

World  
Watch  
Research

## Qatar: Full Country Dossier

February 2024



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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# Introduction

## World Watch List 2024

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	12.8	96	98	96	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	10.6	93	92	91	92	92
3	Libya	15.9	16.0	15.9	16.1	16.4	10.2	91	88	91	92	90
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.8	89	89	88	88	87
5	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	89	88	87	85
6	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.5	14.9	14.4	16.7	88	88	87	85	80
7	Pakistan	13.2	13.9	15.0	15.1	13.1	16.7	87	86	87	88	88
8	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	13.3	87	83	79	79	85
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.8	16.5	10.9	86	86	85	86	85
10	Afghanistan	15.7	15.9	15.2	16.3	16.6	4.6	84	84	98	94	93
11	India	12.2	12.6	13.3	14.8	13.2	16.5	83	82	82	83	83
12	Syria	13.4	14.3	13.9	14.3	14.2	11.1	81	80	78	81	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.7	16.6	3.3	81	80	81	78	79
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	12.8	15.1	15.6	79	76	70	67	66
15	Algeria	14.4	14.1	11.5	14.0	15.6	9.8	79	73	71	70	73
16	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.0	14.8	13.9	7.8	79	76	78	82	76
17	Myanmar	12.2	10.6	13.4	13.7	13.0	16.1	79	80	79	74	73
18	Maldives	15.6	15.5	13.6	16.0	16.4	0.9	78	77	77	77	78
19	China	13.0	10.0	12.8	14.6	16.0	11.1	78	77	76	74	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	13.8	15.6	75	71	68	67	66
21	Laos	11.6	10.6	13.2	14.3	14.0	11.3	75	68	69	71	72
22	Cuba	13.2	8.7	13.8	13.3	15.1	8.7	73	70	66	62	52
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	1.3	72	72	70	71	68
24	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.7	12.8	14.4	5.4	71	69	69	67	66
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.9	12.6	15.5	1.7	71	71	71	71	73
26	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.5	10.8	10.4	14.1	71	69	68	67	63
27	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.9	70	70	68	62	60
28	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	70	68	66	68
29	Turkmenistan	14.2	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.5	0.6	70	70	69	70	70
30	Nicaragua	12.1	7.6	13.2	13.2	14.1	9.6	70	65	56	51	41
31	Oman	14.3	14.0	10.6	13.3	14.0	3.1	69	65	66	63	62
32	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	14.4	69	66	66	65	63
33	Tunisia	12.3	13.2	10.2	12.4	13.8	6.9	69	67	66	67	64
34	Colombia	11.1	8.6	12.9	11.3	10.4	14.1	68	71	68	67	62
35	Vietnam	11.3	9.4	12.4	13.8	14.2	7.2	68	70	71	72	72
36	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	12.4	14.1	14.3	2.2	68	66	67	64	61
37	Mexico	11.5	8.5	12.5	11.1	10.6	14.1	68	67	65	64	60
38	Egypt	12.5	13.7	11.4	11.9	10.9	7.8	68	68	71	75	76
39	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.0	68	68	65	63	43
40	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.6	67	68	74	67	66
41	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.9	67	67	66	64	56
42	Indonesia	10.9	12.3	11.5	10.2	9.7	11.5	66	68	68	63	60
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.0	13.1	15.9	66	65	65	64	60
44	Brunei	15.0	14.7	10.0	10.8	14.1	1.3	66	65	64	64	63
45	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.1	66	66	63	62	57
46	Tajikistan	13.8	12.6	12.3	12.9	13.4	0.6	66	66	65	66	65
47	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.8	12.1	12.8	14.3	1.1	65	65	64	64	64
48	Jordan	12.9	14.2	10.5	12.4	12.8	2.2	65	65	66	64	64
49	Malaysia	13.0	14.1	11.5	12.2	11.1	2.4	64	66	63	63	62
50	Turkey	13.0	11.5	11.6	13.2	11.4	3.1	64	66	65	69	63

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	12.4	63	64	63	62	61
52	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	14.4	62	63	61	58	55
53	Nepal	12.1	10.4	9.5	13.2	12.3	4.4	62	61	64	66	64
54	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	64	64	63	62
55	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	1.1	61	60	59	56	56
56	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	10.6	61	58	55	53	56
57	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.7	61	62	62	62	60
58	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.2	10.8	11.5	9.7	5.9	60	57	63	62	65
59	Azerbaijan	13.2	9.9	9.6	11.9	13.6	1.7	60	59	60	56	57
60	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	9.7	10.7	12.1	0.9	60	60	59	58	60
61	Kyrgyzstan	13.2	10.3	11.3	10.5	12.2	1.3	59	59	58	58	57
62	Russian Federation	12.7	7.7	10.6	12.8	12.9	1.7	58	57	56	57	60
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	9.4	58	57	50	42	42
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	12.8	57	55	52	48	48
65	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	1.1	55	55	57	56	55
66	Honduras	7.9	4.7	12.2	7.3	9.9	12.6	55	53	48	46	39
67	Venezuela	6.0	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	10.7	53	56	51	39	42
68	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	8.9	52	49	44	43	41
69	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	7.2	52	48	43	47	45
70	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	15.9	52	51	48	47	48
71	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	52	51	46	43
72	Lebanon	11.0	10.2	7.0	6.1	6.6	7.2	48	40	11	-	35
73	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	3.7	47	44	44	43	43
74	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.6	46	46	43	43	44
75	Belarus	9.6	3.8	5.8	9.7	13.3	3.3	46	43	33	30	28
76	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	44	42	42	42
77	Ukraine	5.5	4.8	8.0	11.6	11.6	2.8	44	37	37	34	33
78	Israel	9.8	8.6	5.8	6.3	6.9	6.7	44	38	41	40	38

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## Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2024 reporting period was 1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/> and on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom): <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>.

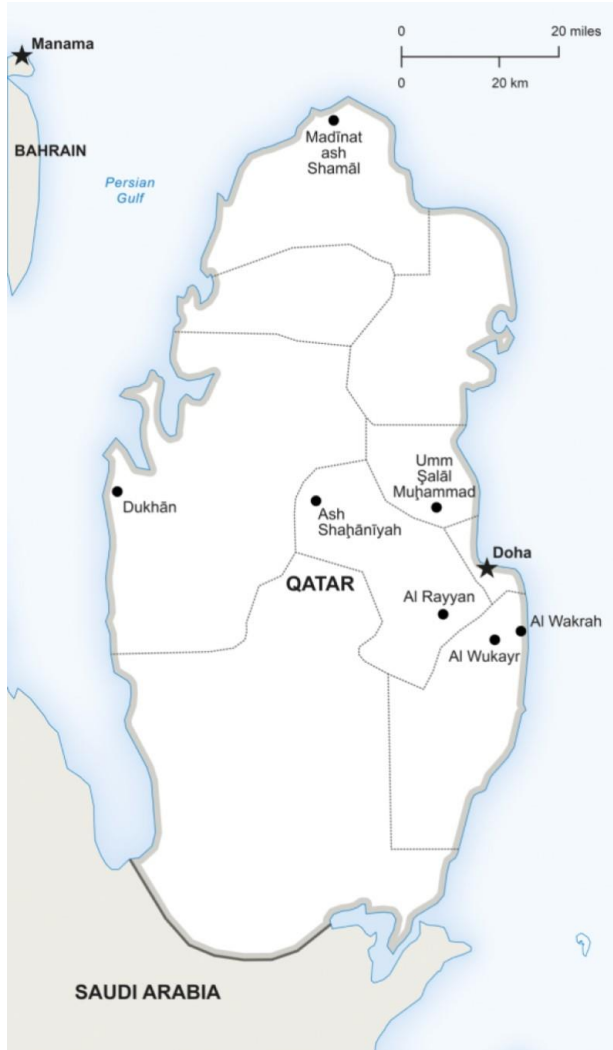
# WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Qatar

## Brief country details

Qatar: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
3,029,000	414,000	13.7

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

## Map of country



Qatar: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	67	40
WWL 2023	68	34
WWL 2022	74	18
WWL 2021	67	29
WWL 2020	66	27

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Qatar:	
Main persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Government officials, Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family
Clan oppression	One's own (extended) family, Non-Christian religious leaders, Ethnic group leaders, Government officials, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials

*Engines and Drivers are listed in order of strength. Only Very strong / Strong / Medium are shown here.*

### Brief description of the persecution situation

There are two categories of Christian communities in Qatar; they are separate from each other and have to be careful when interacting with each other. The largest group - the community of expatriate Christians - is made up of Christian migrant workers. Proselytizing Muslims is strictly forbidden and can lead to prosecution and deportation. However, large worship events have been allowed in the past. A major issue remains the lack of sufficient church space, since only a select number of churches have been allowed to establish buildings at the official Religious Complex outside the capital, Doha. Many migrant workers have to live and work in poor conditions, while their Christian faith adds to their vulnerability.

The other group consists of converts from Islam to Christianity. Both converts from an indigenous and migrant background bear the brunt of persecution. Converts with Qatari citizenship face very high pressure from their Muslim families. Converts from a migrant background are primarily controlled by the social environment they live in. Often, the social norms of their home countries apply to them rather than Qatari cultural norms. In some cases, they can avoid pressure by living within an international community, rather than their own ethnic community. Nonetheless, even their employers can be a source of persecution. Both indigenous and migrant converts risk discrimination, harassment and police monitoring. Moreover, a change of faith (away from Islam) is not officially recognized and is likely to lead to legal problems in personal status and property matters.

There are hardly ever reports of Christians being killed, imprisoned or harmed for their faith, because the number of converts is low and they keep their faith secret.

## Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Qatar has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights in the following international treaties:

1. [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR)
2. [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR)
3. [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) (CAT)
4. [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW)
5. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

Qatar is not fulfilling its international obligations by regularly violating or failing to protect the following rights of Christians:

- Christians face restrictions in employment in the public sector and experience discrimination in the private sector (ICCPR Arts. 25 and 26, and ICESCR Art. 6)
- Christian converts are ostracized and faced with opposition by their families, and threatened with divorce and loss of child custody (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christian children are harassed because of their parents' faith (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Christians face harassment and violence if they talk about their faith or engage in proselytization (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)

## Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

Violent incidents against Christians are rarely reported. Incidents where Christian migrant workers are targeted probably go unreported because it is in nobody's interest to make details public; the victim wants to keep his or her job and other actors (like the government) are not interested in having a record of such occurrences on their files. Secondly, it is sometimes difficult to discern whether or not a case of mistreatment has been due to a worker's Christian faith. However, it is estimated that thousands of expatriate Christians face abuse. According to a 2020 report by [Amnesty International](#) (AI, "Why do you want to rest", 2020), thousands of migrant workers are suffering from labor abuses despite initiatives and laws to improve labor conditions. As highlighted in an [earlier report](#) (AI, "My Sleep Is My Break", 2014), (sexual) abuse of female migrant workers, many of whom are Christian, is common.

## Specific examples of positive developments

- Qatar continues to encourage interfaith dialogue, for example via the Doha International Centre for Interfaith Dialogue (DICID). Although very much connected to government efforts to boost its diplomatic ties with the Western world (which in Qatari eyes is seen as Christian), it has nevertheless helped to create a more tolerant attitude towards Christians in the country. In 2023, DICID organized a number of conferences in Qatar, including the "Global Youth Interfaith & Intercultural Forum" ([ACWAY, accessed 28 July 2023](#)) and the "Conference From Religious Freedom to Religious Responsibility (Building Communities of Advocacy and Action)" ([Gulf Times, 11 May 2023](#)).



- In 2019, Qatar's Emir Tamim ben Hamad al-Thani personally financed the building of a church in Lebanon ([Asia News, 1 April 2019](#)).

## External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Amnesty International - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde22/3175/2020/en/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: earlier report - [https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/qatar\\_my\\_sleep\\_is\\_my\\_break\\_final.pdf](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/qatar_my_sleep_is_my_break_final.pdf)
- Specific examples of positive developments: ACWAY, accessed 28 July 2023 - <https://acway.org/global-youth-forum-qatar-2023/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Gulf Times, 11 May 2023 - <https://www.gulf-times.com/article/660796/qatar/interfaith-dialogue-an-indispensable-mechanism-for-communication-between-societies-for-peace>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Asia News, 1 April 2019 - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Inauguration-of-Church-funded-by-the-Emir-of-Qatar-45880.html>

## WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Qatar

### Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/23 Qatar report	AI Qatar 2022	<a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/qatar/report-qatar/">https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/qatar/report-qatar/</a>	3 July 2023
BBC News Qatar profile - updated 3 March 2023	BBC Qatar profile	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14702226">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14702226</a>	3 July 2023
Bertelsmann Transformation Index Qatar report 2022	BTI Qatar Report 2022	<a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/QAT">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/QAT</a>	3 July 2023
CIA World Factbook Qatar - updated 6 June 2023	World Factbook Qatar	<a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/qatar/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/qatar/</a>	3 July 2023
Crisis24 Qatar report (Garda World)	Crisis24 Qatar report	<a href="https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/qatar">https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/qatar</a>	3 July 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit Qatar profile 2023	Qatar profile 2023	<a href="https://country.eiu.com/qatar">https://country.eiu.com/qatar</a>	3 July 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2023 Qatar	<a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>	3 July 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Qatar not included	Freedom House/Democracy 2023	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores</a>	
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2023 Qatar	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/qatar/freedom-world/2023">https://freedomhouse.org/country/qatar/freedom-world/2023</a>	3 July 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report – covering 70 countries, Qatar is not included	Freedom on the Net 2023	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores</a>	
Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 – covering 170 countries	GIWPS 2021 Qatar profile	<a href="https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/qatar/">https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/qatar/</a>	3 July 2023
Girls Not Brides Qatar report	Girls Not Brides Qatar	<a href="https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/qatar/">https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/qatar/</a>	3 July 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 - Qatar country chapter	HRW 2023 Qatar country chapter	<a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/qatar">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/qatar</a>	3 July 2023
Internet World Stats available in 2023	IWS 2023 Qatar	<a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm#qa">https://www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm#qa</a>	3 July 2023
Middle East Concern - Qatar profile	MEC Qatar profile	<a href="https://meconcern.org/countries/qatar/">https://meconcern.org/countries/qatar/</a>	3 July 2023
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2023 Qatar	<a href="https://rsf.org/en/qatar">https://rsf.org/en/qatar</a>	3 July 2023
Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2022 Qatar	<a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/qat">https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/qat</a>	3 July 2023
UNDP: Human Development Report Qatar	UNDP HDR Qatar	<a href="https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/QAT">https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/QAT</a>	3 July 2023
US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report Qatar	IRFR 2022 Qatar	<a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/qatar/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/qatar/</a>	3 July 2023
USCIRF 2023 covering 17 CPC / 11 SWL, Qatar not included	USCIRF 2023	<a href="https://www.uscirf.gov/countries">https://www.uscirf.gov/countries</a>	
World Bank GCC overview - updated 13 February 2023	World Bank GCC overview	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/gcc/overview">https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/gcc/overview</a>	3 July 2023
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook Qatar - April 2023	Macro Poverty Outlook Qatar	<a href="https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/65cf93926fdb3ea23b72f277fc249a72-0500042021/related/mpo-qat.pdf">https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/65cf93926fdb3ea23b72f277fc249a72-0500042021/related/mpo-qat.pdf</a>	3 July 2023
World Bank Qatar data - 2021	World Bank Qatar data	<a href="https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=QAT">https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=QAT</a>	3 July 2023

## Recent history

Since declaring independence from Great Britain in 1971, Qatar has gone through considerable economic, social and political changes. The country has been dominated by the al-Thani family for almost 150 years. Once a poor (pearl-)fishing nation, Qatar has developed into a prosperous and modern country, thanks to the exploitation of oil and gas fields since the 1940s.

Qatar has sought to establish a unique role for itself, especially through its news station Al-Jazeera, the Middle East's most viewed satellite TV channel, founded in 1996.

Until June 2017, Qatar was a stable nation, maintaining friendly relations with the USA, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Hamas and Hezbollah. Apart for a few online protests, the influence from the Arab Spring uprisings elsewhere did not seem to cause any unrest in Qatar, despite the country's active role in the Arab Spring movement and its aftermath abroad (most notably in Libya).

This changed in 2017 when Saudi Arabia led the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt to boycott Qatar and sever all diplomatic and economic ties. All land and sea borders between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates were closed until January 2021. The official reason for the boycott was Qatar's alleged support for terrorist groups (among a number of other reasons). Qatar's support for the Muslim Brotherhood (which is designated as a terrorist organization by Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the UAE) was the main issue of concern ([The Atlantic, 2 July 2017](#)). However, using its vast financial reserves, Qatar did not give in and an official restoration of ties took place following the Al-Ula agreement in January 2021 ([BBC News, 5 January 2021](#)). Nonetheless, it seems that Qatar has reduced its support for the Muslim Brotherhood to a certain extent, with a number of its leaders being told to leave the country ([Washington Institute, 3 February 2021](#), [MENA Research Center, 7 June 2022](#)). Following further rapprochement between Qatar and Egypt during 2023, Qatar requested that around 100 Egyptians with connections to the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups leave the country ([Mada Masr, 8 June 2023](#)).

On the geopolitical level, due to its supportive attitude towards Islamist groups, Qatar has developed a role as international intermediary between Western countries and Islamist ruled countries like Afghanistan and Iran. It played a major role in discussions surrounding the USA's withdrawal from Afghanistan, while also offering a neutral meeting place for talks between the USA and Iran ([New York Times, 7 September 2021](#), [AP News, 30 June 2022](#)). It further increased its global intermediary position following the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war in October 2023, during which the country functioned as a key broker in hostage negotiations ([BBC News, 23 October 2023](#)). See also below: Political and legal landscape.

Qatar managed to remain relatively unaffected by the COVID-19 pandemic with only 690 COVID-related deaths ([Worldometer](#), accessed 31 January 2024).

The Christian presence in the country has been growing since the start of the development of the gas and oil industry in the 1970s with the subsequent influx of expatriate workers. Although expatriate Christians enjoyed a limited level of religious freedom, it took until 2008 before the first church was inaugurated in the strictly monitored [Mesaimmer Religious Complex](#) just outside Doha (DohaGuides, accessed 14 January 2024).

## Political and legal landscape

Qatar is an absolute monarchy, ruled by Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani who took over power from his father in 2013 and was educated in the UK. Qatar's Sheikh is dedicated to diversifying the economy and renewing national infrastructure. Qatar's political system is classified as 'authoritarian' by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU 2022). The conservative Qatari government is not in favor of democracy, which they perceive as a Western concept bound to cause difficulties, as attempts to democratize other Arab countries have shown. The state distributes its wealth generously, which has largely resulted in the absence of much of the social and economic discontent which has characterized the region since the beginning of the Arab Spring. However, in a major development, first-ever legislative elections were held in October 2021 for the new Shura council, with 30 elected and 15 appointed members. The elections were organized along tribal lines, resulting in the election of known businessmen and former government officials. It is to be expected that they will mainly focus on the key interests of their constituents, including opposing reform of labor rights for migrant workers ([AGSIW, 7 October 2021](#)).

Qatar considers Christianity a foreign influence, with the Ministry of Foreign affairs regulating the churches in the country. Although keeping a strict separation between Qataris and expatriate Christians, attitudes towards the Christian expatriate community are generally respectful, as the Qataris have accepted that giving the Christian community some freedom is in Qatar's best interest.

According to Middle East Concern (MEC Qatar profile):

- "The constitution of Qatar enshrines Islam as the religion of the State and Islamic law as a main source of legislation. The constitution affirms the principle of non-discrimination, including on the basis of religion. It guarantees freedom of religious practice provided that public order and morality are maintained. The Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) are legally recognised. Under applicable Islamic law, Muslims are effectively prohibited from changing their religion. Non-Islamic proselytism is strictly prohibited and is punishable by prison sentences ... – though in recent years the government has preferred to deport without legal proceedings those suspected of proselytising. Islamic personal status laws apply for citizens, and Islamic custody provisions apply to non-Muslims as well as Muslims. ... The importation of non-Islamic religious materials is permitted for recognised groups, though it is strictly monitored and regulated."

Unusual for the wider region is the fact that there is little public expression of social or economic discontent. Next to the government's tight grip on the freedom of expression, this is probably due to the state generously distributing its wealth among the Qatari citizens; this in turn leads to general political apathy. Fragile State Index political indicators (FSI 2023) show a sharp rise in external intervention for 2017, in line with the start of the Saudi-led boycott. The average indicators remained stable, signaling that Qatar managed to deal successfully with the increased external pressure (if that were not the case, the score for the average indicators would have increased).

Another reason why Qatar is stable is because sectarian divisions (between Sunnis and Shiites) are less profound and are not leading to visible tensions as is the case in neighboring countries. However, Qatar did play an active role in the Arab Spring movement abroad, especially in Libya where it cooperated in military intervention. It also played an active role in Iraq, Syria and Libya by supporting Islamic militants. The reasons for this were to increase its regional influence and uphold a Sunni, pro-Islamist agenda. The latter highlights one of the major differences compared to neighboring Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which do not support pro-Islamist groups (and which - as stated above - designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization).

In addition to supporting Islamist groups and political Islam, Qatar also angered Saudi Arabia and the UAE by establishing a quite independent role for itself: It has contact with Saudi Arabia's regional rival Iran and has often mediated between Iran and the USA ([Arab Weekly, 26 July 2021](#)). Another clear example is the mediation Qatar was involved in before and after the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban in August 2021. Although Qatar has hosted a Taliban office for almost a decade, its key diplomatic role became very clear after the fall of Kabul, with almost all evacuation flights being arranged via Qatar ([BBC News, 2 September 2021](#)).

Qatar is also trying to become a major regional player with its airline and the hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Last but not least, it hosts news station Al-Jazeera, the Middle East's most viewed satellite TV channel, founded in 1996. Al-Jazeera is said to have been an engine of the Arab Spring movement, serving as a mouthpiece for opposition leaders and insurgents, especially from the Muslim Brotherhood. Al-Jazeera also criticized the governments of neighboring countries and this might have particularly angered Saudi Arabia and its allies. In addition, following the now-ended boycott, Qatar increased its ties with Turkey. This further annoyed Saudi Arabia, as Turkey is the regional safe haven for the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups, although Turkey did also reduce its support for Islamist groups from 2022 onwards. Following the Al-Ula agreement, Qatar is apparently aligning itself more in accordance with Saudi wishes, but even so it is unlikely that Qatar will completely sever ties with the Muslim Brotherhood ([AGSIW, 14 April 2021](#)).

### **Gender perspective**

The Qatari legal landscape has long been restrictive towards women and girls; laws discriminate against women in relation to marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance. The proportion of seats held by women in the Majlis Al-Shura (Shura Council), which corresponds to an advisory body with limited powers, is about [4.4%](#), the lowest it has been since 2017 (IPU, 2023). [Reservations](#) made by the Qatari government to numerous articles still stand, including Article 9 (which grants women the right to pass on/retain their nationality) and Article 16 (which provides for the elimination of discrimination against women as they enter or exit a marriage), despite ratifying CEDAW in 2009 (UNDP, Qatar: Gender Justice and the Law, 2019).

The concept of male guardianship is incorporated into Qatari law and practices, which limits the freedom of women. Without it they may not be able to travel, work, attend university or marry. General limitations on women include being required to obey their husbands in the context of male guardianship (HRW 2023 Qatar country chapter). They are also [legally vulnerable](#) to domestic violence and are legally restricted to inherit half of what a similarly situated male rela-

tive would receive (UNDP, Qatar: Gender Justice and the Law, 2019). Whilst rape is outlawed under Article 279 of the Penal code, there are no provisions against marital rape. Whereas the husband has the right to unilaterally divorce her, she must attain a judicial decree and risks losing access to her children. For this reason many women choose to stay in abusive marriages.

## Religious landscape

Qatar: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	414,000	13.7
Muslim	2,399,000	79.2
Hindu	92,200	3.0
Buddhist	54,400	1.8
Ethno-religionist	0	0.0
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	3,500	0.1
Atheist	2,200	0.1
Agnostic	63,600	2.1
Other	0	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

According to Middle East Concern (MEC Qatar profile), 90% of Qataris are Sunni and only 10% Shiites. Qatar is one of the only two Wahhabi countries in the world, following a very puritan version of Islam. The other Wahhabi country is Saudi Arabia, but since the 1990s Qatar has adopted its own, less strict version of Wahhabism. This difference is also known as the "[Wahhabism of the sea](#)" versus the "[Wahhabism of the land](#)" (Huffpost, 12 April 2017). Hence, in contrast to Saudi Arabia, Qatar has been relatively lenient towards the growing Christian expatriate community and has provided land to build churches. Although most Christian expatriates welcome this, there is a flipside since the concentration of churches in the one Abu Hamour area of Doha can lead to 'ghettoization'. As such, Christians can also be easily monitored and controlled – which usually happens under the pretext of ensuring their safety. Qatar's ban on re-opening villa house-churches outside of the designated religious complex after COVID-19 restrictions were eased, can be viewed as another measure to keep control over the Christian population, although no repercussions followed for those who did re-open (US State Department, [IRFR 2021](#) Qatar, p.7). Representatives of the villa house-churches continue to advocate for increased space, but the Qatari government seems to ignore those requests (IRFR 2022 Qatar, p. 9).

While the country makes efforts to be open and modern, the strict interpretation of Islam continues to have its grip on society. Society and government enforce conservative Islamic customs in public, e.g. by enforcing public dress codes, prohibiting the drinking of alcohol in public, by limiting the freedom of expression (to prevent criticism of Islam) and by allowing other religions only to worship in private.

### **Other sources report**

According to Humanists International's [Freedom of Thought Report](#) (updated 7 October 2021):

"Whilst Qatar's constitution and other laws provide for freedom of association, public assembly, and worship, these freedoms are framed within limits based on sharia law and 'morality concerns'. Legal, cultural, and institutional discrimination against, women and girls, LGBTI+people, non-Qatari nationals, certain local tribes, and other minorities is prevalent."

"Leaving Islam is a capital offense punishable by death in Qatar. However, since 1971 no punishment for apostasy has been recorded." ... [Nevertheless, m]ultiple fatwas on Islam Web are clear that insulting the prophet must be punished by death, often without giving them a chance to repent. ... Islam Web is a website directly employed, funded, and managed by the government. It promotes the Salafi literalist school of Sunni-Islam, a radical interpretation of Islam considered incompatible with the promotion of co-existence."

According to Middle East Concern (MEC Qatar profile):

- "Expatriate Christians enjoy considerable freedom in Qatar, provided that their activities are restricted to designated compounds and, in particular, that they avoid interaction with Muslims that could be construed as proselytism. In recent years there have been several cases of expatriate Christians being deported, it is assumed because of activities considered to have been proselytism (though for most deportations no reasons are stated). The recognized churches find their current facilities inadequate; the 'Religious Complex' is typically overcrowded on days of worship as churches seek to accommodate multiple congregations of various nationalities and languages. Robust security arrangements at the Religious Complex facilitate enforcement of a strict entry ban on Muslims, except where prior permission has been granted. Qatari nationals or other Muslims who choose to leave Islam are likely to face strong family and societal pressure. In extreme cases those who leave Islam can face violent responses from family members".

## Economic landscape

According to the World Factbook Qatar and World Bank Qatar data:

- **GPD per capita (PPP):** \$92,900 (2021 est.)
- **Unemployment:** 0.3% (2021), with youth unemployment being 1.1% (2021), making it a country with one of the lowest (youth) unemployment rates in the world.
- **Percentage of population below national poverty line:** No data available, but probably very low. The Qatari government is known to take care of all citizens.

According to World Bank ([GCC Economic Update Spring 2023](#) and Macro Poverty Outlook Qatar):

- **General:** "The FIFA World Cup, ... reportedly drew 3.4 million visitors. Travel, tourism and hospitality, and retail sectors have all gained momentum and received a major boost during Q42022. The hydrocarbon sector continues to benefit from high yet moderating energy prices. Large surpluses in the external and fiscal balances are expected to remain for the next few years."
- **Economic growth:** "Real GDP is estimated to slow down to 3.3% in 2023 after the strong performance registered in 2022, with the hydrocarbon sector expanding by 0.8%. ...The high premium expected for natural gas in Europe from geopolitical tensions lead to surpluses for the fiscal balances in Qatar ... estimated at 8.4 percent ... of GDP."
- **Outlook:** "The North Field expansion project is expected to boost the hydrocarbon sector in the medium term once the field enters commercial operation. Meanwhile, robust growth is anticipated during this year in the non-hydrocarbon sectors, reaching 4.3%, driven by private and public consumption.."
- **Potential risks:** "The economy continues to face challenges and risks, including the potential emergence of new COVID-19 variants, fluctuations in energy prices, and tightening global financial conditions."

### Other sources report

- The World Bank's [World by Income and Region report](#) (accessed 28 July 2023) puts the Qatari economy in the high income category .
- The Fragile State Index (FSI 2023 Qatar) shows improvement in the economic indicators on average for 2023, but 'Economic Inequality' further increased. The indicator 'External intervention' increased sharply in 2017 due to the Qatar diplomatic crisis, but has been decreasing since.
- The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU 2023) writes: "We expect the emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, to remain secure in power throughout the 2023-27 forecast period, supported by strong public confidence. The Qatar National Vision 2030, which forms the centerpiece of the government's strategy to develop and diversify the economy and to advance environmental management and social development, will shape policy in 2023-27. The long-term plan is to generate a favorable business environment to support higher investment and employment. ... Qatar's economy will continue to benefit from high commodity prices in 2023-27, but less so than in 2022. The ongoing Qatar's North Field East liquefied natural gas expansion project, which is expected to start production in 2025, will bolster the surpluses on the fiscal and external accounts."

The World Bank classifies Qatar as having a high income economy. This is not surprising since it has the world's third largest natural gas reserves. Petroleum also plays a dominant role in the economy, despite the government's efforts to diversify. The three year boycott of Qatar by Saudi Arabia, the UAE and other allies led to a diversification of the Qatari economy, but did not cripple it due to Qatar's huge financial reserves. Nevertheless, some sectors of the economy, such as Qatar Airways and the tourist industry, made significant losses due to the closure of all borders between Qatar and its neighbors. The [boycott was lifted](#) in January 2021 (NBC News, 5 January 2021).

A large section of the population (87.0%) is employed, according to World Bank data. However, poverty among expatriate workers is likely to be under-reported. Although probably not primarily faith-related, Christian expatriates do experience labor abuse, including low and non-paid salaries, confiscation of passports and other forms of unfair treatment.

Qatari converts from Islam to Christianity are very likely to be placed under economic pressure: There is a high chance they will lose employment and economic benefits provided by the state, if their conversion becomes known.

### Gender perspective

Female converts are additionally vulnerable due to patrilineal inheritance practices and lower employment rates. Whilst Qatar has achieved gender parity in education and has one of the highest female [labor force participation](#) rates in the region, 96.8% of men are in the workforce compared to 60.5% of women (World Bank, Gender Data Portal 2023). Male converts who lose their jobs may suffer the shame of not being able to provide for their dependent family members. Despite Qatar's ongoing [labor reforms](#), domestic workers – the majority of whom are female – remain vulnerable to serious labor abuses, including delayed or unpaid wages, substandard living conditions, and forced labor (International Labour Organization, 21 June 2022).

## Social and cultural landscape

According to the World Factbook Qatar:

- **Main ethnic groups:** The majority of the Qatari population are from Arab decent. A wide variety of ethnicities can be found among the expatriate community.
- **Main languages:** The official language is Arabic, with English being widely spoken as well.
- **Urban population:** In 2023, 99.4% of the population lived in urban areas with an annual rate of urbanization of 1.66%.
- **Literacy rate:** 93.5% of the population can read and write; with more women (94.7%) than men (92.4%) being able to read and write (2017)
- **Population/age:** The total population is around 2.5 million (2023 est.), with immigrants making up 88,4% of the total population (2015 est.). The younger generation - up to 24 years of age - makes up almost 25% of the population.
- **IDPs/Refugees:** Around 1200 stateless people reside in the country.
- **Life expectancy:** 80.0 years on average; women (82.2 years), men (77.9 years).



According to the UNDP Human Development Report Qatar:

- **HDI score and ranking:** Qatar ranks #42 out of 191 countries. The combined ratio of life expectancy, education and per capita income gives a very high score of 0.855 on the Human Development Index (HDI).
- **Gender inequality:** with a GDI (Gender Development Index) score of 1.019, men are slightly disadvantaged in comparison to women. The GDI measures the differences in life expectancy, years of education and GNI per capita per gender.
- **Education:** On average, Qataris are expected to have 13 years of schooling. Bucking the regional trend, girls typically spend more time in education than boys; the mean years of schooling for boys was 9.6 years compared to 11.6 years for girls (2021).

Despite this slight gender inequality, men enjoy greater freedom in Qatari society than women. Due to the male guardianship system, men remain the key decision-makers in the lives of women and their children ([HRW News, 29 March 2021](#)). This level of control makes it extremely challenging for female converts to escape abusive situations or to flee the country. Male converts on the other hand, may find that - due to the greater prominence of men in the public sphere - they face higher levels of scrutiny from the authorities about their faith and church activities.

An estimated 88% of the country's population are expatriate migrant workers (according to MEC's country profile), which creates a dual system of rights and privileges in the country. Forced labor and human trafficking are a problem and foreign workers are vulnerable to abuses such as underpayment, lack of appropriate housing and sanitation (due to the overcrowded labor compounds), domestic violence and sexual harassment. Since 2013, [reports by civil society groups](#) revealed that workers in Qatar are experiencing "modern-day slavery" (AI, March 2016). According to Amnesty International's report in April 2014: "The Qatari authorities are [failing to protect](#) migrant domestic workers who face severe exploitation, including forced labor and physical and sexual violence". [Legal improvements](#) were made in 2018 (The Guardian, 6 September 2018) and Amnesty International (AI Qatar 2022) states:

- "Despite the government's ongoing efforts to reform its labour system, thousands of migrant workers continued to face labour abuses ... Domestic workers, most of whom are women, continued to face some of the harshest working conditions and abuses, including verbal, physical and sexual assault. The authorities failed to implement measures introduced in 2017 to protect them from labour abuses. Women domestic workers who managed to flee abusive employers lacked access to safe shelter."

Hence, the question remains how much will change in practice, especially now that the eyes of the world have left again after the 2022 World Cup.

Although not primarily faith-related, it is very likely that many Christian expatriates experience (sexual) abuse, especially female domestic workers. The treatment of Christians in Qatar is not so much based on their faith, as on their skin color and ethnic background. Western (white) Christian expatriates are far less likely to experience harassment than African or Asian Christian expatriates. In addition, high-skilled workers will face less difficulties than low-skilled ones. Hence, a low-skilled Christian migrant from an African background will be most vulnerable in

Qatar.

Qataris are a homogeneous group with strong family ties actively trying to uphold their Islamic norms by protecting themselves against modernization and Westernization. Conversion from Islam to Christianity is seen as betrayal and can lead to high levels of family and societal pressure, including ostracization, forced marriage and physical violence.

## Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2023 Qatar):

- **Internet usage:** 104.8% penetration (January 2022). According to UNDP HDR Qatar, there is gender parity in relation to Internet usage.
- **Facebook usage:** 104.8% penetration (January 2022). According to [Napoleon Cat \(June 2023\)](#), 70.3% of Facebook users in Qatar are male and 29.7% female.

According to the World Bank Qatar data:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 144.2 per 100 people

The high level of Internet usage is an indication of the advanced technical development of the country. But Internet users have to be careful and refrain from questioning government policies or criticizing Islam or Islamic practices. According to Freedom House's Global Freedom Index 2023 Qatar:

- Qatar is listed as "not free".
- "Both print and broadcast media are influenced by leading families and subject to state censorship. The international television network Al Jazeera is privately held, but the government has reportedly paid to support its operating costs since its inception in 1996. All journalists in Qatar practice a degree of self-censorship and face possible jail sentences for defamation and other press offenses. ... In January 2020, an amendment to the penal code made the sharing or publication of "false news" punishable with up to five years in prison or a maximum fine of 100,000 riyals (\$27,500)."
- "While residents enjoy some freedom of private discussion, security forces reportedly monitor personal communications, and noncitizens often self-censor to avoid jeopardizing their work and residency status. Social media users can face criminal penalties for posting politically sensitive content. However, citizens and residents have become more active in debating current affairs and regional developments without apparent retribution in recent years."

A report from [Amnesty International \(20 January 2020\)](#) adds:

- A new repressive law "issued by Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, amends the Penal Code by adding a new provision ... which authorizes the imprisonment of 'anyone who broadcasts, publishes, or republishes false or biased rumours, statements, or news, or inflammatory propaganda, domestically or abroad, with the intent to harm national interests, stir up public opinion, or infringe on the social system or the public system of the state'."

Reporters without Borders (World Press Freedom 2023 Qatar) reports:

- "Despite an easing of restrictions during the FIFA World Cup in 2022, journalists are left little leeway by the oppressive legislative arsenal and draconian system of censorship. A cybercrime law adopted in late 2014 and reinforced in 2020 imposes restrictions on journalists and criminalises spreading "fake news" online. ... The state-funded *Al Jazeera* TV news broadcaster has considerable resources and a pool of presenters who are paid well enough to ignore subjects that could embarrass their employer. ... Qatar has a majority immigrant population, which is reflected in the diversity of journalists working for Qatari media outlets. But the conditions of immigrant workers, in particular those employed at the 2022 FIFA World Cup construction sites, is completely off limits in Qatar. *Al Jazeera English* has devoted some reports to this subject, but the same cannot be said for the parent company, the Arabic-language section. Religion, the emir's personal life, women's rights and LGBT rights are also all off limits."

Christians in Qatar have to be careful in their social media postings as proselytizing remains strictly forbidden. Nonetheless, churches can announce church activities online.

### Gender perspective

As reflected in the statistics above, women have equal access to the Internet compared to men. Male guardians can monitor their activity however, restricting the freedom with which they can utilize technology. Guardians may also use mobile apps (such as Metrash) to both grant and cancel exit permits to leave Qatar; this reflects how technology can be used to control women, especially unmarried women under 25 ([Human Rights Watch, 29 March 2021](#)).

### Security situation

Although trust between Qatar and its neighbors remains low after the Saudi-led boycott, there is no risk of any kind of military confrontation. The only threat seems to be on the cyber level, as the countries are [allegedly spying on one another](#) (Reuters, 1 April 2019). Both Qatar and its neighbors are allies of the USA, with Qatar hosting 10,000 American troops at the al-Udeid air base. In January 2024, a deal was reached by both countries to extend the cooperation for another ten years ([Reuters, 3 January 2024](#)).

The chances of public unrest are low, due to the government's suppression of all opposition. In addition, any threat of violence by radical Islamic groups is held in check by the security services and its well-advanced technology. Qatar has, however, supported radical Islamic groups abroad, including in Syria and Libya ([AP News, 13 May 2022](#), [Refworld, 14 July 2017](#)).

Christians are in general safe from violence and crime, as the country is well policed and violent religious groups or others who might endanger public safety are severely oppressed.

### Gender perspective

Greater pressure and violence is typically experienced within the domestic sphere; according to Georgetown (GIWPS 2021), there was an increase in domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic, including particularly against women who had not experienced domestic violence

previously. The US State Department has indicated that police response is often poor, as domestic violence is seen as a family, rather than criminal, matter ([2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Qatar](#)).

## Trends analysis

### **1) Economy stimulated and alliances renewed after the Saudi-led blockade ended in January 2021**

Despite the three year long boycott by Saudi Arabia and allied countries, the political, social and economic situation of Qatar remained stable - which was due to its [ample fiscal buffers](#) (Focus Economics, 3 November 2020). The boycott failed to make Qatar give in to Saudi Arabia's demands at the time. It seems that Qatar can retain its independent position, although it decreased its support for the Muslim Brotherhood to further restore ties with its Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) neighbors and Egypt. During the WWL 2024 reporting period, Qatar maintained ties with Iran and Turkey, while both the UAE and Saudi-Arabia renewed talks with Iran and Turkey. It is likely that these relationships, with Qatar in the middle, will continue to improve and stimulate both Qatar's economy as well as its international standing.

### **2) Rapid modernization is a challenge to current cultural norms**

A major challenge for the country is to maintain its cultural and religious standards amidst rapid modernization and development. In the run-up to the 2022 World Cup, Qatar and its deplorable treatment of migrant workers increasingly caught the world's attention. Under pressure from the West, Qatar implemented minor - according to human rights organizations: cosmetic - reforms in the labor conditions for migrant workers ([Amnesty International, 20 October 2022](#)). In spite of the pressure to improve human rights in Qatar, no major improvements are expected in the strict Islamic country which is known for its overall control of society. As such, no major changes in religious freedom for Christians are expected in the near future.

### **3) Strengthened ties with Iran and Turkey could affect Christians in the long-term**

If the numbers of Qatari converts are indeed growing (even if slowly), this could lead to an increased number of incidents of persecution against converts occurring in the future. There is no other real reason for persecution to increase. However, the Saudi-led 'blockade' - imposed in part because of Qatar's perceived closeness to Iran - has ironically served to strengthen ties with Iran, which is renowned for its hardline stance against converts to Christianity. As long as Qatar remains in the sphere of influence of Islamist countries, it is unlikely that Qatar will seek to improve the level of freedom for religious minorities.

### **4) Increasing use of technology to control population**

Qatar is increasingly using advanced technology to monitor both citizens and expatriates in the country. Although tracing technology was widely accepted for combating the spread of the COVID-19 virus, there is growing concern that the government will use similar techniques for further developing population surveillance. With civil and political freedoms already being severely limited, it is likely that the situation will only deteriorate. This has caused Christians in

Qatar to become increasingly careful in their movements and gatherings.

## External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: The Atlantic, 2 July 2017 - <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/07/muslim-brotherhood-qatar/532380/>
- Recent history: BBC News, 5 January 2021 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-55538792>
- Recent history: Washington Institute, 3 February 2021 - <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/will-qatars-relationship-muslim-brotherhood-change-after-gulf-reconciliation>
- Recent history: MENA Research Center, 7 June 2022 - <https://mena-studies.org/is-qatar-pushing-the-reset-button-on-muslim-brotherhood/>
- Recent history: Mada Masr, 8 June 2023 - <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2023/06/08/news/u/source-qatari-authorities-ask-100-egyptian-nationals-affiliated-to-muslim-brotherhood-jamaa-al-islamiya-salafist-front-to-leave-country/>
- Recent history: New York Times, 7 September 2021 - <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/07/world/middleeast/afghanistan-qatar-airlift.html>
- Recent history: AP News, 30 June 2022 - <https://apnews.com/article/politics-iran-dubai-nuclear-united-arab-emirates-cb297fc7bbe0f59acf5b20cdefe352a7>
- Recent history: BBC News, 23 October 2023 - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67205109>
- Recent history: Worldometer, - <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/qatar/>
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- Political and legal landscape: AGSIW, 7 October 2021 - <https://agsiw.org/qatars-shura-council-elections-incrementally-strengthening-local-politics/>
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- Political and legal landscape: AGSIW, 14 April 2021 - <https://agsiw.org/qatars-regional-relations-and-foreign-policy-after-al-ula/>
- Political and legal landscape: 4.4% - [https://api.data.ipu.org/parliament/qa?chamber\\_id=13576](https://api.data.ipu.org/parliament/qa?chamber_id=13576)
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- Political and legal landscape: legally vulnerable - <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/arabstates/Qatar.Summary.19.Eng.pdf>
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## WWL 2024: Church information / Qatar

### Christian origins

Remnants of a structure believed to be a Nestorian church have been found on the south-east coast of Qatar, near al-Warkah. It is certain that the site was occupied from the early 7th to the mid to late 8th century. Besides this, a Nestorian cross was found in Umm al-Maradim in central Qatar. This is the only material proof of the presence of early Christianity in Qatar. However, there is much documental evidence for Christianity in what in Nestorian antiquity was called 'Bet Qatraye', the northern parts of the Persian Gulf with Qatar as an important part of it. Isaac of Nineveh, a 7th century bishop regarded as a saint in some churches, was born in Qatar.

Nestorian Christians from Iraq and Persia and Arab Christians from the Peninsula may have moved to Qatar in the 4th-5th centuries to establish a Christian presence, as happened in Kuwait, Bahrain and elsewhere. There is scholarly reason to believe that in the whole region, in spite of the traditional dating for the emergence of Islam, Nestorian Christianity flourished in the late 7th-9th century AD. This, assumedly, also happened in Qatar. Yet within a few centuries after Islam became established, Christianity disappeared.

As Qatar was part of the important sea routes between Iraq and India, Qatar must have had contact with Christians even after it no longer had any native Christians. This contact may have

increased when in 1871, the Ottoman Empire extended its rule over Qatar. This lasted until 1915, when Great Britain defeated the Ottomans and took over Qatar. In 1916, Qatar became a British protectorate. In 1949 the export of oil began in earnest, bringing many expatriates to Qatar. Qatar became independent in 1971. After the boom in oil prices in 1973, the number of expatriates increased fast, as did the presence of churches serving those foreigners.

Presently, the vast majority of migrant Christians are Roman Catholic Asians. Until 2008, they were not allowed to build churches and had to meet in homes, schools, or other private buildings. From 2008 onwards, Qatar began to allow the opening of a number of large churches, located together in the Mesaimeer Religious Complex outside the capital city, Doha.

*(For further details, see: Ross R K, Tadros M and Johnson T M (eds.), Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity. Christianity in North Africa and West Africa, Edinburgh University Press, 2018, pp.177-189)*

## Church spectrum today

Qatar: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	7,600	1.8
Catholic	364,000	87.9
Protestant	18,500	4.5
Independent	14,300	3.5
Unaffiliated	10,000	2.4
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>414,400</b>	<b>100.1</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	5,800	1.4
Renewalist movement	105,000	25.4

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

**Orthodox:** Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Renewalist movement:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

Qatar's first official Christian house of worship in modern times was built in 2008; the second was opened in 2009. Officially recognized denominations with church facilities built in the official Mesaimeer Religious Complex are currently (as listed in US State Department's IRFR 2022):

- Roman Catholic
- Anglican

- Greek Orthodox
- Syrian Orthodox
- Coptic Orthodox
- Maronite
- Evangelical Protestant
- Inter-Denominational Christian Churches

Other Christian groups can operate under the patronage of these recognized churches (see below). In 2015, the Filipino Evangelical Church obtained recognition and was promised land for a place of worship alongside other churches within the religious complex, and approval has also been given for a Maronite church, for which the Lebanese Maronite patriarch laid the cornerstone in April 2018 ([Naharnet, 19 April 2018](#)). The Maronite church is expected to be completed in 2024, while the Evangelical church will need to wait longer.

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Qatar, p. 10):

- "The Mesaimmer Religious Complex, also known as "Church City" and located on government-owned land, continued to provide worship space for the eight registered Christian denominations, with clear government instructions that Christian symbols such as crosses, steeples, and statues were not permitted on the exterior of church buildings. The Anglican Center within the Mesaimmer Religious Complex housed a number of other smaller denominations and offered space to 88 congregations of different denominations and languages."
- "According to church leaders, approximately 75,000 to 100,000 expatriate Christians continued to attend weekly services at the Mesaimmer Religious Complex. Citizens of the country and other Muslims were not allowed to attend these services. Representatives of the CCSC [Christian Church Steering Committee] stated there was overcrowding in seven buildings in the complex, and noted difficulties with parking, access, and time-sharing. In addition to the permanent buildings, the government allowed the churches to erect tents during Easter and Christmas outside the primary complex to accommodate the extra congregants wanting to attend services during these observances. The government continued to enforce strict security measures at the complex, including closing parking lots, setting a curfew on church access, and using metal detectors. Ministry of Interior security personnel asked churchgoers to show identification at the gates because non-Christians, either expatriates or citizens, were prohibited access to the complex."
- "The Evangelical Church Alliance in Qatar (ECAQ) said the government had not yet allocated a plot of land for the alliance to build its premises at the Religious Complex. Sixty evangelical house churches, known as "villa churches," were registered with the Ministry of Interior as worshipping under the umbrella of the ECAQ."

## Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Qatar is a very small country with the capital Doha being the center of all activities. The risks faced by Christians, and especially by converts from Islam to Christianity, depend on what sort of community the Christians are part of - see below: *Christian communities and how they are affected*.



## Christian communities and how they are affected

Of the four WWL categories of Christianity, two exist in Qatar:

**Communities of expatriate Christians:** The level of persecution varies within this category. For instance, low-skilled workers (e.g. construction workers) from low or middle income countries have a low social status and are generally treated worse than expatriates from the Western world working in more skilled occupations. Therefore, workers from Asia and Africa are treated badly, independently of their religion. If such workers are Christian, this can add to their vulnerability and there can be pressure to become Muslims.

They are not free to openly practice their faith and many among them hardly have the opportunity to attend church services in the special Religious Complex built on land provided by the authorities outside of the capital, Doha. There are traffic and parking problems at the church complex and many Christians think that the area provided is too small to house all Christians in Qatar gathering for worship. A positive development in 2015 was that the government allotted land within the church complex for the recently registered Lebanese Maronite and Filipino Evangelical congregations to build churches. The foundation stone for the Maronite church was laid in April 2018 and the church is expected to open in 2024.

In September 2020, Christians gathering in private villas for worship were told that in future they may only meet at the official Mesaimeer Religious Complex, although the authorities are fully aware that this complex is overcrowded. It is not unlikely that this September 2020 stipulation is the reason why the villa churches did not receive notification that they could re-open after the easing of the COVID-19 restrictions in 2021. However, the 60 villa churches recognized under the umbrella of the ECAQ (Evangelical Church Alliance Qatar) continued to gather for worship during WWL 2024.

**Historical Christian communities:** All Christians belonging to these communities are already covered by the expatriate category. Hence, these communities are not treated as a separate category for scoring in WWL analysis.

**Converts to Christianity:** Christians with a Muslim background are heavily persecuted in Qatar. They are considered apostates and face discrimination and harassment from society and even risk being killed by their family. Apostasy is also a crime punishable under the criminal law. However, no execution or other punishment for apostasy has been recorded since the country's independence in 1971. Almost all Qatari Christians converted abroad and the majority of them do not return to the country out of fear. Converts face pressure from both family members and the local community to recant their Christian faith. Most converts are foreign workers. The level of pressure on both groups (indigenous and foreign converts) is very high. Converts from a migrant background face high pressure and are controlled by their social environment in the labor camps they live in. Even their Muslim employers are likely to be a source of persecution.

The harsh reaction against converts has to be understood in the context of tribalism. Family and clan ties are very strong and religion is never just a matter of private belief, it is part of the identity of the (extended) families combined in their tribe. Converting and leaving Islam is therefore not just a change of belief, it also means leaving the family. This poses a threat to the loyalty of the group, since appearing to be weak is a huge shame for the family, which explains

the fierce ways in which families deal with converts.

**Non-traditional Christian communities:** These communities are not treated as a separate category for scoring in WWL analysis, since all Christians here belong to the expatriate category.

## External Links - Church information

- Church spectrum today - additional information: Naharnet, 19 April 2018 - <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/245101>

# WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Qatar

## Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

## Position on the World Watch List

Qatar: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	67	40
WWL 2023	68	34
WWL 2022	74	18
WWL 2021	67	29
WWL 2020	66	27

The fall in the violence score (from 1.5 points to 0.6) was the main reason for the 1-point drop in overall score in WWL 2024. Average pressure on Christians, especially on converts from Islam to Christianity, remained at an extremely high level. Converts both from an indigenous and migrant background experience the most difficulty in living out their faith. Converts continued to face restrictions and persecution from the government, society and their own families.

## Persecution engines

Qatar: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Strong
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Medium
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Not at all

*The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.*

### Islamic oppression (Strong)

The state religion is strictly conservative Wahhabi Islam. While Muslims are free to worship in public, non-Muslim religious groups (such as Christians) can only worship in private houses or designated places. Proselytizing is outlawed and can lead to sentences of up to ten years imprisonment. Criticism of Islam is a punishable offence. Conversion from Islam to another religion constitutes apostasy, which is forbidden and anyway socially unacceptable. Family law is regulated by *Sharia*, the Islamic legislation. Nearly all Qatari citizens and nationals are by definition either Sunni or Shia Muslims.

Different levels of persecution exist depending on the background of the converts from Islam to Christianity. Those from a Qatari background face highest levels of pressure. For converts from Islam with other backgrounds, such as those originating from Pakistan or the Levant (e.g. Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian Territories and Syria, among other countries), much depends on the response within their surrounding community in Qatar. As long as they do not create unrest, they have less to fear from the Qatari government, although their Qatari employers can fire them, which could result in deportation if they cannot find another job. Within those expatriate communities, the consequences for converts depend more on the cultural norms from the home country, than on the cultural practices of Qatar. For expatriates, conversion to Christianity is sometimes easier than in their home country, because family and relatives are often far away and social pressure is less stringent.

### Clan oppression (Strong)

Tribalism still plays a huge role in Qatari society despite the arrival of modern technology (and modern architecture). There is a continuing influence and enforcement of age-old norms and values. This tribalism is clearly mixed with Islam and especially affects converts. As in the rest of

the Middle East, religion is connected to family identity. Therefore, leaving Islam is interpreted as betraying one’s family. In general, families put strong social pressure on converts to make them return to Islam, leave the region or to be silent about their new faith. In many cases, converts are alienated from their families as a result of their conversion.

### Dictatorial paranoia (Medium)

Qatar is an absolute monarchy, ruled by the Emir. While the government has created a welfare state with many financial benefits for Qatari nationals, it expects obedience in return and does not allow any opposition. The government makes it a priority to keep the country distinctly Islamic, especially due to the low number of nationals compared to the very high number of expatriates. Although expatriate Christians are relatively free to practice their faith, the government monitors all activities. The country is well policed and the many expatriates in the country have to behave carefully as they can easily be expelled from the country.

## Drivers of persecution

Qatar: Drivers of persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG			STRONG				MEDIUM	
Government officials	Strong			Strong				Medium	
Ethnic group leaders	Strong			Strong					
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong			Strong					
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong			Medium					
One's own (extended) family	Strong			Strong					

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.

### Drivers of Islamic oppression

- **Extended family (Strong):** Although clearly mixed with the issue of family honor, strongly held Islamic convictions are a significant reason for family members to target those of their kinship that convert to Christianity. Conversion from Islam to Christianity is socially unacceptable in Qatar.
- **Government officials (Strong):** The government will act against any Christian who makes an attempt to discuss Christian faith with Muslims, since proselytizing is illegal and punishable under the law. No Christians have been officially prosecuted for proselytizing, but some have been expelled from the country without due process in recent years.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Conservative Islamic preachers (such as late Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi) have millions of viewers, for example via Qatari-based Al-Jazeera. Although al-Qaradawi did not support Wahhabism, he was seen as an important intellectual voice for the Muslim Brotherhood and he stated very clearly that apostasy has

to be punished with the death penalty.

- **Ethnic group leaders (Strong):** Family and tribal heads will make sure that Islam is respected within their tribe or extended family. They will influence family members to make them put pressure on converts to recant their faith.
- **Citizens (people from wider society) (Strong):** Conservative Islamic society is the biggest threat to Christians in Qatar. Employment contracts are such that employees are vulnerable to the demands of their employers who can easily discriminate, humiliate or abuse expatriate Christians, especially the poor and low-skilled workers from Southeast Asia and North Africa. Expatriate Christians also face discrimination or mistreatment by their fellow Muslim expatriates in some cases.

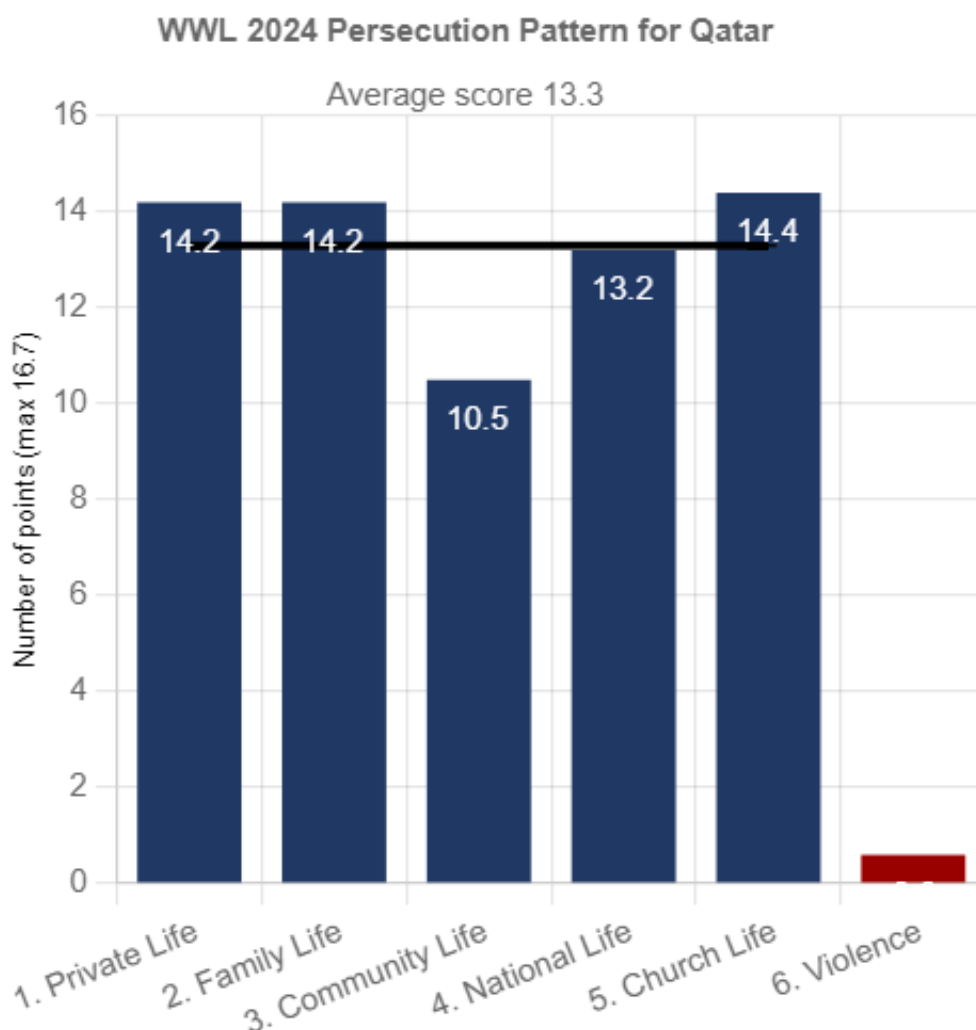
### Drivers of Clan oppression

- **Extended family (Strong):** Although it is clear that the Islamic punishment for apostasy - capital punishment - is a key element among the reasons to persecute a convert family member, this cannot be viewed separately from the concept of 'family honor'. Age old norms (such as protecting family honor) are still intact and conversion from Islam to Christianity is the betrayal of everything a conservative Muslim family stands for and brings shame upon the name of the family. Converts face the risk of being ostracized by their families and might even be killed.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Strong):** Tribal and family heads will make sure that the honor of their group is not defiled by a member converting from Islam to Christianity. A conversion to Christianity brings real shame and preserving the honor and image of the family is paramount.
- **Government officials (Strong):** The government adds to the influence of *Clan oppression* by maintaining the status quo in society and the adherence to cultural practices. Thus, the authorities will not protect converts from their own family, but regard such cases as a 'family matter'.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Local imams etc. will encourage their communities to uphold the cultural norms, which are intertwined with Islamic principles.
- **Citizens (people from wider society) (Medium):** One's social standing in society is very important for Qataris. Thus, there is significant social pressure to keep up societal norms in order not to bring shame upon the good name of the family.

### Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Medium):** The Qatari government does not allow any criticism of state affairs, including the management of religious affairs. The country is well policed, with the security forces monitoring all activities in the country. Expatriates speaking out against the government will most probably be deported.

## The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2024 Persecution pattern for Qatar shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (13.3 points).
- Pressure is at an extreme level in *Church, National, Private* and *Family life*. This reflects the difficulties converts face to practice and share their faith among their own family members and the difficulties the churches face when trying to build new churches, for example, and the limitations they face which hinder evangelization among Muslims.
- The score for violence went down from 1.5 points in WWL 2023 to 0.6 points in WWL 2024. This decrease was caused by fewer incidents being reported.

## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

*In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2024 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).*

## Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

**Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.50 points)**

Indigenous and foreign converts from Islam cannot openly practice their faith. Any hint that they may be Christians can have serious consequences, including physical harm, ostracization by their families, job loss or deportation (in the case of foreign converts).

**Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.50 points)**

Converts from Islam to Christianity face the highest risk here: Faith-related posts on social media platforms can lead to discovery of their conversion. However, expatriate Christians must self-censor, being careful not to openly proselytize or criticize Islam via social media or emails etc.

**Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (3.50 points)**

Converts cannot wear any Christian symbol as it would likely lead to discovery of their faith. Expatriate Christians are also careful, since publicly displaying a cross can lead to negative remarks or other types of harassment, especially when working in a Qatari home (as a domestic worker, for example).

**Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.50 points)**

Risks are highest for Qatari converts, while for non-Qatari converts it depends on the specific norms of their own community. Expatriate Christians can be accused of proselytism, which will lead to deportation.

### **Block 1: Additional information**

Foreign Christians from Western countries are generally highly skilled and have relatively more freedom to privately practice their faith, as long as they do not evangelize Muslims. Lower-skilled foreign Christian workers have to act carefully and their freedom in the *Private sphere* depends on the attitude and religion of fellow migrant workers who live in the same labor camps, where there is often hardly any privacy. In the case of domestic workers, who are mostly women, the level of risk also depends on the attitude of their employers.

## Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

**Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.75 points)**

This is especially true for converts from Islam to Christianity. As there is zero recognition of their new faith, their children cannot be exempted from Islamic education. Islamic instruction is compulsory for students born as Muslim within state schools and private schools; the provision of non-Islamic religious instruction within schools, even international schools is prohibited. Christian children can only receive Christian religious education within their churches.

**Block 2.2: Registering the birth, wedding, death, etc. of Christians has been hindered or made impossible. (3.50 points)**

There is no recognition of conversion, hence it is impossible for converts to have and register a Christian marriage, nor can their children be registered as Christians.

**Block 2.5: Burials of Christians have been hindered or coercively performed with non-Christian rites. (3.50 points)**

Converts often have to hide their faith. In the unlikely case that the family is aware of their conversion, they will still probably be buried according to Islamic rites.

**Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.50 points)**

In a society which has Islam deeply connected to all aspects of life, it is very difficult for converts to raise their children in a Christian way.

**Block 2: Additional information**

All Qataris are considered to be Muslims by the authorities and wider society. For a Muslim family, it is a great disgrace when one of its members leaves Islam. Converts run the great risk of having to face honor-killing, physical violence or being ostracized, if their families or communities discover their faith. As a result, converts tend to keep their Christian faith secret for fear of gossip and betrayal. For expatriate Christians, it is difficult to live as a Christian and to raise a Christian family in an environment which is dominated by conservative Islamic culture.

## Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

**Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (3.50 points)**

All forms of communication are monitored in Qatar, but individual Christians suspected of being involved in proselytism are highly likely to be specifically targeted for closer surveillance.

**Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.50 points)**

There is high pressure from the wider community on converts to recant their faith, while expatriate Christians occasionally experience pressure to convert to Islam. Some converts will have an outward Islamic appearance in order to avoid discrimination, especially when working closely with Qataris (domestic workers, for example).



**Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.25 points)**

This is especially true for converts from Islam to Christianity. Both Qatari and non-Qatari converts will face severe harassment, if their conversion is known. Expatriate Christians can also face harassment and discrimination, although this often depends on their ethnicity: Western expatriate Christians are far less likely to experience harassment than African expatriate Christians.

**Block 3.5: Christians have been put under pressure to take part in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events. (3.25 points)**

All people in Qatar have to observe Ramadan in public, although certain places (like some shopping malls or restaurants) are exempted. Converts will have to observe all Islamic rites, out of fear of their conversion otherwise becoming known.

**Block 3: Additional information**

Lower-skilled expatriate Christians can face harassment and discrimination at their workplace and in their community - converts definitely will, if their new faith is known. Discrimination in dealing with the authorities affects all Christians, although discrimination is often not primarily faith-related. Christian parents are allowed to teach religious education to their children at home, but non-Muslim religious education is prohibited in both public and private schools.

## Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

**Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (4.00 points)**

The legal system is based on Sharia law and conversion to a religion other than Islam is illegal. In addition, only freedom of worship is guaranteed in the Constitution (Art. 50). Qatar even explicitly made reservations regarding the freedom of religion in its accession document to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

**Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (4.00 points)**

Criticizing the government or Islam is unacceptable in Qatar and will lead to deportation in the case of expatriate Christians. In a society that is steeped in Islam, Christians have to speak carefully when giving views from a Christian perspective.

**Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (4.00 points)**

Any establishment of civil society organizations is in general very limited. There is no room for Christian civil society organizations to operate unless this is strictly done within the boundaries of the Religious Complex just outside Doha.

**Block 4.12: Christians, churches or Christian organizations have been hindered in publicly displaying religious symbols. (4.00 points)**

Christian symbols cannot be publicly displayed (see above: *Church spectrum*).

**Block 4: Additional information**

Non-Muslims are subject to Sharia law in cases of child custody, but civil law covers other personal status cases, including those related to divorce and inheritance. Muslims have more rights than followers of other religions. Converts in particular face significant pressure in dealing with the authorities if their Christian faith is known. Expatriate Christians will face problems in this sphere of life if they are actively proselytizing Muslims. This can lead to imprisonment and deportation.

The government has funded a center for interfaith dialogue, which actively promotes religious tolerance. However, this does not seem to make any real difference for Christians living in the country. During the month of Ramadan, the government actively promotes fasting and other religious duties, also for non-Muslims; any people seen eating or drinking during daylight hours can be arrested.

## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

**Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (4.00 points)**

The Mesaimmer Religious Complex outside Doha has an airport-style security system and cannot be visited by non-Christians. All churches and church activities are monitored and it is difficult to organize any form of Christian activity beyond those held in the official complex or villa house-churches. The high level of monitoring forces many Christians to apply self-censorship.

**Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (4.00 points)**

All church activities are strictly limited to the Religious Complex (or the respective congregations gathering in private villas). Basically, Christianity is kept out of public view. Christian books are not for sale outside the Religious Complex. Even if church members partake in a sports competition representing their church, they have to be careful not to have any Christian symbols visible on their T-shirts. Similarly, Christmas decorations cannot display any Christian religious symbols.

**Block 5.7: Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts. (4.00 points)**

This is impossible as converts are not even allowed to enter the Religious Complex outside Doha, let alone be part of a Christian community.

### **Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored. (4.00 points)**

All Christian activities, including preaching, teaching and all church publications are being monitored. CCTV cameras are in place at the Religious Complex and also at private villas being used for church gatherings. No Christian materials can be brought into the country without permission from the government and written approval is needed before importing Bibles and other Christian books.

### **Block 5: Additional information**

Expatriate Christians can only gather for worship in private or designated places. Outward symbols of faith, such as crosses on churches, are illegal. There are eight registered and many unregistered churches in Qatar that serve the large group of foreign workers. Official church recognition is hard to obtain; any independent building or renting of space for Christian worship is not allowed. The officially recognized churches are concentrated in a district outside the capital, Doha. This brings the risk of ghettoization and monitoring, which usually happens under the authorities' pretext of ensuring protection. Reportedly, government security services protecting the churches also check for Muslims trying to visit church services. On a more positive note, in 2015 the Qatari authorities promised land for the Lebanese Maronite and Filipino Evangelical congregations to build churches, with the Maronite church now almost completed.

## **Violence**

*Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:*

### **1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced**

*Possible reasons for this may be:*

- *Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.*
- *In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.*
- *If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives.*
- *In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.*

### **2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons**

- *Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).*
- *In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.*

Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.

### 3. The use of symbolic numbers

In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10\*, 100\* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10\* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100\* could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1,000\* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000\*, 100,000\* and 1,000,000\*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

Qatar: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	0	0
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	0	10 *
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	0
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	10 *	10 *
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	2

In the WWL 2024 reporting period - **Christians attacked:**

It is widely known that housemaids working in the domestic sphere in Qatar are vulnerable to incidents of abuse. Additionally, Amnesty International reported in 2020 on the restrictions on freedom of movement and communication, humiliating treatment and forced labor suffered by domestic workers in Qatar ([AI, 20 October 2020](#)). However, statistics are scarce as almost all persons, organizations and states involved have no interest in revealing the true situation: Qatar needs the domestic staff to work in households, but has a shame culture and does not want a bad reputation. Also, the home countries of the housemaids need the money coming in from the thousands of migrants working in the Gulf states and do not want to put their economic interests at stake.

The employers of abused housemaids are either the perpetrators of the abuse themselves or have no real interest in their well-being. The housemaids themselves are often ashamed because of the abuse and do not want to be seen as being "dirty" in any way, whether in Qatar itself or by their family at home. In addition, many provide a very much needed source of income for their families in their home countries. The home families are proud of the work being done in Qatar, and the housemaid does not want to disappoint her family. Therefore, statistics and evidence of abuse are very difficult to provide. It is also difficult to prove that any abuse is due to the house-maid being a non-Muslim. Nevertheless, given the high number of Christian expatriates in the country, conservative estimates agree that at least 10 Christian housemaids faced physical or mental abuse in the WWL 2024 reporting period, with their faith being one of the factors making them more vulnerable.

## 5 Year trends

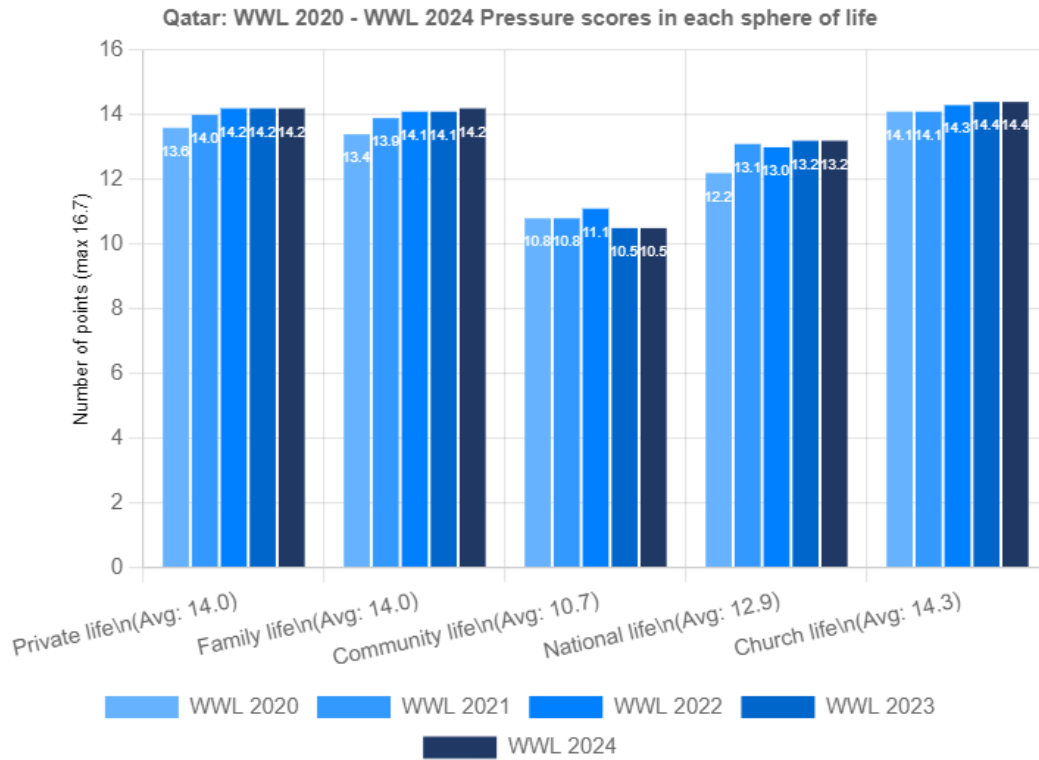
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Qatar: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024	13.3
2023	13.3
2022	13.3
2021	13.2
2020	12.8

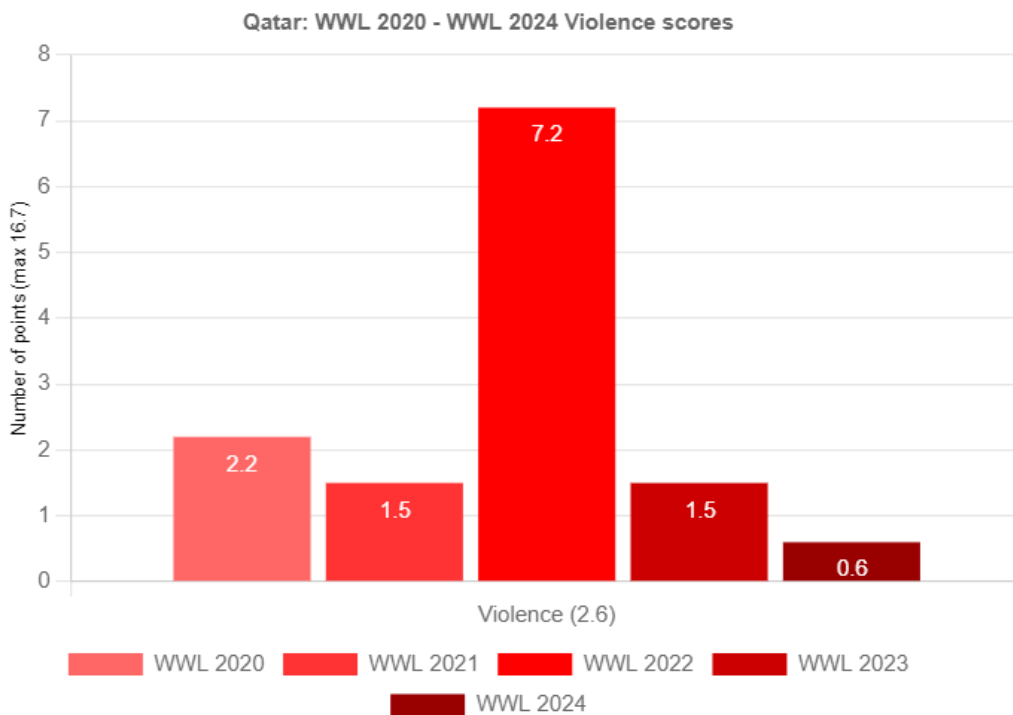
The average pressure on Christians has remained very high and has stabilized at the 13.3 point mark.

## 5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



Pressure in all *spheres of life* except *Community* and *National life* have stabilized at an extreme level.

## 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



Qatar is a typical Gulf country in that very high levels of pressure ensure that almost nobody 'crosses the line'. As a result, the number of violent incidents recorded in Qatar does not usually change dramatically from year to year. However, WWL 2022 witnessed a dramatic increase in the violence score after many villa house-churches were not allowed to re-open after the easing of COVID-19 restrictions and were forced to cease activities. No new forced closures were reported in WWL 2023 and WWL 2024, which contributed to the score now dropping to a very low level.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced marriage
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

In general, women in Qatar face restrictions and limitations to their human rights, due to Sharia and the cultural Wahhabi interpretation of Islam. These same restrictions make Christian women particularly vulnerable to religious persecution. Generally, women are vulnerable to domestic violence, and Qatari women and girls are subject to guardianship by their male family members, where accepted cultural privacy standards dictate that: Whatever happens in the family home cannot be interfered with by the authorities ([HRW](#), 29 March 2021).

Within this context, it is especially difficult for female converts to Christianity. Conversion from Islam to another religion is forbidden, and those who do so must usually conceal their new religious beliefs. If their faith is discovered, they can face severe consequences. Their families have the authority to limit their travel, deny financial support, deny access to the Internet, phone and books and keep them under house-arrest. It is much easier to apply pressure like this on women and girls. Converts also risk facing sexual violence, or in the most extreme cases, honor-killings. Thus, those who convert tend to remain silent about their conversion.

Women from a Muslim background are legally restricted from marrying a non-Muslim. A country expert comments: “A Muslim woman cannot marry a Christian man who wants to remain a Christian. This makes it very difficult for Christianity to take root in Qatar outside of the expatriate population.” Additionally, female converts face the possibility of forced marriage to a religious person who is expected to humiliate her in order to convert her back to Islam; this person can restrict her freedom for a lifetime. In more extreme cases, she may even be married to one of the most religious uncles or nephews as his second wife, where she would then live a life essentially as a sex-slave deprived of any community or respect. If already married before

they convert, women may face further pressures from their husband.

Housemaids working in Qatar can also face sexual harassment or slave-like treatment. The ill-treatment of migrant workers, including sexual abuse, has become a high-profile issue at the international level. Although not primarily faith-related, many Christian domestic migrant workers, almost all of whom are female, experience [serious abuses and exploitation](#), including physical, verbal and sexual violence (Amnesty International, 20 October 2020).

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	-
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Besides the official restrictions on non-Islamic religious expression in Qatari society, Christians try to keep a low profile by self-censoring.

Convert Christian men are particularly under pressure in the area of employment, since the loss of a man’s status and job will affect the whole family through loss of income, future prospects and social isolation.

Converts also risk domestic pressure; if discovered, families can threaten the removal of their wife and children. In the ‘best’ circumstances, the wives could agree to live with their husband on the condition that the children will not be informed of the faith of the husband. Such converts might be able to privately carry out acts of Christian worship, but they cannot then share their faith with their children. These combined restrictions mean that Qatari men are effectively isolated and find it very difficult to meet with other Christians or be taught and grow in their Christian faith. In the rarer, more extreme cases, men can face physical trauma for their faith.

Christian men can come under more frequent public scrutiny, since it is men who are visible in the public sphere and at the forefront of interaction with the authorities. Those in Christian leadership, who are typically male, are required to report details of church activities, further subjecting them to scrutiny. A country expert summarizes: “Pastors are closely monitored and need to be careful how they present themselves in public and what they approve and disapprove.”

Expatriate churches are also highly monitored. Known Muslims (whether nationals or non-nationals) are not permitted by the authorities in the officially sanctioned religious complex and a non-national would risk deportation. These are all issues which directly concern men primarily.



## Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Qatar):

- The only registered religious groups are Sunni and Shia Muslims and eight Christian denominations (p.4).
- Although other religious communities such as the sizeable expatriate Hindu and Buddhist communities have no official recognition, their gatherings are generally tolerated and there are several unofficial Hindu temples in the country. However, "representatives of the Hindu community expressed concern that the government had not granted permission to open new places of worship." (p.9).
- According to the NGO Baha'i International Community (BIC): "Baha'is have lived in Qatar for almost a century – decades before the country gained independence in 1971. In recent decades the Baha'i community has suffered instances of discrimination, restrictions, and human rights violations. The cumulative effect of these acts has now become untenable because they threaten the viability of the community." On top of the that, "The BIC and the Baha'i community had made several attempts to engage the government on issues of employment discrimination, non-renewal of work permits, expulsions and blacklisting, and cemeteries, but the situation had continued to deteriorate, despite government assurances." Furthermore, the BIC said: "The government is apparently attempting to eradicate the Baha'i community." (pp. 7,8)

## Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

### Islamic oppression

Although Qatar looks very modern on the surface, it remains a Wahhabi country with a strict interpretation of Sharia law. It is unlikely that this will change significantly in the near future, although materialism and modernization could lead to more openness and freedom in the long-term. However, with its ties with Iran, Turkey and other Islamic countries, political Islam and Islamist thinking are likely to continue to have a firm grip on the country.

### Clan oppression

A major challenge for the country is to maintain its cultural and religious standards amid rapid modernization. Although the tribal influence is still dominant at the moment, the younger generation is not likely to want to obey tribal rules so strictly in a globalized society where more individual choices are possible than even only a decade ago. Qatar in particular has seen a significant shift in the last 15 years away from being a Saudi-like society to being more like society in Dubai. However, it is unclear whether such movement towards individualism is necessarily positive for the situation of Christians in the country. It could also mean that conservative elements in society are going to rise up in protest and demand that Qatari lifestyle remains a pure form of Islam.

### Dictatorial paranoia

In the run-up to Qatar's hosting of the Football World Cup in 2022, its poor treatment of foreign

workers increasingly caught the world's attention. Under pressure from the West, Qatar implemented minor reforms in workplace conditions but no major improvements took place.

No further improvements in human rights are to be expected in this strict Islamic country which is known for its overall control on society. As such, no major changes in religious freedom for Christians are expected in the near future.

## External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: AI, 20 October 2020 - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde22/3175/2020/en/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: HRW - <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/03/29/everything-i-have-do-tied-man/women-and-qatars-male-guardianship-rules>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: serious abuses and exploitation - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde22/3175/2020/en/>

## Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

As in earlier years, these are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Qatar>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>.