



Christmas in Modern Jordan: Public Religion, Official Islam, and the Politics of Celebration during the Gaza Crisis*

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This study examines the dynamics of Christmas celebrations in modern Jordan. While Jordan lacks precise religious demographics, over 95% of its citizens are Muslims, with Christians accounting for approximately 3% of the population. Despite its small Christian population, Jordan can be considered a country in which Christmas symbols are relatively common in public spaces. However, Christmas celebrations in 2023 and 2024 were apparently restrained, influenced by the Gaza crisis after October 7, 2023. This study aims to understand Jordanian politics and society in crisis by analyzing how Christmas is represented in Jordan, how Christians celebrate and pray, and how Muslims perceive these conditions and events. Based on an analysis of Jordanian newspaper archives, official statements from the royal family, and interviews conducted during the Christmas season of 2025, the study has three main findings: First, the representation of Christmas in Jordan's public spaces has been tolerated as a part of the official Islamic policies of the Jordanian royal family. Second, the practice of Christmas in Jordan exists on a spectrum between "prayer" and "celebration," shifting across three settings: public spaces, churches, and homes. Third, refraining from Christmas celebrations for two years during the Gaza crisis can be understood as a form of expression of everyday politics and a socially meaningful gesture of solidarity associated with the broader boycott and with pro-Palestinian mobilizations.

Keywords Jordan, Christmas, Official Islam, Gaza, Palestine, Christians, Religious Minority

I. Introduction

Christians constitute a religious minority in the modern Jordanian population. While there are no definitive statistics on religious affiliation, according to Pew Research Center estimates, approximately 96–97% of Jordanians are Muslim, with Christians comprising approximately 3% of the

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Table 1 Percentage of the Christian Population in Jordan (Pew Research Center, 2025)

	Christians	Muslims	Unaffiliated	Hindus	Buddhist	Others	Jews	Total	Christians (%)
2010	240,000	7,040,000	<10K	<10K	<10K	<10K	<10K	7,300,000	3.28767
2020	310,000	10,550,000	<10K	<10K	<10K	<10K	<10K	10,870,000	2.85188

Source: Data is compiled from the Pew Research Center by the author.

population, as shown in Table 1.

Christians in Jordan belong to a variety of denominations. Denominations including the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Coptic, Protestant, and Syrian Orthodox Churches each have their own churches, and Christians typically attend their own denominational churches. Maggiolini (2015: 37) presented statistical data showing that, of approximately 30,000 Catholics, 20,000 Protestants, and 90,000 Greek-Orthodox, fewer than 1,000 belonged to other Christian churches. While the Greek Orthodox Church has the largest number of adherents, the Catholic Church also has a significant influence on society and politics (Maggiolini, 2015).

The Constitutional Charter of 1952 states that Islam is the religion of the State and that the King must be Muslim (The Constitution of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 1952). Despite Islam being the country's official religion, Article 6 (i) of the Constitution specifies that "Jordanians shall be equal before the law. There shall be no discrimination between them as regards to their rights and duties on ground of race, language or religion" (The Constitution of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 1952). More specifically, Article 14 of the Constitution stipulates that the State shall safeguard the free exercise of all forms of worship and religious rites in accordance with the customs observed in the Kingdom, "unless such is inconsistent with public order or morality" (The Constitution of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 1952; Wisman, 2019: 85)

In Jordan, officially recognized Christian denominations are granted institutional autonomy in matters of personal and family status through their own religious courts, reflecting a high degree of legal recognition and

state tolerance toward the Christian minority. These denomination-specific courts exercise jurisdiction over marriage, divorce, child custody, and related issues for Christians, whereas civil courts hear cases involving Christians of different denominations or those without access to a dedicated religious court. However, this autonomy is limited with regard to inheritance, where Sharia law is binding and even applies to Christian courts (Wisman, 2016: 86).

Jordan's electoral system incorporates minority quotas and reserves nine parliamentary seats for Christians. Although Christians constitute approximately 3% of the population, they hold about 7.8% of the seats in the House of Representatives, indicating a state policy aimed at political inclusion. Beyond parliamentary representation, Christians have occupied senior positions in government, diplomacy, the military, and other key public and private sectors, reflecting their institutionalized role within the Jordanian state (Wisman, 2019: 84).

As Brown (2017) pointed out, Arab monarchies have often promoted a tolerant and moderate Islam, seeming “eager to associate national pride with fairly liberal statements of religious themes and to enhance the prestige of their own religious establishments.” (Brown, 2017: 17) These characteristics of Arab countries have been described using the terms “Official Islamic Institutions” or “Official Islam.” The Jordanian state system manifests “Official Islam” in various forms. Robbins and Rubin (2013) conceptualize Official Islam in Jordan as follows:

Official Islam refers to the elements of religious authority that are under the direct or indirect control of the regime. These elements are a part of the bureaucracy, meaning that they have some autonomy from the regime itself but that this autonomy can be checked by the regime as with any other bureaucratic department. More concretely, the term “official” is also referred to as “establishment Islam.” It includes the state religious institutions that support the political order or local political authority and its interests(,) which are tied

up with the interests of the state. (Robbins and Rubin, 2013: 61)

One key feature of Jordan's Official Islam is its emphasis on interfaith relations. The Jordanian Royal Family spearheaded this initiative. Through the King, Queen, and Princes, the royal family has actively demonstrated a commitment to interfaith dialogue both domestically and internationally. During the reign of King Abdullah II, notable examples include the 2004 Amman Message on inter-sectarian relations and the 2007 "A Common Word Between Us and You" Initiative on interfaith relations. As Gutkowski (2016) pointed out, these are political strategies involving the joint performance of moderate, shared values that help foster diplomatic trust with the West.

Jordan's Official Islam has emphasized the King's role as the custodian of holy sites for both Islam and Christianity. One example of this is his custodianship of Jerusalem. A deep connection exists between the holy sites in Palestine and Jordan. In 1948, when Israel declared its independence and the First Arab Israeli War began, Jordan fought against Israel and brought the West Bank under its control. Later, in the 1967 Six-Day War, Jordan was defeated by Israel and lost the West Bank. Despite this, King Hussein of Jordan continued to harbor ambitions to reclaim the West Bank. However, in 1988, Jordan formally relinquished its claim to the territory. Nevertheless, Jordan has maintained its claim to custodianship over Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem, Islam's third holiest site (Katz, 2005). This custodianship includes not only Islamic holy sites, but also Christian holy sites in Jerusalem. The official website of Jordan's Department of Palestinian Affairs states the following:

The firm Jordanian position stems from the fact that East Jerusalem is an occupied land, the sovereignty of which belongs to the Palestinians, and the

guardianship over its Islamic and Christian holy sites is Hashemite, assumed by the King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, His Majesty King Abdullah II, and the responsibility to protect the city is an international responsibility in accordance with the obligations of states in accordance with international law and international resolutions. (Department of Palestinian Affairs, 2021)

The royal family's involvement in Al-Maghtas provides a further example of this policy. The royal family safeguarded Al-Maghtas, a Christian holy site in Jordan. It is located along the Jordan River, southwest of the capital, Amman. It is the site where Jesus Christ is believed to have been baptized. Following the 1994 Jordan-Israel Peace Treaty, access to the Jordan River area near the border between the two countries became possible. Excavations at the site progressed after Prince Ghazi inspected the area in the same year. With the support of the royal family, excavation and preservation activities were conducted at the site, as well as efforts to remove landmines buried around the site during the Arab Israeli War. As the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem notes, in 2003, "King Abdullah II of Jordan donated 30 dunams of land for the construction of a Catholic church at Al-Maghtas, providing a welcoming space for pilgrims. On May 10, 2009, Pope Benedict XVI, joined by King Abdullah II and the Hashemite family, laid the foundation stone for the Catholic Church and Monastery of Al-Maghtas, solidifying the royal family's ongoing support for the site (Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, 2025)." In 2015, the "Baptism Site 'Bethany Beyond the Jordan' (Al-Maghtas)" was officially recognized as a World Heritage Site.

Taking the above perspectives into account, "Official Islam" in Jordan can be defined as a royal-led regime of religious management that combines a discourse of interfaith tolerance, policies recognizing Christian minorities, symbolic politics surrounding the custodianship of holy sites, and strategies for securing domestic and international legitimacy. Jordanian Christians have

maintained their religious worships and rites, including Christmas celebrations, within the framework of these Official Islam policies.

A particularly notable point regarding Modern Jordan is the significant impact of the Gaza conflict on October 7, 2023. In Jordan, Christmas celebrations in public spaces showed a tendency toward restraint in 2023 and 2024, with some Jordanians stating that, “Christmas was cancelled”. Jordan includes those whose origins are traced to the west of the Jordan River, so-called “Palestinian Jordanians,” and those whose origins lie to the east of it, so-called “Transjordanians” or “East Jordanians.” Most of the “Palestinian Jordanians” are people who fled Palestine to Jordan during the Arab–Israeli War and obtained citizenship, along with their descendants. There are no clear statistics on the population numbers of each group; Ryan (2018) pointed out that “most analyses assume that Palestinian Jordanians constitute either half the Jordanian population or perhaps a majority” (Ryan, 2018: 92). According to a 2022 public opinion survey conducted by Ritsumeikan University’s Center for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies and the Jordan University Institute for Strategic Studies, when participants were asked, “To what extent do you support the following ideologies?”, the ideology receiving the highest percentage of “strong support” was “Jordanian Patriotism” (71.7%); however, the ideology receiving the second-highest percentage was “Palestinian Patriotism” (63.2%)¹ (Suechika et al., 2023: 8–9). Consequently, solidarity with Palestine is strong, and protests and boycott movements have been active.

Christmas celebrations in Jordan over the past two years closely followed the pattern of Christmas celebrations in Palestine. Following the ceasefire agreement in 2025, a mood of celebration returned by December 2025. In Bethlehem, a large Christmas tree was decorated once again, and its

¹ Next, in descending order of the percentage of respondents who “strongly support” them, are “Arab nationalism,” “political Islam,” “tribalism,” “secularism,” and “liberalism.”

lighting ceremony was held with great enthusiasm (Jadou, 2025). Similarly, in Jordan, the festive mood returned at Christmas 2025. Considering the above, it is reasonable to examine Christmas celebration in Jordan from a political perspective in this study. Therefore, this study analyzes interfaith relations in contemporary Jordan from a political viewpoint, using the religious practices associated with Christmas as a case study. By analyzing the extent to which Christmas celebrations in Jordan were restrained or scaled down during the two years of severe devastation in Gaza, this study aims to advance our understanding of Official Islam and public religion within Jordanian society.

II. Research Question and Methodology

The research question of this study is: How did the observance of Christmas in modern Jordan transform in response to the Gaza conflict? To address this question, this study adopts a qualitative approach. The methodology employed includes an analysis of local literature materials, including books, newspapers, websites, and social media accounts. For the newspaper data, articles from the Christmas season over the past five years were collected from an online archive of *Al-Ra'i*, a Jordanian Arabic newspaper, as well as the English-language *The Jordan Times*, and a selective investigation was conducted focusing exclusively on articles related to Christmas. Similarly, regarding social media posts, the official accounts (X [formerly Twitter] and Instagram), of the Jordanian royal family were comprehensively reviewed for posts from the Christmas season over the past ten years, and only those related to Christmas were extracted for a selective investigation.

Fieldwork involving visits to churches within Jordan has been conducted

on an ongoing basis, albeit on an ad hoc basis, in September 2024 and December 2025. Participant observation during the Christmas season was conducted from December 20 to 26, 2025. In addition to participant observation in public spaces, I also visited churches to attend Masses and events, and my requests were graciously accepted. I attended special Christmas Masses at two Greek Orthodox churches, two Roman Catholic churches, and one Anglican Church in Amman. At one Greek Orthodox church and one Roman Catholic church, I also participated in post-Mass events featuring music and refreshments. However, regarding Christmas practices within the home, direct visits were not possible, so my analysis is based on information obtained from interviews. I conducted short interviews using convenience sampling with 15 Jordanians (six Christians and nine Muslims, aged from their 20s to their 50s, including five men and ten women), asking “Do you celebrate Christmas?”, “How do you celebrate Christmas?”, or “How was it during the past two years?”, on the streets and in churches in Amman on December 20–25, in Fuheis on December 21st, and Madaba on December 25–26. To avoid identifying individuals and thereby violating their privacy, only the above information regarding the interviewees will be disclosed. The interviews were conducted in English and Arabic without the use of an interpreter and instead of recording the interviews, I made field notes.

By conducting a critical discourse analysis of these primary sources in conjunction with the contextual circumstances of the time, this study systematically analyzed Jordan’s position on Christmas as a state and Jordanians’ attitudes toward its practice. The significance of this research lies in clarifying how Christmas, an event associated with religious minorities, has been perceived, practiced, and transformed within Jordan, a state with strong ties to Palestine. The relevance of this study lies in its provision of important insights into Jordanian society and, more broadly, into the relationship between politics and religion in Jordan through an examination

of the specific case of Christmas.

III. Christmas in the Modern Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

Firstly, this section clarifies the status of Christmas as a public holiday from the perspective of Jordan's institutionalized public holiday framework. In Jordan, public holidays are announced annually, including December 25, Christmas Day. For 2025, Prime Minister Jafar Hassan announced on December 7 that Christmas and New Year's Day would be public holidays. According to this statement, all ministries, government departments, public institutions and bodies, official universities, municipalities, joint services councils, the Greater Amman Municipality, and wholly government-owned companies suspended work on Thursday, December 25, 2025, and Thursday, January 1, 2026. He also designated December 26, 2025, as an official holiday for Jordanian Christians (Jordan News Agency, 2025). In other words, while December 25 is a holiday for all Jordanian citizens, for Jordan's Christian community, December 26 is also a public holiday.

Furthermore, in Jordan, not only does the government recognize Christmas as a public holiday, but it is also a society where Christmas celebrations can take place in public spaces. Among Islamic countries in the Middle East, there are nations such as Qatar, for example, where the social environment is not as conducive to decorating public spaces with Christmas trees as it is in Jordan, as shown in Figures 1 to 3.

When discussing Christmas in modern Jordan, Jordan's regime and the presence of the Jordanian royal family are indispensable. Members of the Hashemite Royal Family, including the King, Queen, and Crown Prince, have issued official Christmas messages almost annually. For example, in recent years, King Abdullah II has posted the following messages on the



Source: All figures taken by the author.

Figure 1 Christmas Tree in the public space in Amman (left, Dec 23, 2025), Fuheis (center, Dec 21, 2025), and Madaba (right, Dec 25, 2025)

Table 2 Posts of King Abdullah II during December 2023-2025

Time	Post
Dec. 24, 2025	In the land of harmony and peace, we celebrate Christmas and the New Year as one Jordanian family. [We are] proud of the spirit of fellowship and mutual respect that imbues every aspect of our lives. ¹⁾ (English and Arabic)
Dec. 24, 2024	Warm Christmas wishes to our Christian brothers and sisters in our beloved Jordan. We pray for a year of peace and serenity for all. ²⁾ (English and Arabic)
Dec. 24, 2023	While the world celebrates the glorious Christmas, joy and peace are absent from the Christian families in the Holy Land, a land that cannot enjoy peace under the brutal aggression against the people of Gaza and the restrictions imposed on worshippers in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. We wish for peace for our Christian brothers and sisters in Palestine and around the world. ³⁾ (Arabic only)

¹⁾ <https://x.com/KingAbdullahII/status/2003888515030176244> (Accessed: 2026. 2. 15.).

²⁾ <https://x.com/KingAbdullahII/status/1871602278966374527> (Accessed: 2026. 2. 15.).

³⁾ <https://x.com/KingAbdullahII/status/1738984576314225007> (Accessed: 2026. 2. 15.).

Note: Data is compiled from official X account of King Abdullah II.

social media platform X: The message for Christmas 2023, which came immediately after the start of the Gaza conflict, clearly reflects the situation

in Palestine, as shown in Table 2.

Queen Rania also posted Christmas messages on social media platforms such as X and Instagram, as Table 3 shows. No specific reason has been given for Queen Rania's decision not to issue Christmas messages in 2016 and 2019, so we can only speculate as to why she did not post a message. On December 18, 2016, a terrorist attack occurred in Karak Governorate, targeting police stations and Karak Castle, among other locations. The attack resulted in the deaths of 10 people, including one foreign tourist, and injuries to more than 30 people, including foreigners. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) claimed responsibility for this incident. In November 2019, there was an attack in Jerash that injured eight people, including four foreign tourists. The suspect was believed to have become radicalized after encountering ISIL ideology online and intended to seek revenge for the killing of the ISIL leader, al-Baghdadi. Therefore, this may suggest that she possibly refrained from issuing a Christmas greeting in consideration of these domestic events and public sentiment. Looking at her posts during the Gaza crisis, one can observe the disappearance of Christmas imagery, such as Christmas trees and festive gatherings, as well as a noticeable shift toward a less celebratory tone.

During the Christmas season, members of the royal family have traditionally attended Christmas events throughout the country and met with members of the Christian community. Prince Hassan is also a member of the royal family who has focused on a strategy of interfaith dialogue. He is the chairperson of the board of trustees of the Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies, an NGO established to promote interfaith dialogue. He held a meeting with Christian representatives in Jordan on December 27, 2025 (The Jordan Times, 2025/12/27).

The Prime Minister of Jordan has done so as well. Jordanian Prime Minister Jafar Hassan and other politicians have held meetings with the

Table 3 Posts of Queen Rania during December 2016-2025

Time	Posted Photo	Posted words
Dec. 4, 2025	Queen Rania's photos with religious sisters and children	During my visit with the children at the Mar Mansour Charitable Society today. Nothing lights up the holidays like those beautiful smiles! ¹⁾ (Arabic and English, Instagram account)
Dec. 24, 2024	No photo	Merry Christmas to all. May the holiday season bring warmth and light to you and your families ²⁾ (Arabic and English, X account)
Dec. 16, 2024	Queen Rania's photo with a religious sister	From my visit to the Rosary Sisters Visitation Home earlier today. Praying for peace across the Holy Land and a Merry Christmas to all #Jordan #LoveJO ³⁾ (Arabic and English, Instagram account)
Dec. 24, 2023	Retweet of the post of Husam Zomlot, with the video of Munther Isaac's Sermon	On this Christmas Day, please make the time to listen to this moving message, at the Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem (Only English, X account)
Dec. 24, 2023	No photo	Our wishes of hope and prosperity to our Christian brothers and sisters this Christmas. We pray that God brings peace to the Holy Land and blesses our world with mercy and compassion ⁴⁾ (English and Arabic, X account)
Dec. 21, 2023	Link to the Queen Rania's article of the Washington Post	My opinion piece in the Washington Post today ⁵⁾
Dec. 14, 2022	Queen Rania's photo with children wearing red Santa hat	Wishing you a happy and peaceful holiday season! At the Christmas tree-lighting festivities in Fuheis today. ⁶⁾ (Arabic and English, Instagram account)
Dec. 24, 2021	Illustration of Christmas Tree	Merry Christmas to you all and may your homes and hearts be filled with love and joy. #MerryChristmas ⁷⁾ (Arabic and English, X and Instagram account)
Dec. 24, 2020	Illustration of Christmas Tree	Wishing a merry and healthy Christmas to you and your loved ones. #MerryChristmas ⁸⁾ (Arabic and English, X and Instagram account)
Dec. 2019	No post on Christmas	
Dec. 24, 2018	Video of Queen Rania attending an event at the Church of Fuheis	The continuity of love, health, and peace is the most beautiful thing that adorns our holidays. Happy Blessed Christmas to everyone. From my visit to Al-Fuheis a week ago to share in the families' preparations for the holiday #الأردن #حب الأردن ⁹⁾ (Arabic only, X and Instagram account)

Table 3 (continued)

Time	Posted Photo	Posted words
Dec. 24, 2017	Illustration of Christmas Rees	Wishing you all a Merry Christmas ¹⁰⁾ (Arabic and English, X and Instagram account)
Dec. 2016	No post on Christmas	

¹⁾ <https://www.instagram.com/p/DRztGGlDBN3/> (Accessed: 2026. 2. 15.).

²⁾ <https://x.com/QueenRania/status/1871604322192199885> (Accessed: 2026. 2. 15.).

³⁾ <https://www.instagram.com/p/DDpJKapoLfB/> (Accessed: 2026. 2. 15.).

⁴⁾ <https://x.com/QueenRania/status/1738996280905302511> (Accessed: 2026. 2. 15.).

⁵⁾ <https://x.com/QueenRania/status/1737824462714655201> (Accessed: 2026. 2. 15.).

⁶⁾ <https://www.instagram.com/p/CmHg1KV8ub/> (Accessed: 2026. 2. 15.).

⁷⁾ <https://x.com/QueenRania/status/1474414110880243712> (Accessed: 2026. 2. 15.).

⁸⁾ <https://x.com/QueenRania/status/1342170955766968320> (Accessed: 2026. 2. 15.).

⁹⁾ <https://x.com/QueenRania/status/1077244476391940096> (Accessed: 2026. 2. 15.).

¹⁰⁾ <https://x.com/QueenRania/status/944919611413270530> (Accessed: 2026. 2. 15.).

Note: Data is compiled from official X and Instagram account of Queen Rania.

country's Christian community around Christmas. An article dated December 24, 2025, states that Prime Minister Jafar Hassan spoke about interfaith harmony and that "Hassan also reaffirmed Jordan's solidarity with Palestinian Christians in Gaza and across the region, highlighting the Kingdom's commitment to supporting them alongside their Muslim compatriots and safeguarding Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem. (The Jordan Times, 2025/12/24)"

Jordanian political actors have also participated in Christmas Masses in Bethlehem. As an example, on December 25, 2025, deputizing for King Abdullah II, the Minister of Interior, Mazen Faraya, attended the Midnight Mass at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem celebrated by Christian denominations observing Christmas on December 25. The Mass was also attended by Palestinian Vice President Hussein Al-Sheikh, representing President Mahmoud Abbas, along with several Palestinian political figures, Christian and Muslim clergy, and politicians from around the world (The Jordan Times, 2025/12/25). Deputizing for King Abdullah II, Mazen Faraya

also visited Bethlehem on January 7, to attend the midnight mass for the Christmas of the Christian denominations following the Eastern calendar (Al-Ra'i, 2025). Although the Coptic Christian minority in Jordan is believed to be smaller than the Greek Orthodox and Catholic communities, there is a significant number of Coptic Christians live in the country and celebrate Christmas on January 7.

In summary, Jordan has maintained an active stance on interfaith dialogue within its Official Islam policy, centered on the royal family, while simultaneously preserving its authority over Jerusalem's holy sites and upholding its position as the guardian of Islam and Christianity. The act of the royal family celebrating Christmas together, ensuring that Christmas is recognized as a public holiday, demonstrating tolerance toward Christian citizens, and showcasing religious coexistence within Jordan has served as an important opportunity to highlight the standing of the Jordanian royal family and the government. However, when the festive atmosphere of celebrating Christmas seemed inappropriate, such as during the Gaza crisis, refraining from such celebrations appears to have been an appropriate approach.

IV. Christmas for Jordanians: A Spectrum of Prayer and Celebration

What does Christmas mean to Christian Jordanians? Christmas practices in Jordan can be analyzed along two dimensions—prayer and celebration—and across three spatial settings: public spaces, churches, and private homes. Of course, these categories and dimensions are not entirely distinct from one another; rather, they are interconnected and form a spectrum. This is because, for example, in churches, prayers are offered amid a festive atmosphere created by Christmas decorations both inside and outside

Table 4 Analytical framework of Jordanian's practicing Christmas

Prayer		Celebration
In public spaces		Decorations, commercial events and consumption
In churches	Worship, mass, sermons, mourning, and prayers for peace	Decorations, Music, parades, bazaars, gift distribution
In individual homes	Personal praying	Decorations, party at home, familial intimacy, private consolation

the building, and sermons often incorporate elements of both prayer and celebration. As a result, prayer and celebration may overlap. Given this, Christmas practices can be explained as shown in Table 4.

In public spaces, Christmas decorations such as Christmas trees can be seen in various locations, not only in Fuheis and Madaba where there are many Christians, but also in the capital city of Amman. In Amman's Abdali district, where development has advanced in recent years, events have been held with luxurious Christmas decorations. Reports indicate that the Christmas season has become a period for various businesses across Jordan to intensify their sales promotions. According to *The Jordan Times*, the manager of a mid-sized apparel store in Amman stated, "The festive period is no longer limited to traditional Christmas shoppers" (Weldali, 2025). In the Modern Jordan, the Christmas season has become a major economic seasonal boost in revenue (Weldali, 2024). In 2023, the economic benefits declined owing to the impact of the Gaza conflict, and for the 2024 Christmas season, it was reported that "many businesses [were] allocating a portion of their profits to support Gaza" (Weldali, 2024). In 2025, under the patronage of the Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, Emad Hijazeen, the Amman Christmas Market opened at The Boulevard with the lighting of the Christmas tree. The event lasted from November 27 to December 14 (Abu Khadijeh, 2025). The Gaza conflict also impacted Jordan's tourism industry,



Source: All figures taken by the author, on Dec 23, 2025.

Figure 2 Christmas tree (left) and music stage (right) on Boulevard Street, Abdali District, Amman

prompting Dr. Emad Hijazeen to tell *The Jordan Times* in an interview, “It’s the start of recovery. Tourism is back” (Abu Khadijeh, 2025). December 25 is a holiday for universities and other institutions, so many Muslims enjoying the day off could be seen out on the streets.

Many Muslims were also seen on Boulevard Street in Abdali District during the Christmas season, enjoying live music and singing, taking photos of the tree with their smartphones, and enjoying shopping and dining. Of course, among Muslims in Jordan, there is likely to be a wide range of attitudes and practices regarding whether, and to what extent, they “celebrate” Christmas. Thus, Christmas appears as a celebration and also commercial consumption in public spaces. Following the classification presented in Table 4, It is generally quite rare for Christians to express their prayers in public spaces in Jordan, even during the Christmas season.

Churches are decorated with special ornaments, both inside and outside, and special Masses for Christmas are held. In the Coptic Church, Christmas Mass is conducted on January 7, while in other churches, it is held on

December 25. During Christmas season, particularly during Mass times at churches on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, police officers are stationed in front of the churches. While a certain degree of “coexistence” exists in Jordan, it was also observed that the presence of police guarding each church during Christmas indicates a certain level of tension. During the Christmas season, individual churches hold their own events. For example, celebrations centered primarily on children are held, featuring music, parades, bazaars, and the distribution of gifts. Thus, it is clear that churches function both as places where Christmas is conducted through prayer and as places where it is celebrated.

At home, Jordanian Christians commence with Christmas decorations and invite family and relatives over for meals. They sometimes invite Muslim friends to their homes as well. Christians and Muslims sometimes hold Christmas-related events together during community and volunteer activities. After all, for Christian Jordanians, Christmas at home is likely perceived as an occasion for celebration. And, of course, it should also be a place where personal prayers are offered.

It has generally been noted that “Christmas was canceled” in Jordan during the two years of conflict in Gaza; however, according to the classification above, it was specifically the celebrations in public spaces and in churches that were restrained, while other practices (such as celebrations at home and prayers in churches) continued. In the next section, this article presents specific examples of how celebrations in public spaces and churches were restrained during the Gaza crisis.

V. Christmas During the Gaza Crisis (October 7, 2023 to December 2025) in Jordan

This section proceeds in two steps. First, it examines the response of the Jordanian royal family following the Gaza crisis, and then considers in particular their approach to Christmas. Second, it analyzes the transformations in Jordanian society since the Gaza crisis and clarifies how these changes have been reflected in Christmas-related practices and attitudes. These changes are categorized into three domains: public spaces, churches, and homes.

Firstly, how did the Jordanian royal family behave during the Gaza crisis? Since October 7, 2023, Jordan has pursued an active foreign policy. In a speech by King Abdullah II on October 11, he emphasized the importance of the two-state solution, stating that “The dangerous escalation and acts of violence and aggression currently taking place in the Palestinian Territories are proof that confirms, once again, that our region will never be secure nor stable without achieving just and comprehensive peace on the basis of the two-state solution, in order for the Palestinian people to gain their independent and sovereign state on the June 4th, 1967 lines, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and so that the cycles of killing—whose ultimate victims are innocent civilians—end” (Abdullah II, 2023). He also reaffirmed Jordan’s role as the “Custodian of the Holy Sites,” stating, “Jordan’s position will remain unwavering, and we will not abandon our role—no matter the challenges—in safeguarding Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, under the Hashemite Custodianship” (Abdullah II, 2023). Even in the face of the Gaza crisis, it can be said that the King of Jordan responded by maintaining the core principles of the official Islamic policy outlined in Section 3 and acting as the guardian of holy sites for both Muslims and Christians.

Additionally, in air-drop operations delivering relief supplies to Gaza, King Abdullah II and Princess Salma personally boarded the aircraft and participated in the mission. On June 11, 2024, an international summit titled “Call for Action: An Urgent Humanitarian Response for Gaza,” was held near the Dead Sea in Jordan to discuss humanitarian aid for Gaza. Co-hosted by King Abdullah II of Jordan, President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi of Egypt, and UN Secretary-General António Guterres, the summit was attended by representatives including heads of state, prime ministers, and foreign ministers from 75 countries, along with representatives from 75 international organizations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of Jordan, 2024). Jordan’s people, businesses, and organizations also made active donations to Gaza. Many of these donations were consolidated and managed by the Jordan Hashemite Charity Organization (JHCO) and delivered to Gaza. By October 7, 2025, two years after the start of the hostilities, the JHCO had dispatched 201 relief convoys, comprising 8,664 trucks carrying food, medical, and shelter supplies, which reached hundreds of thousands of families in Gaza (The Jordan Times, 2025/10/07).

Next, how did the Jordanian royal family behave during Christmas amid the Gaza crisis? An examination of Queen Rania’s social media posts during the 2023 Christmas season reveals that she linked Christmas to expressions of solidarity with Gaza. Her post, dated December 24, 2023, downplayed festive tones and instead emphasized prayers to God for peace. She also reposted a sermon from a church in Bethlehem, thereby amplifying the presence of Palestinian Christians. Queen Rania also contributed an article to the Washington Post on December 21, 2023, prior to Christmas. She referenced a Christmas display in Bethlehem showing the newborn Jesus amidst rubble, appealing for an immediate ceasefire and highlighting the dire situation in Gaza, particularly the tragic circumstances faced by the children living there (Queen Rania, 2023). This followed King Abdullah II’s

own op-ed on Gaza, published in *The Washington Post* in November 2023:

Bethlehem usually comes alive at Christmas. Not this year. In the Holy Land, celebrations have been canceled: no parades, no bazaars, no public tree lightings. In my country, Jordan, where Jesus was baptized, our Christian community has chosen to do the same. In the occupied West Bank, one Bethlehem church has adapted its Nativity scene, placing the infant Jesus among the rubble of a bombed-out building. It is a reflection of the story playing out on screens everywhere: the horrific images of the destruction of Gaza and, especially, its bloodied and broken children. (...)

There is another video I will never forget: a mother, saying her goodbyes to her children. After going to bed on empty stomachs, they had been killed in their sleep by an airstrike.

Their mother's grief is unbearable; her guilt that they died hungry broke me. "It's okay, my boy. You are with God now," she says to one son. "I named him Ayoub [Job] for patience," she explains, and then, through tears: "I will be patient, my child."

In the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament and the Quran, the prophet Job loses his possessions, children and health. Yet he remains steadfast in his faith. His patience is honored by Jews, Christians and Muslims, who, at different points in history, have shared the Holy Land in peace. His story is one of pain but also hope. (Queen Rania, 2023)

Discourses equating the newborn Jesus with contemporary Palestinian babies facing hardships have also been widely seen in online spaces. It is worth noting that Jordan's royal family also invoked figures such as Jesus and Job to appeal for peace.

Christmas events across Jordan, which have traditionally been attended by members of the royal family, were scaled back during the two years following the Gaza conflict. The royal family's participation in these events resumed in 2025. For example, on December 16, 2025, Crown Prince

Hussain visited Madaba, a city with a relatively large Christian population, to participate in a Christmas tree lighting ceremony. The official homepage of Prince Hussein reported, “During a Christmas tree lighting ceremony at Peace Square in Madaba, the Crown Prince affirmed that Jordan is a model of fellowship and tolerance, expressing hope that the New Year will bring continued prosperity to Jordan and its people.”²

Second, this section examines how Jordanian society has changed amid the Gaza crisis. Before examining changes in Jordanian society regarding Christmas, this study provides an overview of the situation in Jordan since October 7, 2023.

Since the beginning of the Gaza conflict, the citizens of Jordan have expressed solidarity in various ways. In Amman, demonstrations were held after Friday prayers at the Hussain Mosque on King Talal Street and in front of the Israeli Embassy. This growing social movement in solidarity with Palestine triggered by the Gaza conflict is considered to have posed a threat to the regime security of the Jordanian state. The Jordanian government responded by intensifying police crackdowns on protests, including demonstrations expressing solidarity with Palestine and online posts. During demonstrations in October and November 2023, Jordanian authorities used force, tear gas, and other means to control protesters. Although participation in demonstrations subsequently declined, many people began to participate again in March 2024, leading to further intensified government crackdowns. A large demonstration outside the Israeli embassy in late March reportedly drew approximately 2,000 participants and led to police crackdowns. Human Rights Watch reported that three youths were arrested while returning home after participating in an Amman

² <https://www.alhussein.jo/en/media/press-releases/crown-prince-extends-christmas-wishes-members-christian-community> (Accessed: 2026. 2. 15.).

demonstration in late October 2023 and that multiple activists testified to being summoned and interrogated by intelligence agency personnel (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

The Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement was also promoted in Jordan. Boycott and divestment campaigns targeted Israeli products, Israeli companies, and companies supporting Israel, as well as foreign companies from the United States and other countries. Foreign-owned stores in Amman, such as Starbucks and McDonald's, appeared deserted during this period. Boycotts also targeted foreign products such as Pepsi in supermarkets and other grocery stores. Flyers and stickers advocating the importance of BDS were posted in multiple locations, including stores and utility poles. In May 2025, as part of the same arrest campaign, Hamza Khader, the head of the BDS campaign in Jordan, was arrested. As reported by *The Middle East Eye*, he was detained for several weeks and then released after intelligence officers asked him to remain silent and not reveal what happened to him during his detention (The Middle East Eye, 2025).

Protests in Jordan calling for solidarity with Palestine and a ceasefire in Gaza were largely mobilized by the Muslim Brotherhood. Their political arm, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), is Jordan's largest opposition party, winning 31 out of 138 seats in the September 2024 elections. This represented a significant leap, tripling its seat count from the 2020 elections. Murad al-Adaileh, the IAF's Secretary General, told the Middle East Eye that his party's success was a result of both its performance in the previous parliament and its pro-Palestinian stance during Israel's war on Gaza (Ayesh, 2024). In April 2025, Jordan's interior minister announced that the kingdom was banning the Muslim Brotherhood and that promoting its ideology was now illegal. Given the political and social context in Jordan, not only actively criticizing the government on issues such as Gaza or Palestine but also participating

in social movement expressing solidarity with Palestine carries a certain risk, depending on the government's stance.

Given these social circumstances, the fact that Jordanians refrained from celebrating Christmas in public spaces can be interpreted not merely as an expression of sympathy for Palestine, but also as a form of everyday political expression, which was one of the few forms of expression available to them under these circumstances. It appears that this restraint extended not only to Christmas celebrations but also to the Muslim holiday of Eid. One Muslim woman described it this way: "During the war in Gaza, Christmas trees were decorated, but there was no music or ceremonies. Eid was similar—we slaughtered sheep and shared the meat, but it wasn't a festive mood" (Interview in Madaba, December 25, 2025). In other words, during the two years of the Gaza crisis, while religious rites and prayers continued for both Christmas and Eid, the festive atmosphere associated with music and ceremonies was largely curtailed.

In homes, Christmas celebrations tended to continue even during the two years of the Gaza crisis. One Christian woman (a Palestinian Jordanian) stated that during Christmas over those two years, "My heart hurt over Gaza, but Christmas is a precious time to see family (whom) I don't usually get to meet, so I spent it with my family and prayed at church. Children need time to enjoy themselves, and finding joy(,) even in sadness(,) is necessary" (Interview in Amman, 2025/12/23). This statement offers a glimpse into the struggle Christians face as they try to find a balance between their sympathy for Gaza and their desire to celebrate Christmas. While public celebrations were restrained, it is reasonable to assume that Christmas celebrations continued within the private space of the home. Christmas is a precious time for Jordanian Christian families, and while they feel deep sympathy for Palestine and Gaza, their lives continue as they preserve their family's happiness within their private sphere.

In churches, Christmas prayers have continued. In response to the Gaza crisis, special prayers were sometimes offered in churches. A Christian man described it this way: “In churches, special masses are held when something bad happens, whether in Gaza or Lebanon,” and solidarity with Palestine can certainly be expressed through prayer (Interview in Amman, December 21, 2025). In other words, solidarity with Gaza was sometimes expressed through prayers within churches.

Church leaders led the phenomenon of refraining from Christmas celebrations in churches. The leaders of Jordan’s Council of Churches announced on November 5, 2023, the cancellation of all festivities and events to express their deep concern over the escalating humanitarian crisis engulfing Palestinian civilians in Gaza, as reported by Gavlak (2023a/11/08):

Viewed as a poignant gesture of respect for the innocent victims and the reverent sacrifices made by those in Gaza and the West Bank, the council has called for a solemn observance of Christmas through prayer and religious rituals. It stated that Christmas bazaars, gift distributions for children, decorative initiatives and scout parades would be canceled. “We canceled the external celebrations of Christmas. The decision was made to focus on the spiritual meaning of Christmas — the birth of Jesus. It’s solidarity with the people of Gaza,” Father Rifat Bader told OSV News. He directed the Catholic Center for Studies and Media in the Jordanian capital. “We will focus only on the religious celebration, including worship services and songs inside the churches and nothing outside the churches,” Father Bader explained. (...)

Father Bader said Jordanians and Jordan’s population of Palestinian descendants “also are suffering together with the people of Gaza. We are the closest country to Palestine, to Gaza, that is why we are not celebrating Christmas with joy this year.” (...)

“All the Christians in Gaza’s Hayy Zeitouna district took a public decision to go to the two churches - the Latin Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church was attacked,” Father Bader explained. The Greek

Orthodox Church of St. Porphyrius sheltered hundreds of Palestinians, mainly Christians, displaced by the war, according to religious officials. The Israeli military strike (October, 19), killed some 18 people and injured at least 30. “Those who were in the Orthodox Church came to the Latin Catholic Church and now you find more than 700 people sheltering and sleeping inside the (Holy Family) church. They are living like the first-century Christians sharing everything together,” Father Bader said. (Gavlak, 2023a/11/08)

Father Rifat Bader has been Director of the Catholic Centre for Studies and Media in Jordan and parish priest at Sacred Heart of Jesus in Tla’ El Ali in Amman from 2020. He also stated in an interview with OSV News in 2023, “I think the Jordanian army was our Santa this year to bring these gifts to the people in need ... on Christmas Eve” (Gavlak, 2023b/12/28)

Father Rifat Bader delivered a sermon at the Christmas Mass held at the church on December 25, 2025. The author participated in this Mass as an observer. In his sermon, he expressed thanks to God that Christmas had returned to Palestine and to Jordan and stressed the tie between the people of Gaza and Palestine. He also spoke about the importance of friendship between Muslims and Christians in Jordan. His sermons, while certainly acts of “prayer,” can also transcend the religious sphere by taking on social significance in their promotion of solidarity with Palestine and friendship with Muslims. Following the Mass, bagpipe music was performed, and coffee and chocolate were served to the Mass attendees. At Christmas 2025, the “celebration” that had been suppressed for two years was thus regained. Thus, at church, Christmas was practiced both in “prayer” and “celebration,” interweaving religious observance with expressions of everyday politics.

VI. Conclusion

This study draws the following three conclusions: First, the representation of Christmas in Jordan's public spaces has been tolerated as a part of the official Islamic policies of the Jordanian royal family. The regime, including the Jordanian royal family, has characterized its official Islam by emphasizing religious tolerance, evident in actions such as the royal family's issuance of celebratory messages during Christmas and their participation in Christmas-related events. It has also become clear that these actions were adapted according to the political situation and public sentiments; for instance, in the wake of the Gaza crisis, the celebratory tone in Christmas messages was toned down, and participation in domestic events was curtailed but resumed in 2025.

Second, the practice of Christmas in Jordan exists on a spectrum between "prayer" and "celebration," shifting across three settings: public spaces, churches, and the home. The non-celebration of Christmas during the Gaza crisis specifically meant restrictions on celebrations in public spaces and churches, while other aspects of Christmas (including prayers in churches and homes, as well as celebrations in home) continued. Celebrations included events with music, parades, bazaars, and gift distribution, which were restrained because of the Gaza crisis but resumed in 2025.

The third conclusion is that refraining from the act of celebrating Christmas can be positioned within various forms of expression of everyday politics that emerged in Jordanian society after the Gaza crisis, such as boycott campaigns. Solidarity with Palestine was expressed by not celebrating religious occasions. This emerged as a possible form of political expression amid government crackdowns on various social movements that advocated solidarity with Palestine.

This study holds academic significance in that, through an analysis of the

minority Christian community in Jordan and Christmas as a form of limited religious practice, it offers insights into the broader configuration of the Jordanian state and society, as well as into the relationship between public religion and official Islam.

As a limitation of this study, it does not fully account for the diversity resulting from differences among Christian denominations. The same limitation applies to variations in Christmas practices among Muslims. Furthermore, there are likely differences in Christmas practices and expressions of solidarity with Gaza depending on factors such as urban–rural contexts and age. By conducting a more detailed survey—for example an anonymous survey stratified by denomination and incorporating analytical categories tailored to intra-communal differences—the study could be further developed. A more comprehensive analysis of how Christmas practices in Jordan have evolved over time would also be possible by extending the scope of the investigation to a longer timeframe, such as several decades.

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