living poverty-stricken lives in Kuwait, under the threat of deportation. The *Biduns*, who fled the country during the invasion by Iraqi troops, were later barred from re-entering the country.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Phil Bracey, "Kuwait's Escalating Campaign against Its Expat Workers," Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain, April 28, 2017 <https://www.adhrb.org/2017/04/12330/> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>24</sup> De Bel-Air, 4.

Continuing throughout much of the 1990s, *Biduns*, who departed from Kuwait, had a stamp, which stated “no re-entry into Kuwait,” imprinted in their travel documents.<sup>25</sup>

The first Gulf War which began in August 1990, following the invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi soldiers, forced many Kuwaitis and expatriates to seek refuge abroad, among whom were approximately 400,000 Arab foreign residents. As Jordanians and Palestinians were accused by Gulf countries to be supporters of the Iraqi government, 350,000 Jordanians and Palestinians were compelled to leave Kuwait. Subsequently, only a few Jordanians and Jordanians of Palestinian origin re-entered Kuwait before the early 2000s.<sup>26</sup>

Following the oil price rise during the 2000s, Kuwait resumed hiring vast numbers of non-Kuwaitis. Since the end of the decade, financial and oil prices fluctuations have led the country into launching ambitious development plans to diversify its economy, gradually moving it away from oil to become a competitive financial hub for the Gulf region. Large-scale infrastructure development was also continued, which has been expected to support investments in many sectors including tourism, hospitality, logistics, and communication and information technology, as well as international trade. In addition, members of the Kuwaiti government believe that Kuwait could be a global hub for the petrochemical industry, in that Kuwait possesses six percent of the world’s proven oil reserves and one percent of its natural gas. Despite economic fluctuations, the country had an estimated per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of \$50,960 in 2025, in terms of purchasing-power parity, which was the eighth-highest value worldwide.<sup>27</sup>

For many years, including around 2011, many Kuwaiti citizens had been expressing concerns that they were far outnumbered by non-Kuwaitis in that country. Efforts to curb what many Kuwaitis believe to be the expansion of the “demographic imbalance” since 2011 has taken several forms, in a context of socio-political and economic uncertainties. These efforts include the large-scale and repeated campaigns of arrests and deportations conducted against foreign residents in irregular administrative situations, such as visa overstayers and undocumented migrants, as well as suspected criminals and citizens from specific countries.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>27</sup> International Monetary Fund, “GDP per Capita, Current Prices; Purchasing Power Parity; International Dollars per Capita,” 2025, <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/PPP@WEO/KWT?zoom=KWT&highlight=KWT> (accessed May 16, 2025).

<sup>28</sup> Bracey, 5-6. See also Online Bureau and Agencies, “Kuwait Phases Out Expats in Public Sector, Prioritises National Workforce,” *Economic Times / HR World*, March 31, 2025, <https://hrme.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/news/industry/kuwait->

Kuwait held a major amnesty campaign for migrants in irregular situations from March 1 to June 30, 2011. Crackdowns on remaining migrants in irregular situations were conducted after the expiration of the grace period, leading to more than 30,000 deportations. A statement by Kuwait's Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor in 2012 stated that over 67,000 migrants had their residencies revoked during the year, due to overstays abroad and deportations of those found in irregular situations. The Kuwaiti government launched another campaign against illegal expatriates in 2013, and deported persons working without proper documentation or persons who had switched jobs without official permission. From April to July 2013, an additional 2,000 migrants were deported from Kuwait due to traffic violations. In May 2014, the Kuwaiti Ministry of Interior issued an order to halt immigration raids because police stations and prisons were no longer able to accommodate the large numbers of people being arrested for residency violations.<sup>29</sup>

Domestic workers, among them Ethiopians, were particularly targeted during the raids, which resulted in the deportation of 13,000 Ethiopian domestic workers. Several months later, in January 2015, the government launched another ambitious crackdown on illegal residents, which was expected to lead to the arrests of more than 100,000 people that was the estimated number of residents in irregular administrative situations in Kuwait at the time. Following various operations, during the first nine months of 2018, an additional 13,000 foreign residents were deported for a variety of reasons, including poor health conditions and labor law violations, or after criminal charges were brought against them.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to reducing the number of foreign residents in Kuwait, the Kuwaiti government also implemented measures to decrease the flow of non-Kuwaiti laborers into the country. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor announced in 2012 a policy of reducing the flow of foreigners coming to Kuwait by 100,000 every year for the next decade, mainly by reducing the number of low-skilled and service workers entering the country. The government went even further as of late 2018, and expressed its intentions to reduce the number of expatriates by at least 1.5 million by 2025 in order to achieve, what the government perceived as, a demographic balance between Kuwaiti citizens and expatriates. In this context, the Kuwaiti government supported the establishment of a national committee for the organization and management of the country's demographic structure.<sup>31</sup> In addition, a new law,

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phases-out-expats-in-public-sector-prioritises-national-workforce/119799988  
(accessed 5/16/2025).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

which came into effect in Kuwait in 2025, places significant restrictions on expatriates, who may want to do business there.<sup>32</sup>

Other measures aimed to shift employment opportunities toward young Kuwaitis. Former Kuwaitization quotas, which had been set in 2015, were revised, and by the end of 2017 Kuwait had introduced an \$830 fee for companies employing too many foreign workers. In mid-2018, the chairman of the Civil Services Commission (CSC) stated the government's intention to eventually stop recruiting expatriates in the public sector and fully Kuwaitize government jobs. An estimated 44,500 foreign employees in the government sector may be replaced by Kuwaiti citizens in the coming years. Of these, 3,140 foreign workers had been made redundant under mandated cuts for the 2017-2018 period at ministries, departments, and other bodies. The private sector also aims to nationalize its workforce: Kuwait's banks, for instance, had plans to cut 17,000 foreign workers from their staff, with the goal of an eighty percent Kuwaitization of employment by the end of 2018. According to the policies, foreign laborers should be limited to training positions.<sup>33</sup> In addition, in 2025, Kuwait significantly tightened regulations for the issuing of work permits for expatriates.

Various measures have also been taken to implement more constraints on the hiring of foreign laborers. Kuwait's government began assessing the validity of expatriates' university degree certificates before issuing or renewing residency documents. The government has ended the hiring of expatriates with college degrees, who are under age thirty, after July 2018, in order to promote the employment of young Kuwaiti graduates.<sup>34</sup> In 2025, Kuwait significantly tightened regulations for the issuing of work permits for expatriates.<sup>35</sup>

The social rights of expatriates in the country have also been targeted, as the Kuwaiti government stopped issuing visas for expatriates' parents. The government also significantly raised healthcare fees for foreign residents. Expatriates in Kuwait are to be banned from public hospitals, and those suffering from some chronic illnesses could face difficulties when trying to obtain residency in the country.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Bini Saroj, "Kuwait Cracks Down on Illegal Business Practices by Expats with New Law," al-Ketbi, Khalifa bin Huwaidan, Advocates and Legal Consultants, January 20, 2025, <https://www.alketbilaw.com/news/kuwait-cracks-down-on-illegal-business-practices-b/> (accessed May 16, 2025).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Staff Writer, *Arab Times*, "Kuwait Suspends Hiring of Unvetted Expats," Zawya by LSEG, May 9, 2025, <https://www.zawya.com/en/economy/policy/kuwait-suspends-hiring-of-unvetted-expats-g9dtwpm0> (accessed May 16, 2025).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

Meanwhile, Kuwait was also the first and only country in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to set a minimum wage of sixty Kuwaiti Dinars, which is two hundred U.S. Dollars, for domestic workers. Kuwait enacted that policy in 2016. The Kuwaiti parliament passed a law in June 2015 that, for the first time, gave migrant domestic workers labor rights including one day of rest per week, a twelve-hour working day with rest, and annual paid leave. However, implementation and control mechanisms, such as inspections, are not included in the measure. In addition, in 2015 Kuwait issued a new standard contract for migrant workers, and a 2016 administrative decision allowed some foreign laborers to transfer their sponsorship to a new employer after three years of work, without their employer's consent. However, these reforms do not extend to migrant domestic workers. Bilateral agreements, such as the new agreement passed with the Philippines at the end of 2018 to solve an employment ban enacted by the sending country, may improve conditions for some expatriate nationals, including domestic laborers.<sup>37</sup>

In October 2018, Safa al-Hashem, who is a member of Kuwait's parliament stated, "Expatriates must be charged for everything, for medical services, infrastructure and again I say for the air they breathe here."<sup>38</sup> In August 2020, the Kuwaiti government announced that governmental ministries will dismiss fifty percent of foreign employees, in particular those who work in non-technical fields and for subcontractors.<sup>39</sup> An article published in October 2022 in the *Arab Times* states that in May of 2019, the Ministry of Interior announced the cancellation of 538,382 expatriates' driver's licenses that were obtained illegally. The Ministry of Interior renewed its intentions to examine all driver's licenses for expatriates, which were obtained during the previous years based on the instructions of Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of Defense, and the Acting Minister of Interior.<sup>40</sup> Approximately 100,000 driver's licenses of expatriates were subject to scrutiny. The Ministry of Interior stated that anyone who would be found to have obtained a driver's license in violation of the ministry's regulations, would be summoned and

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> "Kuwait MP Calls for Foreign Workers to be Charged 'for the Air They Breathe,'" *Gulf Business*, October 29, 2018 <https://gulfbusiness.com/kuwait-mp-calls-foreign-workers-charged-air-breathe/> (accessed May 14, 2025); "Absurd Campaign Against Expats. Accompanied by a Lot of Racism," *Arab Times*, September 14, 2022, <https://www.arabtimesonline.com/news/absurd-campaign-against-expats-accompanied-by-a-lot-of-racism/> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>39</sup> "Kuwait Starts Laying Off Expats Working in the Public Sector," *AlBawaba*, August 5, 2020, <https://www.albawaba.com/business/kuwait-starts-laying-expats-working-public-sector-1372626> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>40</sup> "100,000 Expats' Driving Licenses Subject to Scrutiny," *Arab Times*, October 10, 2022, <https://www.arabtimesonline.com/news/100000-expats-driving-licenses-subject-to-scrutiny/> (accessed May 14, 2025).

their license would be permanently canceled from the database of the General Traffic Department.<sup>41</sup>

In a similar vein, the Kuwaiti Ministry of Interior deported 11,000 residency law violators, of different nationalities, between January and April of 2023.<sup>42</sup> Indian nationals topped the list of deportees followed by Filipinos, Sri Lankans and Egyptians.<sup>43</sup> These and other deportations from Kuwait have been part of the Kuwaiti government's goal of reaching a situation where seventy percent of the population of Kuwait will be comprised of citizens and thirty percent will be comprised of expatriates.<sup>44</sup> These measures have significantly affected the size, structure and dynamics of future inflows of expatriates to Kuwait while having a significant effect on Kuwait itself.<sup>45</sup>

The effect that anti-expatriate policies will have on Armenians in Kuwait remains to be seen. Armenians in Kuwait may be somewhat protected from these anti-expatriate policies because a high percentage of them, who live in Kuwait, are highly skilled and are middle- or high-income, although some expatriates in those categories have been affected by Kuwait's anti-expatriate policies. Ordinarily, anti-expatriate policies have a significantly negative impact on less-skilled, low-income workers, who are typically not Armenians. Yet, if some less-skilled expatriates work in jobs that Kuwaiti citizens do not want, that may offer those expatriates some protection.

#### WORK VISAS AND RESIDENCE PERMITS FOR KUWAIT

The eligibility requirements for a work visa for Kuwait are the following, while additional requirements may depend on a person's nationality:

1. a valid passport with a minimum of two years validity from time of arrival;
2. a valid employment offer;
3. a "No Objection Certificate" (NOC) from the Criminal Investigation Department and a character certificate, if that is deemed as being required, for private sector employees; and

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> "Kuwait Deports 11,000 Expats Violating Residency Laws since 2023," *Middle East Monitor*, April 29, 2023, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20230429-kuwait-deports-11000-expats-violating-residency-laws-since-2023/> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>43</sup> "Kuwait deports 9,000 expats in three months: India tops list of deportees," *Arabian Business*, April 10, 2023, <https://www.arabianbusiness.com/politics-economics/kuwait-deports-9000-expats-in-three-months-india-tops-list-of-deportees> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>44</sup> "Kuwait Deports 11,000 Expats."

<sup>45</sup> De Bel-Air, 7.

4. evidence of good health and willingness to undergo further medical tests like chest X-Rays, blood tests for HIV/AIDS, and possibly other tests upon arrival in Kuwait.

In addition, non-Kuwaitis must enter the country on a valid entry permit, in order to apply for the work residence permit.<sup>46</sup> The requirements for a work residence permit are similar to those of a work visa and also require the copy of a person's entry permit which is based on a job that they have already acquired in Kuwait, as well as fingerprint and security clearance certificates. The work residence permit is valid for sixty months.<sup>47</sup>

## HISTORY OF KUWAIT'S 1938 AND 1962 CONSTITUTIONS

Kuwait's short-lived 1938 Constitution, which was ratified and annulled in that year, had a brief history.<sup>48</sup> At the time, the Kuwaiti government had to decide how to respond to an influx of revenue which was coming to the government as a result of an oil concession which Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah, who ruled Kuwait from 1920 until 1950, had signed with the Kuwait Oil Company, an Anglo-American venture.<sup>49</sup> Because the agreement was made in Ahmad's name, rather than on behalf of Kuwait, the revenues went directly to Ahmad, which enabled him to utilize those funds in any manner that he chose. The concession provided Ahmad with a steady and independent income before oil was found in large quantities in 1938 in Kuwait, thereby granting the al-Sabah family some financial freedom. Ahmad used the income for his personal gain. He bought large estates outside Kuwait, and spent money on such luxuries as yachts and palaces.

For governmental revenues, Ahmad depended on taxes. The signing of the oil concession and the arrival of Ahmad's newfound wealth occurred during a period of significant economic recession.<sup>50</sup> In this context, many persons in Kuwait were frustrated that Ahmad had made this concession in a manner that benefited him while yielding little benefit for the country. In 1938, Bari Radio Station in Italy broadcast a statement that contradicted the actual situation in Kuwait. The statement announced that Kuwait "had attained a high degree of

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<sup>46</sup> Visadb, "Residency Permit - Work: Kuwait," <https://visadb.io/visa/temporary-stay/Anywhere/Kuwait/61c206561feb2eb87adf092e> (accessed May 14, 2025). Visadb's website states that it makes immigration simple for global citizens and companies, and that it offers online access to verified immigration, tax, and business experts in more than one hundred countries. Its United States headquarters are in Bartlett, Illinois USA. See <https://visadb.io/about> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Nathan J. Brown, *Constitutions in a Nonconstitutional World: Arab Basic Laws and the Prospects for Accountable Government*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2002, 30.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.; Farah Al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed: A History of Oil and Urban Life* Stanford University Press, Palo Alto, 2016, 33.

<sup>50</sup> Al-Nakib, 33.

efficiency in education, civilization, financial management” and improvements at the hands of Ahmad. Upon hearing about the radio broadcast, the merchants and others in Kuwait expressed anger about the praise which Ahmad had received in that broadcast. The Kuwaitis believed that it was wrong for a person, who had aggrandized himself, to receiving credit for accomplishments that he had not made.

The demands for reform that the Kuwaitis made, after the Bari broadcast, led to the majlis (which means assembly or council) movement of 1938 that created the environment for the writing of Kuwait’s first constitution. At the same time, 1938 was the year that oil in large, commercial quantities was found in Kuwait. The merchants knew that oil could deprive them of their crucial role in providing revenue, and, as result, could cost them their political and economic power. They petitioned the ruler to form an elected council to grant them more formal power in decision-making, to which Ahmad agreed. In July 1938, a group, which was comprised of the heads of one hundred and fifty leading families, elected a legislative assembly of fourteen members, under the leadership of Abdullah al-Salem, who was Ahmad’s cousin and opponent within the ruling family and also a supporter of the reformists.<sup>51</sup> One of the main grievances of the council’s members was that Ahmad was not investing his money in Kuwait’s government or public services.<sup>52</sup> The reformists wanted improved government-funded education for members of Kuwait’s society, the establishment of a hospital at the government’s expense, and other improvements.<sup>53</sup>

To meet these demands, the council requested that Ahmad give to Kuwait’s government the next check for oil revenues that he received from the Kuwait Oil Company. Ahmad responded by dissolving the council and Kuwait’s first constitution, in December 1938, which increased Ahmad’s power significantly.<sup>54</sup> That constitution contained the following:

1. Article one stipulated that the people were the source represented by the legislative council of their elected representatives.
2. Article two specified that the council had to establish the following laws:
  - a. the budget law, which provided for the proper control of all the state’s expenditures and its distribution in a just manner, with the exception of the personal properties of the al-Sabah, with which the legislative council had no right to interfere;

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 33-34.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 34; Abdulrahman Alebrahim, “The Balancing Powers in Kuwait in the 1938 Majlis Movement,” *AlMuntaqa* 4(2):2021-2022, 8-26, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48651941> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>54</sup> Al-Nakib, 34.

b. the administration-of-justice law, which was to establish the religious and common law in such manner as to ensure the proper administration of justice among the people;

c. the public security law, the purpose of which was security within and outside Kuwait, up to the furthest points on the borders;

d. the education law, so as to ensure that education would proceed in line with countries which had strong governmentally-supported educational institutions;

e. the public health law, the purpose of which was health laws which would protect the state and its inhabitants from the risks of ill-health and diseases;

f. the improvement law which included the construction of roads, the building of jails, the digging of wells, and other improvements of the infrastructure;

g. the emergency law, the purpose of which involved encouraging the establishment of policies which would empower governmental officials to implement measures ensuring public security in the event of emergencies;

3. Article three stipulated that the legislative council was the place of reference for all treaties, concessions, monopolies and agreements, both internal and foreign. If any of these had to be renewed, it would not become legal unless seen and approved by the legislative council.

4. Article four stated that as the state had no court of appeal, the powers of such a court would rest temporarily with the legislative council until such time as a special court was established for the purpose.

5. Article five stated that the president of the legislative council would exercise the executive authority in the state.<sup>55</sup>

There are some similarities and differences between Kuwait's 1938 and 1962 constitutions. The similarities suggest that the writers of the 1962 constitution were influenced by the earlier one. The differences suggest that the writers of the 1962 constitution may have wanted to further develop some of the ideas in the 1938 constitution. Also, the composition of the 1962 constitution began on January 20, 1962, which was when the opening session of Kuwait's Constitutional Convention took place and was only seven months after Kuwait's independence which was on June 19, 1961. In this context, the writers of Kuwait's 1962 constitution knew that they were establishing a

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<sup>55</sup> Kamal Osman Salih, "The 1938 Kuwait Legislative Council," *Middle Eastern Studies* 28(1):1992, 76-77, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4283478> (accessed May 14, 2025).

constitution for a modern nation-state and that providing sufficient specifics would be important for the constitution's nation-state's success.<sup>56</sup>

In terms of comparing and contrasting some provisions of the 1938 and 1962 constitutions, while the 1938 constitution establishes a legislative council, the 1962 constitution establishes a national assembly. The 1938 constitution does not specify the number of legislators, while the 1962 constitution states the national assembly is composed of fifty members.<sup>57</sup> Next, the 1938 constitution does not explicitly state the powers of Kuwait's emir, while the 1962 constitution states, "Executive power shall be vested in the Amir, the Cabinet and the Ministers in the manner specified in the Constitution."<sup>58</sup> The 1962 constitution also provides stipulations for an emir's succession and related matters, which the 1938 constitution does not. The 1962 constitution states,

Kuwait is a hereditary Amirate held in succession in the descendants of the Mubarak Sabah. The Heir Apparent shall be appointed within a period not exceeding one year from the date of the Amir's investiture, and his appointment shall follow his nomination by the Amir and the swearing of fealty to him by a consenting majority of the members composing the National Assembly sitting in special session.<sup>59</sup>

The 1962 constitution provides specifics about the national assembly, which are absent in the 1938 constitution's stipulations related to the legislative council. For example, the 1962 constitution provides the necessary qualifications for election to the national assembly, the term of the national assembly, the time of year that the national assembly meets, and stipulations for selecting leaders of the national assembly, among many other matters.<sup>60</sup> In some respects, the 1962 constitution seems to be an expansion of the 1938 constitution, while the 1962 constitution explicitly gives more power to the emir than the earlier constitution.

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<sup>56</sup> Amni AlShammari, "The Constituent Assembly. A Turning Point in Kuwait's History," Kuwait News Agency (Kuna), January 19, 2022, <https://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=3022635&language=en> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>57</sup> Kuwait's Constitution of 1962, Reinstated in 1992, [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Kuwait\\_1992.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Kuwait_1992.pdf?lang=en) (accessed May 14, 2025). Constituteproject.org is part of the Comparative Constitutions Project which is a scholarly endeavor that produces comprehensive data about the world's constitutions. See "About the CCP" at <http://comparativeconstitutionsproject.org/about-ccp/> (accessed May 14, 2025); Kuwait's 1962 Constitution, Article 80.

<sup>58</sup> Kuwait's 1962 Constitution, Article 52.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 4.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, Articles 82-92.

Between 1938 and 1961, the Kuwaiti emir's Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah and Abdullah al-Salim al-Sabah, who ruled in succession, governed as authoritarian leaders, under the domain of Great Britain, which held Kuwait as a protectorate.<sup>61</sup> In this milieu, the 1938 constitution opened the way for the 1962 constitution.<sup>62</sup>

#### THE WRITING AND ESTABLISHMENT OF KUWAIT'S 1962 CONSTITUTION

On August 26, 1961, Sheikh Abdullah al-Salim al-Sabah issued a decree which called for the establishment of a Constituent Assembly that would draft the country's constitution. On December 30, 1961, elections were held in Kuwait to elect members to the assembly. Seventy-four candidates ran for twenty seats on that assembly. The emir opened the assembly's first session on January 20, 1962. The assembly held thirty-two sessions until January 15, 1963. The assembly approved the constitution on November 3, 1962, and it was ratified by the emir on November 11, 1962.<sup>63</sup>

Kuwait's constitution is based on democratic principles for its citizens and combines aspects of presidential and parliamentary systems which exist in democratic countries. The pillars of the constitution are the sovereignty of the State, freedom, and equality before the law for Kuwaiti citizens. The Constitution is composed of 183 articles divided into five parts.<sup>64</sup> The emir is the head of state and the commander of Kuwait's military,<sup>65</sup> who has significant power, and with the cabinet constitutes the executive branch.<sup>66</sup> The emir is also part of the legislative branch with the National Assembly of Kuwait.<sup>67</sup> According to Kuwait's 1962 Constitution, "The National Assembly shall be composed of fifty members elected by general direct secret ballot in accordance with the provisions of the Electoral Law. Ministers who are not elected to the National Assembly shall be considered members of the Assembly by virtue of their functions."<sup>68</sup>

Kuwait's constitution emphasizes rights for Kuwaiti citizens, but is unclear about rights which may relate to expatriates. For example, the constitution's

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<sup>61</sup> Nakib, 35-171.

<sup>62</sup> International Business Publications, USA, *Kuwait: Foreign Policy and Government Guide; Volume 1: Strategic Information and Developments*, International Business Publications, Washington, DC USA, 2016, 61.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid; AlShammari.

<sup>64</sup> Kuwait's Constitution of 1962, Reinstated in 1992.

<sup>65</sup> Kuwait's 1962 Constitution, Articles 67 and 74.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., Article 52.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., Article 51.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., Article 80.

stipulations about family,<sup>69</sup> youth,<sup>70</sup> education,<sup>71</sup> public health,<sup>72</sup> ownership, capital, labor,<sup>73</sup> and confiscation of property<sup>74</sup> may or may not apply to expatriates because those stipulations do not explicitly mention citizens or expatriates. In contrast, constitutional stipulations that explicitly mention Kuwaiti citizens relate to political freedom, equality, social justice,<sup>75</sup> cooperation, compassion,<sup>76</sup> security, tranquility, equal opportunity,<sup>77</sup> social insurance services, social help, medical care,<sup>78</sup> prosperity,<sup>79</sup> right to work,<sup>80</sup> and the power to petition and complain to the government.<sup>81</sup>

Article 2 of Kuwait's constitution states, "The religion of the State is Islam and Islamic Law shall be a main source of legislation."<sup>82</sup> At the same time, Kuwait's constitution contains two articles related to religious freedom one of which is Article 29 that states, "The people are peers in human dignity and have, in the eyes of the law, equal public rights and obligations. There shall be made no differentiation among them because of race, origin, language or religion."<sup>83</sup> Article 35 of that constitution states, "Freedom of belief is unrestricted. The State shall protect freedom in the observance of religious rites established by custom, provided such observance does not conflict with morals or disturb public order."<sup>84</sup> More broadly, approximately 200,000 Christians live in Kuwait, most of whom are non-Kuwaiti. There are approximately two hundred Kuwaiti citizens, who are Christians.<sup>85</sup> The Armenian Apostolic Church is one of seven officially-licensed governmentally-recognized Christian churches in Kuwait.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., Article 9.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., Article 10.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., Articles 13 and 14.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., Article 15.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., Article 16.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., Article 19.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., Preamble.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., Article 7.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., Article 8.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., Article 11.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., Article 20.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., Article 41.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., Article 115.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., Article 2.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., Article 29.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., Article 35.

<sup>85</sup> Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia, "Christians in Kuwait," <https://www.avona.org/kuwait-christians-in-kuwait/> (accessed May 16, 2025).

<sup>86</sup> "Getting to Know the Christians in Kuwait: 'Seven Licensed churches - Hundreds of Thousands of Worshipers,'" *Kuwait Times*, March 23, 2017 <https://news.kuwaittimes.net/website/getting-know-christians-kuwait/> (accessed May 14, 2025). The Kuwaiti government recognizes the following officially-

## ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

Kuwait's economy is an important factor for Armenians and other expatriates there. According to the World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook for Kuwait, which was published in April 2025, Kuwait's economy remained in recession in 2024 due to oil sector contraction, but recovery is expected in 2025 with the gradual unwinding of OPEC+ production cuts. Downside risks are stemming from trade headwinds, uncertainty on global growth, oil price volatility. Substantial financial buffers from past oil revenues provide a cushion against adverse shocks.<sup>87</sup>

A recovery in real GDP from the oil sector is projected in 2025, with growth expected at 2.2 percent as OPEC+ production cuts are gradually unwound starting in May 2025. The non-oil sector is forecasted to expand by 1.6 percent in 2025, supported by a rebound in real credit growth and large-scale infrastructure projects. Long-term growth prospects remain contingent on the effective implementation of structural reforms and diversifying the economy.<sup>88</sup> Despite Kuwait's overall economic contraction, employment projections for 2025 point to a growth of about 2.0 percent year-on-year, stronger among women (2.4 percent year-over-year), thanks to the recovery of the non-oil sector. This is in a context of roughly stable labor force participation and unemployment rates. The latter is projected to hover around 2.1 percent in 2025, with virtually no change with respect to 2024. Yet, the unemployment rate is estimated to remain significantly higher at 14.9 percent among youth (15-24), with a peak of 28.3 percent among young women.<sup>89</sup> The relatively positive economic outlook seems to bode well for Armenians in Kuwait.

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licensed churches: the Anglican Church, Armenian Apostolic Church, Coptic Orthodox Church, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), Greek Catholic Church, Greek Orthodox Church, National Evangelical Church of Kuwait (Protestant), and Roman Catholic Church (Geoff Openshaw, "Kuwait Grants Official Recognition to Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints," *This Week in Mormons*, April 3, 2019 <http://thisweekinmormons.com/2019/04/kuwait-grants-official-recognition-to-church-of-jesus-christ-of-latter-day-saints/> (accessed May 14, 2025); "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints Receives Official Recognition in Kuwait," Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, New Release, April 3, 2019 <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/the-church-of-jesus-christ-of-latter-day-saints-receives-official-recognition-in-kuwait> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>87</sup> World Bank, "Macro Poverty Outlook: Kuwait," April 10, 2025, 1, <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/65cf93926fdb3ea23b72f277fc249a72-0500042021/related/mpo-kwt.pdf> (accessed May 16, 2025).

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

## THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE)



With respect to the United Arab Emirates, its constitution, as well as Armenians and other expatriates there, it would be helpful to begin with a discussion of the demographics of that country.

### DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

In terms of the ethnic and national demographics of the United Arab Emirates, Emiratis comprise 11.6% of the population, South Asians comprise 59.4%, (which includes Indians 38.2%, Bangladeshis 9.5%, Pakistanis 9.4%, others 2.3%), Egyptians comprise 10.2%, Filipino comprise 6.1%, and other nationalities and ethnicities comprise 12.8%. That data represents the total population. These statistics constitute a 2019 estimate. As of that year, immigrants made up about 87.9% of the total population, according to statistics from the United Nations.<sup>90</sup> In terms of religious demographics Muslims comprise 74.5% of the population (Sunni 63.3%, Shia 6.7%, other 4.4%), Christians 12.9%, Hindus 6.2%, Buddhists 3.2%, agnostics 1.3%, and other 1.9%. That data represents the total population. These statistics constitute a 2020 estimate. As of that year, immigrants comprise approximately 88.1% of the total population, according to data from the

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<sup>90</sup> “United Arab Emirates,” *World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/united-arab-emirates/#people-and-society> (accessed August 5, 2025).

United Nations.<sup>91</sup> There are approximately 8000 to 10,000 Armenians living in the United Arab Emirates.<sup>92</sup>

### ARMENIANS IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

As early as the sixteenth century, Armenian merchants were the main organizers of trade between the East and West in the Gulf region.<sup>93</sup> Armenians settled in the United Arab Emirates in the 1960s predominantly as migrant workers, emigrating from Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Egypt, Iraq, Armenia, Russia, the United States, Canada, and various countries in Europe. The flow of Armenians to the UAE has gradually increased over time. Since the 1980s, the Armenian community in the UAE has developed distinctive features. Initially, two Armenian communities were established in the UAE: one in Sharjah and Dubai, and the other in Abu Dhabi. The Armenian communities in Sharjah and Dubai constituted approximately eighty percent of the Armenian population in the UAE. The Armenian community in Abu Dhabi constituted twenty percent of the Armenian population in the UAE. Currently, a number of Armenians also live in the Northern Emirates, which include al-Fujairah, Ajman, Ras al-Khaimah, and Umm al-Quwain.<sup>94</sup>

Today, many Armenians in the UAE hold high-ranking positions in various institutions. Approximately ten percent of Armenians in the UAE are businesspersons and private traders. There are also architects, economists, high-tech specialists, doctors, and teachers. Armenians in the UAE are considered by the state to be a religious community. Acting within the framework of the historical national constitution, the community is represented and governed by the religious authority within the state. The supreme and legislative body of the community is the diocesan assembly, and the executive bodies are the national departments, which are formed locally.<sup>95</sup>

Armenian organizations in the UAE currently include the Abu Dhabi National Board, Dubai and the Northern Emirates National Division, the Armenian Relief Society, the Armenian General Benevolent Union, and the UAE Regional Division of the Hamazkayin Armenian Educational and Cultural Association. There are two churches in the UAE: Saint Gregory the Illuminator Church in Sharjah and the Holy Martyrs Church in Abu Dhabi, which are under the jurisdiction of the Catholicosate of the Great See of

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Government of Armenia, Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, United Arab Emirates, <http://diaspora.gov.am/en/pages/41/uae> (accessed August 5, 2025).

<sup>93</sup> Government of Armenia, Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, "United Arab Emirates," <http://diaspora.gov.am/en/pages/41/uae> (accessed August 6, 2025).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

Cilicia. There are also followers of the Armenian Catholic and Armenian Evangelical Churches. As they do not have their own churches, they mainly visit the Armenian Apostolic Church. There are two Armenian schools in the community: the Sharjah Ohanesian Day School and the Ara Khanoyan National Day School in Abu Dhabi.<sup>96</sup>

#### BRITAIN, THE EASTERN ARABIAN PENINSULA, AND THE PERSIAN GULF

After the British firmly established their presence in the Arabic-speaking regions of the Persian Gulf in the early nineteenth century, the first of the treaties made by Britain with all the sheikhs of the coast of Oman, which are known as the Trucial States, was concluded in 1820.<sup>97</sup> That treaty followed conflicts between the maritime communities of the Trucial Coast and the British, which involved the British attacking Ras al-Khaimah in 1809 and again in 1819. Various treaties, beginning with the General Maritime Treaty of 1820, led to peace and prosperity along the coast and supported a lively trade in high-quality natural pearls as well as a resurgence in other regional trade. A further treaty of 1892 devolved external relations to the British in return for protectorate status on the part of the region that was later to become the UAE.<sup>98</sup> By the terms of these treaties, Britain undertook to control defense and foreign policy, and agreed not to interfere in internal affairs.<sup>99</sup>

These treaties were restrictive and indefinite; they restricted the sheikhdoms from establishing relations with countries other than Britain, unless they received permission to do so. In addition, the treaties were indefinite, in that they had no expiration date. By virtue of these treaties, Britain was able to impose on the sheikhs and princes in the Arabic-speaking areas of the Persian Gulf obligations that favored Britain. At the same time, these treaties enabled Britain to establish its long-term involvement in the affairs of those sheikhdoms, while limiting the powers of the political leaders in the Gulf region. (Those treaties remained in place until the emergence of the United Arab Emirates, the State of Qatar, and the State of Bahrain in 1971 when those treaties were replaced by treaties of friendship.)<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Abdullah Omran Taryam, *The Establishment of the United Arab Emirates, 1950-85*, Croom Helm, Amazon Kindle E-Book Edition, London, 1987, 8-9; Jon Armajani, "Kuwait's and the United Arab Emirates' Constitutions, and Expatriates in those Countries," *Armenians of the Gulf Arab*, 125-36, <https://haigrepositary.haigazian.edu.lb/items/f58f80bc-19ac-41c3-b4f5-37b5d247a4e1> (accessed May 20, 2025).

<sup>98</sup> Taryam, 9-10.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

Britain had secured pledges from the Ruler of Kuwait in 1913, the Ruler of Bahrain in 1915, the Ruler of Qatar in 1916, and the Rulers of the Trucial Coast in 1922 not to grant oil exploration concessions without prior consultation with and the consent of the British Government through its accredited representatives. In this way, those rulers were largely obligated not to negotiate with non-British oil companies. Britain used these treaties as a means to justify its continued involvement in the internal affairs of the sheikhdoms in the Gulf.

## WORLD WARS I AND II

After World War I, western nations' endeavors to secure oil from the Persian Gulf intensified, particularly on the part of American companies which entered the Gulf area and the Arabian Peninsula in the late 1920s and managed to secure concession rights in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. While British oil companies failed to procure any concession in Saudi Arabia, Standard Oil of California (SOCAL) in the United States obtained a concession for oil exploration in Bahrain in 1928 and began extracting oil in 1932.<sup>101</sup> Another American company, the Gulf Oil Corporation, became a partner with the British Anglo-Persian Oil Company in 1934 in a bid for the concession in Kuwait. Faced with this American competition, Britain resolved to tighten its grip, and managed to prevent American companies from dealing with Qatar for a period of time. In 1935, Britain secured the Qatari concession for the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, and attempted to prevent American companies from obtaining any concessions in the Trucial Emirates.<sup>102</sup>

Britain had emerged from World War II with a policy that aimed to maintain its influence on strategically vital regions, which included the Persian Gulf. This new policy toward the area translated into what was termed Britain's direct rule. Accordingly, Britain appointed a Political Resident to Bahrain in 1946. Subsequently, in 1949, Britain appointed a permanent Political Agent, who was based in Sharjah. Officials from Britain's Foreign Office were sent to the area to prepare field studies about various affairs, including recommendations about the best system of government and administration for the area to ensure the continuity of British involvement.<sup>103</sup>

After World War II, liberation movements emerged in various parts of the world. Many people in colonized countries called for an end to colonial administrations and for economic, social, and cultural reforms.<sup>104</sup> During the post-World War II period, the United States continued to expand its influence in the Middle East, Persian Gulf region, and other parts of the world. As part of this continued expansion, the United States opened an embassy in Jeddah,

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

Saudi Arabia in 1944.<sup>105</sup> This event, and others that were similar to it, manifested a desire on the part of the United States government and its allies for military bases in the Persian Gulf to secure their economic and political interests there, while serving as transit bases for American military service persons who may be going to other parts of the Middle East and the world. Over the next several decades, the United States gained greater influence in the Persian Gulf and Middle East than Britain.<sup>106</sup>

#### FROM THE 1950s TO THE 1970s

One event with a significant effect on political awareness in the region was the Egyptian revolution of 1952, when the Free Officers toppled King Farouk in a coup d'état. The leaders of that revolution proclaimed national liberation for Egyptians themselves and for Arabs, more generally, while declaring universal support for liberation movements against foreign forces in the Arab world. At the same time, Egyptian media, including radio broadcasts and print media, declared those anti-colonialist principles to various persons, including persons who lived in colonized countries and regions. Many persons in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf region viewed the Egyptian revolution as a potential threshold moment for anti-colonialist independence movements.<sup>107</sup>

As British influence in the Persian Gulf region decreased, and as people within that region asserted their own powers over economics and politics, between 1968 and 1971 the Persian Gulf witnessed a chain of events, from which emerged four distinct political entities: The Sultanate of Oman, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, and Bahrain.<sup>108</sup> In the transitional period between 1968 and 1971, the search in the emirates for a federal structure acceptable to all parties as a strong political entity in terms of manpower and economics was conducted within the framework of British control that continued until 1971.<sup>109</sup> Indeed, in January of 1968, the British Labor government announced its decision to withdraw its military forces from east of Suez, particularly from the Arabian Gulf, by the end of 1971, which Britain did.<sup>110</sup> Significant weakening in the British economy and Britain's continuing

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<sup>105</sup> U.S. Embassy & Consulates in Saudi Arabia, Policy & History, Mission, n.d. <https://sa.usembassy.gov/policy-history-mission/> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>110</sup> Masoumah Saleh al-Mubarak, "The British Withdrawal from the Arabian Gulf and its Regional Political Consequences in the Gulf," North Texas State University, December 1976, 1. [https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc663118/m2/1/high\\_res\\_d/1002773070-Al-Mubarak.pdf](https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc663118/m2/1/high_res_d/1002773070-Al-Mubarak.pdf) (accessed May 14, 2025).

inability to maintain its colonies and protectorates were important factors in the decision.<sup>111</sup>

## THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

UAE's Constitution came into effect on December 2, 1971, which is the date that those emirates gained their independence. The constitution's implementation was provisional, and in 1996 the UAE's Federal Supreme Council made that provisional constitution permanent.<sup>112</sup> Jerusalem-born Adi al-Bitar (عدي البيطار) wrote that country's constitution which is comprised of a Preamble, ten chapters, and 152 articles.<sup>113</sup> The constitution's amendments involved stipulations that explicitly (1) gave the UAE's government control over its armed forces and (2) extended the constitution's validity until it was made permanent in 1996.<sup>114</sup> This section of the chapter will focus on that constitution's stipulations and relevant laws that apply to Armenians and other expatriates in the UAE, as well as UAE citizens. Many of that constitution's protections apply largely to UAE citizens. Those stipulations relate to equality, social justice, safety, security, equal opportunity,<sup>115</sup> education,<sup>116</sup> medical protection,<sup>117</sup> rights of employees and employers,<sup>118</sup> private property,<sup>119</sup> protections related to arrest and punishment,<sup>120</sup> and freedom of movement and residence,<sup>121</sup> among many others. Some of the constitution's stipulations, which apply to Armenians in the UAE, relate to Islam as that country's official religion with Islamic sharia as its principal source of legislation,<sup>122</sup> and the freedom to hold religious ceremonies in accordance with established custom.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 32-35.

<sup>112</sup> The Official Portal of the UAE Government. The Constitution.

<https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/the-constitution-of-the-uae> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>113</sup> United Arab Emirates's Constitution of 1971 with Amendments through 2004 [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/United\\_Arab\\_Emirates\\_2004.pdf](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/United_Arab_Emirates_2004.pdf) (accessed May 14, 2025). Constituteproject.org is part of the Comparative Constitutions Project which is a scholarly endeavor that produces comprehensive data about the world's constitutions. See "About the CCP" at <http://comparativeconstitutionsproject.org/about-ccp/> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>114</sup> Constitution of the United Arab Emirates [with amendments], Refworld, <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/48eca8132.pdf> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>115</sup> UAE's 1971 Constitution, Article 14.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., Articles 17 and 18.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., Article 19.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., Article 20.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., Article 21.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., Articles 25-28.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., Article 29.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, Article 7.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., Article 32.

There are approximately thirty-seven Christian churches in the UAE, including two Armenian Apostolic churches, which are Saint Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Church of Sharjah and Holy Martyrs' Armenian Church of Abu Dhabi. In 1997, Catholicos Aram I of the Great See of Cilicia officially inaugurated the construction of the Saint Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Church in a groundbreaking ceremony, and on November 15, 1998, he ordained that church. He also inaugurated the adjacent building comprising the Pierre Keusseyan community hall and the Ohanessian Armenian school in the presence of more than two thousand Armenians from Sharjah, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Kuwait.<sup>124</sup> The Holy Martyrs' Armenian Church of Abu Dhabi opened its doors in December 2014.<sup>125</sup> One of the oldest churches in the UAE that continues to operate is Saint Joseph's Cathedral, which is Catholic.<sup>126</sup> The foundation for that Church was laid in 1962, and it was blessed in 1964.<sup>127</sup>

The February 2019 visit of Roman Catholic Pope Saint Francis I to the UAE was a significant event for Armenian Christians in the UAE, whether those Armenians were Apostolic, Catholic, or Protestant. Armenian Bishop Mesrob Sarkissian was very supportive of the Pope's visit saying, "We have historical links with the Pope. Therefore, the Pope's visit is important to us. This visit will enhance our good relationship with our Muslim brothers, and I am sure that this will inspire local people to know more about Christian culture, further strengthening our coexistence in a tolerant society.... This is the most important occasion in my six years living here in the UAE."<sup>128</sup> The Pope's visit to the UAE followed the appointment of Armenian Apostolic

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<sup>124</sup> "Saint Gregory the Illuminator Church" Armenian Prelacy of United Arab Emirates, November 24, 2016 <https://emahay.com/en/saint-gregory-the-illuminator-church/> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>125</sup> Haneen Dajani, "New Church a Haven for Abu Dhabi's Armenian Population," *The National*, January 3, 2015 <https://www.thenationalnews.com/uae/new-church-a-haven-for-abu-dhabi-s-armenian-population-1.117975> (accessed May 14, 2025); Armenian Prelacy of United Arab Emirates, Homepage, <https://emahay.com> (accessed May 14, 2025); Dona Cherian, "Your Ultimate Guide to Churches in the UAE," *Gulf News*, December 20, 2017, <https://gulfnews.com/lifestyle/community/your-ultimate-guide-to-churches-in-the-uae-1.1948435> (accessed May 14, 2025). The following website provides information about leaders of the Armenian Apostolic Church in the Middle East and countries of the Persian Gulf:

<https://www.armenianorthodoxchurch.org/լրատվություն> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>126</sup> "About Us," Saint Joseph's Cathedral, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates <https://stjosephsabudhabi.org/about-us> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> Binsal Abdul Kader, "Pope's Visit to Shine Light on UAE's Coexistence: Head of Armenian Church Praises UAE's Initiatives for Dialogue Between Different Faiths," February 1, 2019, <https://gulfnews.com/uae/government/popes-visit-to-shine-light-on-uaes-coexistence-1.61797116> (accessed May 14, 2025).

Bishop Khajag Barsamian, in early September 2018, as the official representative of the Armenian Apostolic Church to the Vatican.<sup>129</sup> Along these lines, the Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi, which includes a church, mosque, and synagogue, is intended to promote positive relations among Christians, Muslims, Jews and persons of other religions.<sup>130</sup>

Although Christians may worship freely in parts of the UAE, aspects of Islamic law apply to all expatriates and Emirati citizens in such areas as strictures on alcohol, drugs, and sexual relations, as well as laws related to marriage, divorce, inheritance, and personal status.<sup>131</sup> Article 40 of UAE's constitution refers specifically to foreigners in that country. It states, "Foreigners shall enjoy, within the Union, the rights and freedoms stipulated in international charters which are in force, or in treaties and agreements to which the Union is party. They shall be subject to the equivalent obligations."<sup>132</sup> In this regard, the UAE is a member of the United Nations, and is required by virtue of its membership to comply with the UN's

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<sup>129</sup> Andrea Gagliarducci, "Armenian Apostolic Church Appoints First-Ever Representative in Rome," *Catholic Herald*, December 20, 2018 <https://thecatholicherald.com/armenian-apostolic-church-appoints-first-ever-representative-in-rome/> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>130</sup> Abrahamic Family House, "Diverse in Our Faiths. Common in Our Humanity. Together in Peace" <https://www.abrahamicfamilyhouse.ae/> (accessed on May 25, 2025); Abrahamic Family House, "Education & Dialogue," <https://www.abrahamicfamilyhouse.ae/education-dialogue> (accessed May 25, 2025).

<sup>131</sup> Natalie Wilson, "Dubai Laws You Need to Know before Visiting," *The Independent*, April 17, 2025 <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/north-africa-middle-east/uae/dubai/dubai-travel-laws-uk-foreign-office-b2733769.html> (accessed May 14, 2025); Sara Kettler, "Dubai Laws for Expats to Consider," International Citizens Group, <https://www.internationalcitizens.com/blog/expatriate-living/dubai-laws-expats.php> (accessed May 14, 2025); Bashir Ahmed, Chatura Randeniya and Mevan Kiriella Bandara, "Litigation and Enforcement in the United Arab Emirates: Overview" Law Stated as at November 1, 2018, *Thomson Reuters Practical Law*, [https://content.next.westlaw.com/Document/I2ef1294a1ed511e38578f7ccc38dcbe/View/FullText.html?contextData=\(sc.Default\)&transitionType=Default&firstPage=true&bhcp=1](https://content.next.westlaw.com/Document/I2ef1294a1ed511e38578f7ccc38dcbe/View/FullText.html?contextData=(sc.Default)&transitionType=Default&firstPage=true&bhcp=1) (accessed May 14, 2025); [https://afриди-angell.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/PLC-Litigation-and-Enforcement-in-the-UAE\\_2021-002.pdf](https://afриди-angell.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/PLC-Litigation-and-Enforcement-in-the-UAE_2021-002.pdf) (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>131</sup> UAE's 1971 Constitution, Article 40; Diana Hamadé AlGhurair, "Family Law in the United Arab Emirates: Overview," Law Stated as at September 1, 2023, *Thomson Reuters Practical Law* [https://uk.practicallaw.thomsonreuters.com/4-612-5426?transitionType=Default&contextData=\(sc.Default\)&firstPage=true&bhcp=1](https://uk.practicallaw.thomsonreuters.com/4-612-5426?transitionType=Default&contextData=(sc.Default)&firstPage=true&bhcp=1) (accessed June 4, 2023, and May 14, 2025).

<sup>132</sup> UAE's 1971 Constitution, Article 40.

stipulations for member states, including the UN principles on human rights.<sup>133</sup> Those statements on human rights are relevant to expatriates in the UAE, although some companies operating in the UAE have violated some of those principles, specifically with respect to aspects of the UAE's judiciary system<sup>134</sup> and human trafficking with respect to labor exploitation<sup>135</sup> as it relates to low-income migrant workers.

## THE UAE'S CONSTITUTION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

A 2010 report by the UN Human Rights Council made the following recommendations, among others, to the UAE's government about expatriates in that country:

1. Valid applications for citizenship by individuals who have lawfully lived in the UAE for a certain period of time must be reviewed and processed by the authorities in a non-discriminatory manner;

2. The UAE's government should reconsider its actual educational policy, so as to ensure that public educational institutions are open to all children, including non-nationals;

3. The constitutional provisions restricting certain human rights to Emirati nationals should be revised so as to extend human-rights protections to all individuals residing in the country, including non-nationals.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> "United Arab Emirates," United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/MENARegion/Pages/AEIndex.aspx> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>134</sup> United Nations, General Assembly, Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers, Gabriela Knaul - Addendum - Mission to the United Arab Emirates*, May 5, 2015, A/HRC/29/26/Add.2, Document E at [http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage\\_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/29/26/Add.2](http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/29/26/Add.2) (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>135</sup> United Nations, General Assembly, Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Joy Ngozi Ezeilo - Addendum - Mission to the United Arab Emirates*, February 22, 2013, A/HRC/23/48/Add.1, Document E at [http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage\\_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/23/48/Add.1](http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/23/48/Add.1) (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>136</sup> United Nations, General Assembly, Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, Githu Muigai*, A/HRC/14/43/Add.3, March 31, 2010, 2 <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G10/125/76/PDF/G1012576.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed May 14, 2025).

If the UAE were to comply with these and other recommendations, it would be beneficial to Armenians and other expatriates living in the UAE, although the vast majority of Armenians in the UAE are highly-skilled white-collar workers in the middle and upper classes.<sup>137</sup>

In terms of other matters related to human rights related to the UAE's constitution, a statement that Human Rights Watch released in June 2022 stated, "wide-ranging legal changes introduced by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in late 2021 [have] failed to address the longstanding and systematic restrictions on citizens' and residents' civil and political rights."<sup>138</sup> The legal changes include amendments to over forty laws including the ones on crime and punishment, cybercrimes, and drugs. While those changes allow for a moderate broadening of personal freedoms, the new legal framework retains severe restrictions on the rights to free expression, association, and assembly.

The UAE's crime and punishment law, and cybercrimes law, which were implemented in January 2022, continue to prohibit criticism against rulers, as well as speech that the UAE government believes would create or encourage social unrest. According to Human Rights Watch, over time the UAE's government has imposed severe penalties for vaguely defined charges. That government maintains provisions, which criminalize defamation and both verbal and written insults, as prosecutable offenses. New provisions criminalize "false" and "misleading" information, sharing information with foreign groups or countries, and "offending foreign states." Protests and demonstrations continue to be prohibited. According to Human Rights Watch, since 2011 the UAE's authorities have executed a sustained assault on freedom of expression and association, arresting and prosecuting many independent lawyers, judges, teachers, students, and activists, and closing civil society associations, as well as the offices of foreign organizations, effectively crushing any space for dissent.<sup>139</sup>

Previous laws that severely suppress freedom of expression have often been used to block dissent. Local news sites, many of them owned or controlled by the government, exercise self-censorship in accordance with government regulations and unofficial red lines. Since at least 2015, governmental authorities in the UAE have ignored or denied requests for access to the country by United Nations experts, human rights researchers, and

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<sup>137</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Human Rights Liaison Unit, Division of International Protection, *Submission by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' Compilation Report, Universal Periodic Review: United Arab Emirates*, June 2012 <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4ffd31262.pdf> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>138</sup> Human Rights Watch, "UAE: Sweeping Legal 'Reforms' Deepen Repression," June 5, 2022 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/06/05/uae-sweeping-legal-reforms-deepen-repression> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

critical academics and journalists.<sup>140</sup> These restrictions and related actions by the UAE's government contradict the freedoms and rights which are stated in articles twenty-five through forty-four of the UAE's constitution which, among other rights and freedoms, support freedom of expression, opinion, thought, conscience, and assembly.<sup>141</sup>

At the same time, there are similarities and differences in the ways that the seven emirates of the UAE enforce the constitution and laws. The similarities are rooted, in part, in the fact that certain matters are under the exclusive domain of the federal authorities. Such matters include foreign affairs, defense and security, currency, public health, and education. Federal laws are enacted by the UAE Federal National Council. Concurrently, under the UAE's constitution, each emirate is permitted to maintain its own legislative body and judicial authority. Typically, differences in the laws of the individual emirates do not have a significant effect on expatriates in the UAE because their status is governed mostly by the UAE's federal laws.<sup>142</sup>

#### THE UAE'S DEMOGRAPHY AND ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

The total population of the UAE as of April 2025 is 11.35 million.<sup>143</sup> The total expatriate population in UAE in 2025 stands at 10.04 million residents, while the Emirati population stands at 1.31 million.<sup>144</sup> Indians continue to occupy the highest position of expatriates in the UAE with 37.96 percent of the population, followed by Pakistanis with 16.72 percent. Some other nationalities in the UAE include Bangladeshis, Filipinos, Iranians, Egyptians, Nepalese, Sri Lankans, and Chinese, among others.<sup>145</sup> The number of Armenians living in the UAE is estimated to be around 8,000 to 10,000, the

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> UAE's 1971 Constitution, Articles 25 through 44.

<sup>142</sup> El Ameir Noor, Tammam Jazmati and Zane Anani, Al Tamimi & Company, "Legal Systems in the United Arab Emirates: Overview; General Constitutional Features," *Thomson Reuters Practical Law*, n.d., [https://uk.practicallaw.thomsonreuters.com/w-032-5816?transitionType=Default&contextData=\(sc.Default\)&firstPage=true](https://uk.practicallaw.thomsonreuters.com/w-032-5816?transitionType=Default&contextData=(sc.Default)&firstPage=true) (accessed May 14, 2025); Europe Emirates Group, Dubai, "Everything You Need to Know about the UAE Legal System," Europe Emirates Group, Dubai, December 20, 2023, <https://uae-cu.com/blog/uae-legal-system-explained-for-expats.html> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>143</sup> "United Arab Emirates Population Statistics 2025," *Global Media Insight*, April 27, 2025, <https://www.globalmediainsight.com/blog/uae-population-statistics/> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>144</sup> "United Arab Emirates Population Statistics 2025," *Global Media Insight*, April 27, 2025, <https://www.globalmediainsight.com/blog/uae-population-statistics/#:~:text=UAE%20Population%202021%20by%20Nationality,11%25%20or%201.15%20million%20today> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

vast majority of whom hold high-ranking positions in various institutions.<sup>146</sup> About ten percent of Armenians are businesspersons and private traders. There are also architects, economists, high-tech specialists, doctors, and teachers. Despite not being permitted to acquire Emirati citizenship, Armenians in the UAE are considered by the government to be a legally-accepted religious community.<sup>147</sup>

In this context, the UAE government's policy has been to encourage highly-skilled expatriates, who will drive non-oil economic growth in sectors such as health care and technology, to work in the UAE because there are not enough skilled Emiratis who can work in these sectors, and because these expatriates are high spenders and investors who will benefit the UAE's economy. For instance, the UAE has relaxed restrictions on family sponsorship, making it easier for employed expatriate residents who wish to bring their family members to the UAE. In addition, in 2019 Abu Dhabi announced changes to the emirate's real-estate regulations. Non-UAE individuals and companies in Abu Dhabi are allowed to enter freehold agreements across thirty designated zones, lifting previous restrictions that limited them to 99-year leases of the land. The change brings Abu Dhabi into line with Dubai, which has allowed such purchases since 2002. Owners will be able to purchase land with a mortgage, sell it, inherit it, and enjoy all the rights that come with full ownership. The intent is to boost demand for residential real estate by enabling non-Emiratis, and citizens in countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, to own property albeit only in designated investment zones.<sup>148</sup>

In terms of the UAE's economic outlook, according to the World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook for that country, which was published in April 2025, the UAE's economy is reaping the benefits of its diversification, prudent macroeconomic policies, and economic transformation. While hydrocarbons continue to be important, the expanding non-oil sector drives sustainable growth. Despite OPEC+ adjustments, global trade headwinds and associated uncertainty, economic growth remains steady, with modest improvements

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<sup>146</sup> Republic of Armenia, Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, "United Arab Emirates," <http://diaspora.gov.am/en/pages/41/uae> (accessed May 14, 2025).

<sup>147</sup> "Diaspora - United Arab Emirates," Republic of Armenia, Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, n.d., <http://diaspora.gov.am/en/pages/41/uae> (May 14, 2025).

<sup>148</sup> "United Arab Emirates: The Shifting Sands of Policy Towards Expatriates" *The Economist Intelligence Unit*, May 2, 2019 <https://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=237953407&Country=United%20Arab%20Emirates&topic=Economy> (accessed May 14, 2025).

expected in 2025. Fiscal buffers, forward-looking governance, and investments ensure long-term stability.<sup>149</sup>

The UAE's GDP is projected to grow by 4.6 percent in 2025, and to remain broadly stable around that range in the medium term. From 2025 onward, oil Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is expected to expand, reflecting the phasing out of OPEC+ decisions. Gradual resumption of oil production between May 2025 and September 2026, is expected to support oil-GDP growth despite downward pressure on global oil prices. The non-oil sector is expected to remain a key contributor to growth, with projected expansion of 4.9 percent in 2025, supported by growth in tourism, construction, transportation, and financial services.

Ongoing business climate reforms, infrastructure investments, and governance enhancements are expected to further support economic diversification and competitiveness. However, key sectors such as logistics may be impacted by ongoing trade uncertainties and disruptions. The UAE is expected to continue advancing its energy transition strategy, targeting a threefold increase in renewable capacity to fourteen gigawatts by 2030. Strategic investments in clean energy and efficiency technologies will reinforce economic resilience and long-term sustainability, in line with the UAE's net-zero targets.<sup>150</sup>

In conclusion, Armenians' and other expatriates' levels of comfort and hope for the future depend on their specific careers and life-situations in Kuwait and the UAE. Even though many Kuwaitis and Emiratis are concerned about the possibility of jobs being granted to foreign workers instead of them, the overall environment for expatriates is more positive in the UAE than in Kuwait.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> World Bank, Macro Poverty Outlook (MPO), United Arab Emirates, April 10, 2025, 1, <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/65cf93926fdb3ea23b72f277fc249a72-0500042021/related/mpo-are.pdf> (accessed May 15, 2025).

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>151</sup> "Kuwait: Economic Update - April 2019"; "Report: Kuwait's Population Growth Declines Due to Kuwaitization Efforts," *AlBawaba*, April 17, 2019 <https://www.albawaba.com/business/report-kuwait's-population-growth-declines-due-kuwaitization-efforts-1280459> (accessed May 24, 2025); Jumana Khamis, "How UAE Companies will Meet 2019 Emiratisation Target," March 19, 2019 <https://gulfnews.com/uae/how-uae-companies-will-meet-2019-emiratisation-target-1.62769683> (accessed May 24, 2025).

## CONCLUSION

While each chapter has analyzed the specific circumstances, which diaspora Armenians face with respect to their rights, freedoms, and relationships with governments, an analysis of the larger international framework, in which some diaspora Armenians live, is worth considering. The horrors of the Armenian genocide are present in the collective memories of Armenians throughout the world. At the same time, those memories may be particularly vivid for Armenians who live in parts of the Middle East that were within the Ottoman Empire during the Armenian Genocide. The modern and contemporary expansionism of Turkey and its close ally Azerbaijan cause enormous fear, hardships, and challenges for Armenians, particularly, but not exclusively, for Armenians who have been harmed by Azerbaijan's and Turkey's military actions. The Second Artsakh War, which took place from September 27, 2020 until November 10, 2020, and Azerbaijan's subsequent military offensive during September 19 and 20, 2023 are traumatic for all Armenians, and particularly the ones in and near Artsakh who have been harmed directly by Turkey's and Azerbaijan's unprovoked aggressions.<sup>1</sup> Tragically, once again some of the descendants of Armenians, who were mercilessly brutalized during the Armenian Genocide, experienced the brunt of Turkey's and its ally's military onslaughts. During the Second Artsakh War, large numbers of Armenian civilians and soldiers were killed, injured or missing.<sup>2</sup> Armenians also lost many territories as well as religious and cultural sites, which hold enormous meaning for Armenians inside and outside Artsakh. Azerbaijan's and Turkey's aggression caused Azerbaijan to conquer most of the land in Artsakh, and virtually the entire Armenian population of Artsakh, comprised of more than one-hundred thousand persons, fled from Artsakh. Most of them became refugees in Armenia. Over the years, Azerbaijan has committed many violations of the ceasefires and of human rights. At the same time, Azerbaijan has occupied sovereign territories of the independent Republic of Armenia.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Center for Preventive Action, "Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," *Council on Foreign Relations*, March 20, 2025 <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/nagorno-karabakh-conflict> (accessed May 20, 2025).

<sup>2</sup> International Crisis Group, "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: A Visual Explainer, International Crisis Group," September 16, 2023, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/content/nagorno-karabakh-conflict-visual-explainer> .

<sup>3</sup> Center for Truth and Justice, "Catalogue Listing Digital Evidence of Azerbaijan Violating UN Court Orders & Continued Human Rights Violations," April 5, 2024 <https://www.cftjustice.org/catalogue-of-open-source-digital-evidence-icj-violations-by-azerbaijan/> (accessed May 20, 2025). See also Felix Light, "Armenia

The Second Artsakh War and Azerbaijan's subsequent military offensive during September 19 and 20, 2023 have had several negative effects on members of the Armenian Diaspora, in addition to the harmful effects on Armenians in Artsakh and Armenia. First, for many Armenians in the diaspora, especially but not limited to descendants of genocide survivors, the 2020 war and the subsequent forced expulsion of Armenians from Artsakh reawakened deep-seated historical trauma and fears. The enormous tragedy and the scale of Armenians' loss in Artsakh resonated with Armenians' collective memory of the Armenian Genocide.<sup>4</sup> Second, some Armenians in the diaspora and in Armenia personally knew Armenians in Artsakh, and were traumatized by the violence which Azerbaijan perpetrated against the indigenous Armenians of Artsakh.<sup>5</sup> Third, some Armenians in Armenia and in the diaspora found themselves working to integrate displaced Armenians from Artsakh into their respective communities.<sup>6</sup> Fourth, many Armenians, in Armenia and the diaspora, became disillusioned and frustrated with Armenia's political leaders' actions and various countries' lack of support of the Armenians of Artsakh, during and after the Second Artsakh War.<sup>7</sup> Fifth,

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Calls on Azerbaijan to Investigate Ceasefire Violations on Border," April 15, 2025, Reuters on AOL's website [https://www.aol.com/news/armenia-calls-azerbaijan-investigate-ceasefire-](https://www.aol.com/news/armenia-calls-azerbaijan-investigate-ceasefire-111151661.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xILmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAJQ9dA8a1P6NnAab5yZTtNT4omY_L8SU)

111151661.html?guccounter=1&guce\_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xILmNvbS8&guce\_referrer\_sig=AQAAAJQ9dA8a1P6NnAab5yZTtNT4omY\_L8SU

Peamzx2uM\_2jhhaVCUGI4jKtP3iAxE5bChQoq0GOPFeIRulMI9jfmP1sn7xkozhHVXlskt3aj0DEgzQYbe\_LQKHKumyuVBUTKt5xCjwbwclseZBQdMVtaEUFiYzi gJPotxl8PL4pvrrj0E (accessed May 20, 2025).

- <sup>4</sup> Madeleine Shaw, "Legacy of Loss: The Armenian Genocide in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," *Journal of Peace and War Studies*, 5th Edition (October 2023): 204-20, <https://www.norwich.edu/documents/journal-peace-war-studies-5th-edition-0#page=209> (accessed May 20, 2025).
- <sup>5</sup> The Associated Press, "The Fall of an Enclave in Azerbaijan Stuns the Armenian Diaspora, Shattering a Dream," NPR (National Public Radio in the USA), September 29, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/09/29/1202576206/the-fall-of-an-enclave-in-azerbaijan-stuns-the-armenian-diaspora-shattering-a-dr#:~:text=BEIRUT%20%28AP%29%20%E2%80%94%20The%20swift,part%20of%20their%20historic%20homeland.> (accessed May 20, 2025).
- <sup>6</sup> Olesya Vartanyan, "Armenia Struggles to Cope with Exodus from Nagorno-Karabakh," International Crisis Group, March 4, 2024, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/armenian-azerbaijani-conflict-armenia/armenia-struggles-cope-exodus> (accessed May 20, 2025).
- <sup>7</sup> Critical Questions: Unpacking Armenia's 2020 Karabakh Defeat Karen Harutyunyan, "Critical Questions: Unpacking Armenia's 2020 Karabakh Defeat," *CIVILNET*, January 17, 2025, <https://www.civilnet.am/en/news/812785/critical-questions-unpacking-armenias-2020-karabakh-defeat/> (accessed May 20, 2025); Elise Feron and Bahar Baser, "Pathways to Conflict Transportation and Autonomisation: The Armenian Diaspora and the Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh,"

the loss of Armenian control over Artsakh raised significant concerns in Armenia and the Armenian diaspora about the fate of Armenians' cultural and religious heritage sites in the territories which came under Azerbaijani control. Many Armenians in Artsakh, Armenia, and the Armenian diaspora have feared the erasure of Armenian culture and Azerbaijanis' distortions of Armenian culture and history. Yet, during and after the Second Artsakh War, many persons in the Armenian diaspora supported the Armenians of Artsakh in many ways, including financial contributions,<sup>8</sup> emergency relief,<sup>9</sup> and going to Armenia as volunteers to assist refugees from Artsakh.<sup>10</sup> Much like there is unity among all Armenians about the horrors of the Armenian Genocide, there is unity among Armenians, inside Armenia and within the diaspora, about the horrors of Turkish and Azerbaijani aggression and the importance of assisting the Armenian refugees from Artsakh.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, Turkey and Azerbaijan continue to pose a threat to Armenia.<sup>12</sup> More broadly, Turkey may pose a threat to diaspora Armenians in other regions because of its military and political actions in such places as the Black Sea, Iraq, Libya, the Mediterranean Sea, Sudan, Syria, all of which is in the context of Turkey's expansionist policies.<sup>13</sup> In this vein, state politics vis-à-vis Armenians have almost always been positive as Armenians did not have any land claims and have had a low-profile in politics. However, with the increasing presence of Turkey in the region, Turkey may force the countries, which it influences, to

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*Ethnopolitics*, 22(4):2023, 384-400,

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/17449057.2023.2199601> ;

<https://doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2023.2199601> .

<sup>8</sup> Van Novikov and Stepan Kocharyan, ed. and trans., "Post-War Donations from Diaspora Amount \$27,000,000 - Hayastan Fund Says," *ARMENPRESS*, February 10, 2021 <https://armenpress.am/en/article/1042932> (accessed May 21, 2025).

<sup>9</sup> Jayson Casper, "Armenia Struggles to Aid 100,000 Artsakh Refugees after War," *Christianity Today*, October 16, 2023, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2023/10/armenia-artsakh-refugees-nagorno-karabakh-azerbaijan-war/#:~:text=His%20400%2Dfamily%20Abovyan%20City,of%20the%20blame%20on%20Russia.> (accessed May 21, 2025).

<sup>10</sup> "Bridges of Service Helps Diaspora Armenians Contribute to Homeland Resilience at Critical Time," *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, April 11, 2024 <https://mirrorspectator.com/2024/04/11/bridges-of-service-helps-diaspora-armenians-contribute-to-homeland-resilience-at-critical-time/> (accessed May 21, 2025).

<sup>11</sup> Shaw.

<sup>12</sup> Fin DePencier, "Fears Linger in Armenia of Azerbaijani Invasion," *Eurasianet*, October 13, 2023, <https://eurasianet.org/fears-linger-in-armenia-of-azerbaijani-invasion> (accessed May 21, 2025).

<sup>13</sup> Kali Robinson, "Turkey's Growing Foreign Policy Ambitions," Council on Foreign Relations, July 11, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/turkeys-growing-foreign-policy-ambitions> .

take some restrictive measures against the Armenians. This tragic possibility is consistent with the Ottoman Empire's and Turkey's harmful policies against Armenians historically and during contemporary times.<sup>14</sup>

In this context, a significant development in Armenian-Azerbaijani and Armenian-Turkish relations is the Armenia-Azerbaijan joint declaration, which was signed on August 8, 2025 by Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, and United States President Donald Trump.<sup>15</sup> In this joint declaration, the Armenians and Azerbaijanis acknowledge the need to continue further actions “to achieve the signing and ultimate ratification of the agreement, and [they] emphasized the importance of maintaining and strengthening peace between . . . [the] two countries.”<sup>16</sup> Armenia and Azerbaijan also call on the participating states in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to close the OSCE's Minsk Process, which was devoted to resolving disputes between Armenia and Azerbaijan and specifically the Nagorno Karabagh conflict.<sup>17</sup> The joint declaration states that the “Republic of Armenia will work with the United States of America and mutually determined third parties, to set forth a framework for the ‘Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity’ (TRIPP) connectivity project in the territory of the Republic of Armenia.”<sup>18</sup> The joint declaration emphasizes that “the conditions have been created for . . . [Armenia and Azerbaijan] to finally embark on building good neighborly relations on the basis of the inviolability of international borders and the inadmissibility of the use of force for the acquisition of territory after the conflict that brought immense human suffering.”<sup>19</sup> The future of the joint agreement is uncertain, in light of several factors, including disagreement among Armenians, in Armenia and the diaspora, about the costs and benefits of the agreement to Armenia, Armenians themselves, and the indigenous Nagorno Karabagh Armenians, who were forced to leave their country due to the ethnic cleansing policies of Azerbaijan's government.<sup>20</sup> Iran has threatened to block the TRIPP connectivity project because it believes that the project poses a risk to Iran's security. Russia has stated its belief in the

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<sup>14</sup> Personal communication from a scholar of Armenian Studies, July 7, 2025.

<sup>15</sup> “Full Text of US-Brokered Armenia-Azerbaijan Joint Declaration,” *Armenpress*, August 9, 2025 <https://armenpress.am/en/article/1226785> (accessed August 10, 2025).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Naharnet* and *Agence France Presse*, “Armenians Caught between Hope and Distrust after Accord with Azerbaijan,” August 10, 2025, <https://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/314633-armenians-caught-between-hope-and-distrust-after-accord-with-azerbaijan> (accessed August 10, 2025).

importance of "implementing solutions developed by the countries of the region themselves with the support of their immediate neighbors - Russia, Iran and Turkey" to avoid what it called the "sad experience" of Western efforts to mediate in the Middle East. At the same time, Russia supported the summit, which enabled the establishment of the joint declaration. In this context, it is difficult to ascertain which effect Armenia's new constitution, which is yet to be ratified, will have on the joint declaration between Armenia and Azerbaijan. That declaration leaves unclear how the TRIPP connectivity corridor would function in practice, while excluding provisions regarding how customs checks and security will work, and the nature of Armenia's reciprocal access to Azerbaijani territory.<sup>21</sup>

More broadly, Armenians may face different types of threats, depending on where they live. In some majority-Muslim countries, they may face potential threats from persons who espouse strict interpretations of Islamic law and/or from Islamist groups. In other contexts, members of the Armenian diaspora may face threats from governments that may be hostile to certain ethnic and/or religious groups.<sup>22</sup> If one were to view the situation that Armenians face in a continuum from safe to risky, Greece may be one of the safer places for Armenians to live in view of the fact that (1) Greece is majority-Christian and (2) the long religious and cultural connections between Armenians and Greeks.<sup>23</sup> Sudan may be among the riskier places for Armenians to live, in light of the civil war in that country, the relatively small numbers of Armenians, who live there, and the relative strength of some Islamists there.<sup>24</sup> In addition, while the governments in some countries, where Armenians live, enforce constitutional stipulations related to such matters as religious and cultural rights, other governments do not, and those are the some

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<sup>21</sup> Parisa Hafezi and Andrew Osborn, "Iran threatens planned Trump corridor envisaged by Azerbaijan-Armenia peace deal," *Reuters*, August 9, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-threatens-planned-trump-corridor-envisaged-by-azerbaijan-armenia-peace-deal-2025-08-09/> (accessed August 10, 2025).

<sup>22</sup> Phillip Jenkins, "Is this the End for Mideast Christianity?" *Baylor Magazine*, Baylor University, January 25, 2024, <https://magazine.web.baylor.edu/news/story/2024/end-mideast-christianity> (accessed May 22, 2025).

<sup>23</sup> Zenian, "Greece: Always a Safe Haven to Armenians."

<sup>24</sup> Aline Grigoryan, "Islamists Destroy Armenian Church in Sudan," *Arm Info Information Company*, April 17, 2025, [https://arminfo.info/full\\_news.php?id=90776&lang=3](https://arminfo.info/full_news.php?id=90776&lang=3) (accessed May 22, 2025); Tonny Onyulo, "Sudanese Christians Pray in Secret, Plead for End to War and Religious Attacks," *Religion News Service*, March 26, 2025, <https://religionnews.com/2025/03/26/sudanese-christians-pray-in-secret-plead-for-end-to-war-and-religious-attacks/> (accessed May 22, 2025).

of the contexts, in which Armenians may be under threat.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, diaspora Armenians usually thrive in contexts, where there is political and economic stability.<sup>26</sup>

This book's examination of the Armenian diaspora across twelve states in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Eastern Mediterranean reveals a common theme that transcends geography and political systems: the constitutions of these states both constrain and enable the survival, adaptation, and flourishing of Armenian communities within pluralistic, and often fragile, socio-political landscapes. At the core of this study is the reality that constitutions, in addition to being foundational documents, are living instruments that define the contours of citizenship, shape identity, and mediate the rights of minorities. As living documents, they are subject to the strengths and weaknesses of governmental officials, who ostensibly have the responsibility of implementing the principles in those constitutions. One of the most significant threats to the rights, which many of those constitutions espouse, are authoritarian governments, whose leaders place their own desire to maintain their power over and above the rights, which the constitutions articulate. Even in ostensibly democratic systems, governmental leaders sometimes have the power to interpret a country's constitutions and laws, in such a way that benefit those leaders and their allies. Unfortunately, in some cases, religious and ethnic minorities, such as Armenians, may be harmed by such misuses, and even self-serving interpretations of constitutions and laws.

While there are similarities and differences between and among (1) individual Armenians, (2) Armenians in various diaspora contexts, and (3) Armenians in Armenia itself, there may be at least a few characteristics, which some Armenians, particularly those in the diaspora, share, which are beneficial to those Armenians.<sup>27</sup> In a very broad way, diaspora Armenians have tendency to be white-collar, well-educated, financially strong, and engaged in professions, which require high levels of knowledge and skills. For diaspora Armenians, some similarities with respect to religion, ethnicity, language, shared history, as well as Armenian churches, educational institutions, and cultural organizations may provide support and a sense of

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<sup>25</sup> Mai El-Sadany, "Human Rights in the Constitution: A Survey of the Arab Uprisings," May 24, 2017, <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/human-rights-in-the-constitution-a-survey-of-the-arab-uprisings/> (accessed May 22, 2025).

<sup>26</sup> Stepan Piligian, "What is 'Community' in the Diaspora?" *Armenian Weekly*, July 17, 2024, <https://armenianweekly.com/2024/07/17/what-is-community-in-the-diaspora/#:~:text=How%20does%20the%20diaspora%20manifest,in%20the%20more%20recent%20entities.> (accessed May 22, 2025).

<sup>27</sup> Alex Cohen, "Culture Summary: North American Armenians," *eHRAF World Cultures*, Yale University, <https://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/cultures/n016/summary> (accessed May 21, 2025); eHRAF stands for "electronic Human Relations Area Files."

solidarity for them.<sup>28</sup> However, one must take great care, so as not to overgeneralize because that could lead to inaccuracies. Indeed, Armenians, whether they live in Armenia or the diaspora, are diverse and not monolithic.<sup>29</sup> In conclusion, while diaspora Armenians have similarities and differences between and among each other, their awareness of a shared legacy can lend strength to their potential bonds. Indeed, the improvement of the rights of Armenians, who are minorities in various contexts, may also often be reflected in the improvement of the rights of other religious and ethnic minorities in those contexts.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.; Piligian.

<sup>29</sup> Nalbantian, 12-17.



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