

World
Watch
Research

Qatar: Full Country Dossier

January 2023



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Introduction

World Watch List 2023

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	94	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.7	92	91	92	92	91
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	88	87	85	86
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.2	89	88	88	87	86
5	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.1	16.3	9.1	88	91	92	90	87
6	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.6	14.8	14.4	16.7	88	87	85	80	80
7	Pakistan	13.4	13.8	14.8	14.8	12.9	16.7	86	87	88	88	87
8	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.8	15.8	16.5	10.7	86	85	86	85	85
9	Afghanistan	15.4	15.7	15.4	16.1	16.6	4.6	84	98	94	93	94
10	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	9.4	83	79	79	85	87
11	India	12.3	13.1	13.0	14.8	13.3	15.7	82	82	83	83	83
12	Syria	13.2	14.1	13.6	14.1	14.1	11.3	80	78	81	82	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.9	15.8	16.7	2.4	80	81	78	79	77
14	Myanmar	12.5	11.6	13.9	13.9	12.9	15.4	80	79	74	73	71
15	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.8	16.0	16.4	0.2	77	77	77	78	78
16	China	12.9	10.0	12.7	14.5	15.6	11.1	77	76	74	70	65
17	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	10.3	15.1	15.0	76	70	67	66	68
18	Iraq	14.1	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	4.6	76	78	82	76	79
19	Algeria	14.1	14.1	11.5	13.7	15.1	4.8	73	71	70	73	70
20	Mauritania	14.5	14.2	13.3	14.1	14.2	1.3	72	70	71	68	67
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	13.9	12.7	15.6	1.5	71	71	71	73	74
22	Colombia	11.8	8.9	13.1	11.3	10.4	15.4	71	68	67	62	58
23	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.5	9.6	13.8	15.6	71	68	67	66	48
24	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	68	66	68	70
25	Vietnam	11.8	9.6	12.8	14.6	14.4	6.9	70	71	72	72	70
26	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	14.1	15.7	0.6	70	69	70	70	69
27	Cuba	13.1	8.3	13.1	13.2	14.9	7.0	70	66	62	52	49
28	Niger	9.4	9.5	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.4	70	68	62	60	52
29	Morocco	13.2	13.8	10.9	12.2	14.5	4.8	69	69	67	66	63
30	Bangladesh	12.6	10.7	12.8	11.3	10.6	10.7	69	68	67	63	58
31	Laos	11.7	10.2	13.3	14.2	14.0	5.0	68	69	71	72	71
32	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.6	68	65	63	43	43
33	Indonesia	11.3	12.0	11.6	11.1	9.2	12.8	68	68	63	60	65
34	Qatar	14.2	14.1	10.5	13.2	14.4	1.5	68	74	67	66	62
35	Egypt	12.7	13.5	11.6	12.1	10.8	7.0	68	71	75	76	76
36	Tunisia	12.0	12.8	10.4	12.0	13.5	6.5	67	66	67	64	63
37	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.6	67	66	64	56	55
38	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	11.0	10.5	13.9	67	65	64	60	61
39	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.4	12.1	10.6	66	66	65	63	65
40	Bhutan	13.2	12.3	11.6	13.9	14.2	1.1	66	67	64	61	64
41	Turkey	12.8	11.5	11.8	13.0	11.5	5.7	66	65	69	63	66
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.5	66	63	62	57	56
43	Malaysia	12.8	14.3	11.4	12.2	11.1	3.9	66	63	63	62	60
44	Tajikistan	13.8	12.2	12.3	12.8	13.4	1.1	66	65	66	65	65
45	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.9	65	65	64	60	54
46	Brunei	14.8	14.6	10.1	10.9	14.4	0.4	65	64	64	63	63
47	Oman	14.0	14.1	10.3	13.3	12.9	0.6	65	66	63	62	59
48	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.6	11.9	12.7	14.2	1.1	65	64	64	64	63
49	Jordan	13.0	14.0	10.5	12.3	12.7	2.0	65	66	64	64	65
50	Nicaragua	10.8	5.9	11.9	12.8	13.6	9.4	65	56	51	41	41

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.3	64	63	62	61	61
52	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	64	63	62	60
53	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.6	63	61	58	55	52
54	UAE	13.4	13.4	9.9	11.2	12.8	1.1	62	62	62	60	58
55	Nepal	12.0	9.8	9.4	13.0	12.6	4.4	61	64	66	64	64
56	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	0.6	60	59	56	56	56
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.3	9.7	10.3	12.0	2.0	60	59	58	60	57
58	Azerbaijan	13.2	10.0	9.5	12.0	13.6	0.6	59	60	56	57	57
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.2	11.0	10.4	12.0	2.0	59	58	58	57	56
60	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	7.6	58	55	53	56	48
61	Russian Federation	12.3	7.9	10.3	11.8	12.8	2.0	57	56	57	60	60
62	Sri Lanka	12.8	9.1	10.6	11.3	9.5	3.9	57	63	62	65	58
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	8.9	57	50	42	42	41
64	Venezuela	6.0	4.6	11.7	10.2	11.4	11.7	56	51	39	42	41
65	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	11.1	55	52	48	48	43
66	Bahrain	12.7	13.3	8.7	10.7	8.8	0.9	55	57	56	55	55
67	Honduras	7.1	5.0	11.9	7.6	9.8	11.9	53	48	46	39	38
68	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	51	46	43	42
69	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	9.2	14.8	51	48	47	48	47
70	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	5.4	49	44	43	41	42
71	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	3.0	48	43	47	45	46
72	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.0	46	43	43	44	44
73	El Salvador	7.7	4.2	10.6	7.4	9.1	6.7	46	45	42	38	30
74	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	42	42	42	43
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	1.1	44	44	43	43	43
76	Belarus	9.5	3.8	4.8	9.4	12.1	3.3	43	33	30	28	35

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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 2023 reporting period was 1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022.
- 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 including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

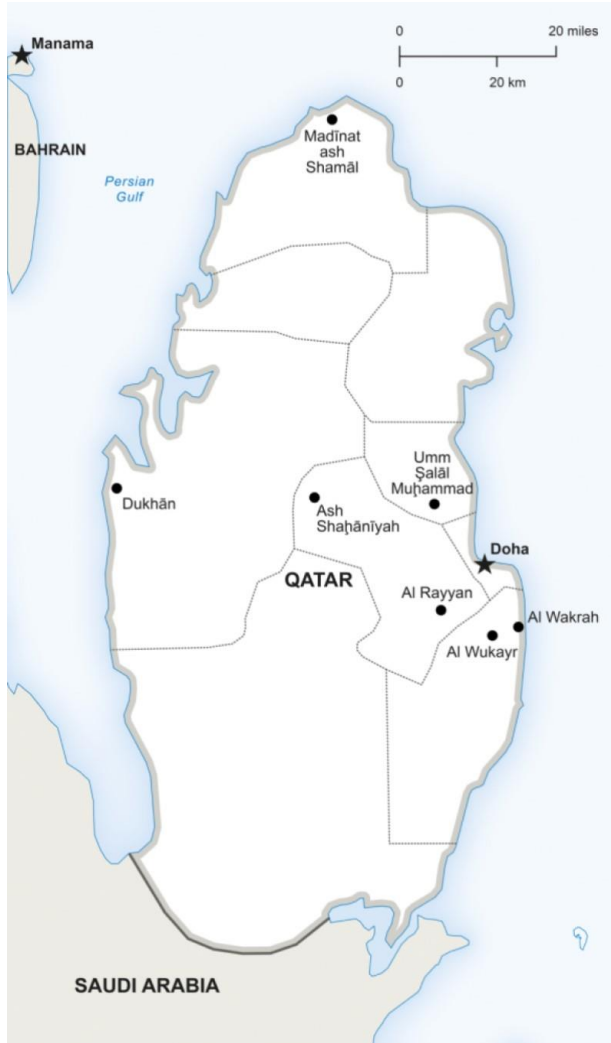
WWL 2023 Situation in brief / Qatar

Brief country details

Qatar: Population (UN estimate for 2022)	Christians	Chr%
2,980,000	409,000	13.7

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

Map of country



Qatar: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	68	34
WWL 2022	74	18
WWL 2021	67	29
WWL 2020	66	27
WWL 2019	62	38

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

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, Government officials, Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders, 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

- In the WWL 2023 reporting period, church communities gathering in private villas (i.e., house-churches) were not allowed to re-open after COVID-19 restrictions were relaxed. However, there is chronic lack of space for Christian worshipers at the official meeting place for Christians in Qatar, the Mesaimmer Religious Complex just outside Doha, and so several house-church congregations did resume holding services in private villas.
- While many expatriate Christians have left the country following the completion of all World Cup related projects, at least one incident was reported in which expatriate Christians were deported due to accusations of proselytism. Due to security concerns, no further details can be published.
- 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 recording such occurrences. 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 recent report by [Amnesty International](#) - AI (AI, "Why do you want to rest", 2020), thousands of migrant workers still suffer 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 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
- 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 2023: Keys to understanding / Qatar

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2021/22 country report – covering 154 countries	AI country report 2021/22 (pp.305-308)	https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf	7 June 2022
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14702226	7 June 2022
Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/QAT	7 June 2022
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/qatar/	7 June 2022
Crisis24 country report (Garda World) – covering 193 countries	Crisis24 country report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/qatar	7 June 2022
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2021 – covering 167 countries	EIU 2021 (p.52)	https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf	7 June 2022
FFP's Fragile States Index 2022 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2022	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	5 August 2022
Freedom House's 2022 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Qatar not included	Freedom House/Democracy 2021	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2022 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/country/qatar/freedom-world/2022	7 June 2022
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 report – covering 70 countries, Qatar is not included	Freedom House/Internet Freedom 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores	
Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 (country chapter) – covering 100+ countries	HRW 2022 country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/qatar	7 June 2022
Internet World Stats 2022	IWS 2022	https://www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm#qa	7 June 2022
Middle East Concern - covering 24 countries	MEC country profile	https://meconcern.org/countries/qatar/	5 August 2022
RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2022	https://rsf.org/en/qatar	7 June 2022
Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2021	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/qat	7 June 2022
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators (country profile) – covering 189 countries	HDI profile	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/QAT	8 June 2022
US State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom (country profile)	IRFR 2021	https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/qatar/	7 June 2022
USCIRF 2022 country reports – covering 15 CPC / 12 SWL, Qatar not included	USCIRF 2022	https://www.uscirf.gov/countries	
World Bank country overview – covering 178 countries	World Bank GCC overview 2022	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/gcc/overview#1	7 June 2022
World Bank country profile data – covering 222 countries	World Bank profile (2020 data)	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&id=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=QAT	7 June 2022
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 – covering 147 countries (divided per region)	Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 (pp.28-29)	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/65cf93926fdb3ea23b72f277fc249a72-0500042021/related/mpo-mena.pdf	7 June 2022

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 (currently 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](#)).

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](#)). See also below: *Political and legal landscape*.

Due to a swift and effective response, Qatar managed to remain relatively unaffected by the COVID-19 pandemic ([KPMG, May 2020](#)), with only 681 COVID-related deaths as of 4 August 2022 ([Worldometer](#)).

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, updated 4 January 2023).

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 2021). 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 country 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 2022) 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 in 2022. 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 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. Despite ratifying CEDAW in 2009, Qatar made [reservations](#) to numerous articles, 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) (Musawah report, July 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 2022 country chapter). They are also [legally vulnerable](#) to domestic violence and are legally restricted to inherit half of what a similarly situated male relative would receive (UNDP: “Qatar: Gender Justice and the Law”, last accessed 13 January 2023). 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 ([OECD, 2019](#)). For this reason many women choose to stay in abusive marriages.

Religious landscape

Qatar: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	409,000	13.7
Muslim	2,354,000	79.0
Hindu	93,200	3.1
Buddhist	54,500	1.8
Ethno-religionist	0	0.0
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	3,200	0.1
Atheist	2,100	0.1
Agnostic	63,300	2.1
Other	0	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

According to Middle East Concern (MEC country 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, p. 7).

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 country 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 CIA Factbook and the World Bank country profile:

- **GPD per capita (PPP):** \$85,300 (2020 est.), decreasing from \$ 90,000 in 2019.
- **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 April 2022](#)):

- **General:** "The effects of the war in Ukraine on the commodity markets and of its associated economic sanctions are positive, on balance, for Qatar's economy, the largest exporter of Liquid Natural Gas in the world. That aside, preparations for the soccer World Cup, scheduled for December 2022, have intensified diversification of the country's economy and bolstered non-oil activity despite the COVID-19 pandemic."
- **Economic growth:** "Real GDP is estimated to rise in 2022 to 4.9% on the heels of boosted hydrocarbon exports of 10%. Growth in private consumption may be slightly lower, at 4.8%, driven by potentially fewer World Cup proceeds and higher prices. Consumer prices are projected to jump by an additional percentage point in the current year."
- **Outlook:** "Qatar's hydrocarbon dependence is likely to expand this decade, as its North Field facilities begin production. The possibility of new outbreaks of COVID-19, a spike in consumer price inflation, and rising US interest rates are likely to be modest downside risks given Qatar's high vaccination rates and sizeable sovereign financial wealth and reserves."

Other sources report:

- The World Bank's [World by Income and Region report](#) (accessed 4 August 2022) puts the Qatari economy in the high income category .
- The Fragile State Index (FSI 2022) shows improvement in the economic indicators on average for 2022, but 'Economic Inequality' increased somewhat. The indicator 'External intervention' increased sharply in 2017 due to the Qatar diplomatic crisis and has stayed quite high as Qatar has remained somewhat isolated.
- The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU 2022) writes: "We expect the emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, to remain secure in office in 2022-26, supported by high public confidence, which has been boosted by his management of both the coronavirus pandemic and regional challenges. The National Vision 2030, which forms the centerpiece of the government's strategy to develop and diversify the economy and to improve social development and environmental management, will shape policy."

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. Female converts are additionally vulnerable due to patrilineal inheritance practices ([OECD, 2019](#)) 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% of men are in the workforce compared to 58.2% of women ([Statista, 2020](#)). Male converts who lose their jobs may suffer the shame of not being able to provide for their dependent family members.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the CIA Factbook:

- **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 2022, 99.3% 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 (2022 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:** 79.8 years on average; women (82.0 years), men (77.7 years).
- **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 12 years compared to 15 years for girls (2020).

According to the UN Global Human Development Indicators (HDI profile):

- **HDI score and ranking:** Qatar ranks #45 out 189 countries. The combined ratio of life expectancy, education and per capita income gives a very high score of 0.848 on the Human Development Index (HDI).
- **Gender inequality:** with a GDI (Gender Development Index) score of 1.030, 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.

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 ([Human Rights Watch, 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's country report 2021/2022 stated: "Significant reforms aiming to protect migrant workers from labour abuse and exploitation were introduced, but employers continued to retain disproportionate powers as they oversee the entry and residence of migrant workers". Hence, the question remains how much will change in practice, especially when 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 2022):

- **Internet usage:** 104.8% penetration (January 2022). According to the UNDP's HDI profile there is gender parity in relation to Internet usage.
- **Facebook usage:** 104.8% penetration (January 2022). According to [Napoleon Cat \(December 2022\)](#), 72.1% of Facebook users in Qatar are male and 27.9% female.

According to the World Bank country profile:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 131.8 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 2022:

- Qatar is listed as "not free".
- "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 2022) reports:

- "Qatari journalists are left little leeway by the oppressive legislative arsenal and draconian system of censorship. ... The state-funded *Al Jazeera* TV news channel has considerable resources and a pool of presenters who are paid well enough to ignore subjects that could embarrass their employer. ... [discussing] the conditions of immigrant workers, in particular those employed at the 2022 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."

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 ([Human Rights Watch, 29 March 2021](#)).

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

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.

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, allegedly 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.

Greater pressure and violence is typically experienced within the domestic sphere; according to [Georgetown \(2021/22\)](#), 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. During the WWL 2023 reporting period, Qatar maintained its 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, also in light of the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

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.

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WWL 2023: 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 Mesaimmer 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	7,400	1.8
Catholic	360,000	88.0
Protestant	18,200	4.4
Independent	13,500	3.3
Unaffiliated	10,000	2.4
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
Total	409,100	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	5,700	1.4
Renewalist movement	103,000	25.2

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

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 2021):

- Roman Catholic
- Anglican
- Greek Orthodox
- Syrian Orthodox
- Coptic
- 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 2023, while the Evangelical church will need to wait longer.

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2021, p. 10):

- "The Mesaimeer 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 Mesaimeer 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 Mesaimeer 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."

According to the US State Department ([IRFR 2020](#)):

- "As part of the government's measures to combat the spread of COVID-19, all churches and most mosques were closed down from mid-March until mid-August [2020]. The government allowed the reopening of 500 mosques in June [2020] as part of a graduated reopening. (There are an estimated 2,100 in the country.) Although Christian congregations within the Mesaimeer Religious Complex were allowed to resume activities in August, the government sent a letter to nearly 150 unregistered religious groups in September banning any worship outside the complex and asking all house churches to find space inside the already over-crowded complex. In December, the government said 61 congregations out of the 150 under the umbrella of the Evangelical Church Alliance in Qatar (ECAQ) could re-open as a temporary solution until the alliance establishes its permanent premises in the complex. At year's end, however, the 61 churches had not yet re-opened, and the MFA had not responded to inquiries by the ECAQ management regarding the government's reopening announcement."

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 2023.

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. Hence, it is expected that it will now be more difficult for a significant number of Christians to gather for worship.

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>
- Church spectrum today - additional information: IRFR 2020 - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/qatar/>

WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Qatar

Reporting period

1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022

Position on the World Watch List

Qatar: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	68	34
WWL 2022	74	18
WWL 2021	67	29
WWL 2020	66	27
WWL 2019	62	38

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

The significant drop in total score was due mainly to the fact that there were no new church closures in the WWL 2023 reporting period, although many previously closed house-churches in private villas were not allowed to re-open, thus making it difficult for the affected Christian communities to meet. Average pressure on Christians, especially on converts from Islam to Christianity, remained at an extremely high level. Monitoring and surveillance continued to be very pervasive. 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 like Yusuf al-Qaradawi have millions of viewers, for example via Qatari-based Al-Jazeera. Although al-Qaradawi does not support Wahhabism, he is seen as an important intellectual voice for the Muslim Brotherhood and he has 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

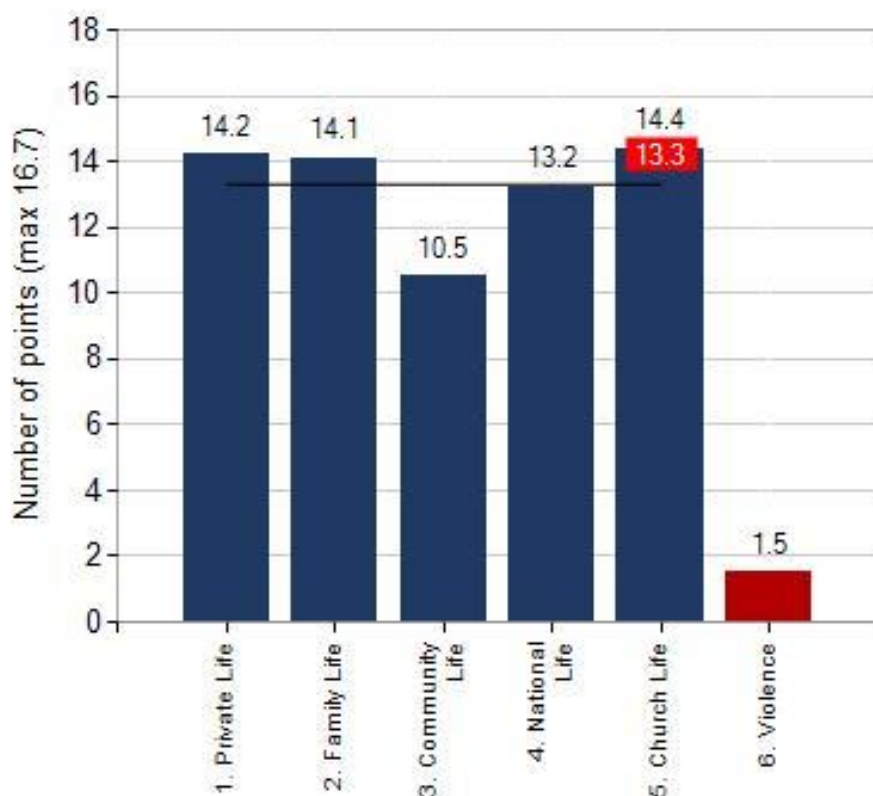
- **Government officials (Medium):** The Qatari government does not allow any criticism of state affairs, including the management of religious affairs. The country is well policed, with the security forces monitoring all activities in the country. Expatriates speaking out against the government will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

The Persecution pattern

The WWL 2023 Persecution pattern for Qatar shows (see diagram below):

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (13.3 points).
- Pressure is at an extreme level in *Church, 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 7.2 points in WWL 2022 to 1.5 points in WWL 2023. This major decrease was caused by no new churches being forced to close during the WWL 2023 reporting period.

WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Qatar



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 2023 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://open Doors analytical.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 2.2: 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 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.50 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 - 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 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 5 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. For further discussion (with a focus on the complexity of assessing the numbers of Christians killed for their faith) please see World Watch Monitor's article dated 13 November 2013 available at:

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/11/number-of-christian-martyrs-continues-to-cause-debate/>.

4. 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.*

5. The symbol "x" in the table: *This denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security concerns.*

Qatar: Violence Block question		WWL 2023	WWL 2022
6.1	How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
6.2	How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	100
6.3	How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	0	1
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?	10 *	10 *
6.7	How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	1
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?	2	1

In the WWL 2023 reporting period:

- **Christians forced to leave the country:** At least two expatriate Christians were forced to leave the country after allegedly being involved in proselytizing.
- **Christians attacked:** It is widely known that housemaids working in the domestic sphere in Qatar are vulnerable to incidents of (sexual) abuse. The [OECD 2019 report](#) states: "Domestic workers are not protected by the Labour Law. Female domestic workers are often paid late or not paid, are asked to work excessive hours with no days off and are provided with inadequate living space." Additionally, Amnesty International (2020) reports on the restrictions on freedom of movement and communication, humiliating treatment and

forced labor suffered by domestic workers in Qatar. ([Amnesty International, 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, although Philippine President Duterte did impose a temporary travel ban to Kuwait, after the body of a Philippine house-maid was found in a Kuwaiti family [freezer](#) in 2018 (World Asia, 16 February 2018).

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 "dirty", 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 sexual abuse are very difficult to provide. It is also difficult to prove that any sexual 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 house-maids were (sexually) abused in the WWL 2023 reporting period, with their faith being one of the factors making them more vulnerable.

5 Year trends

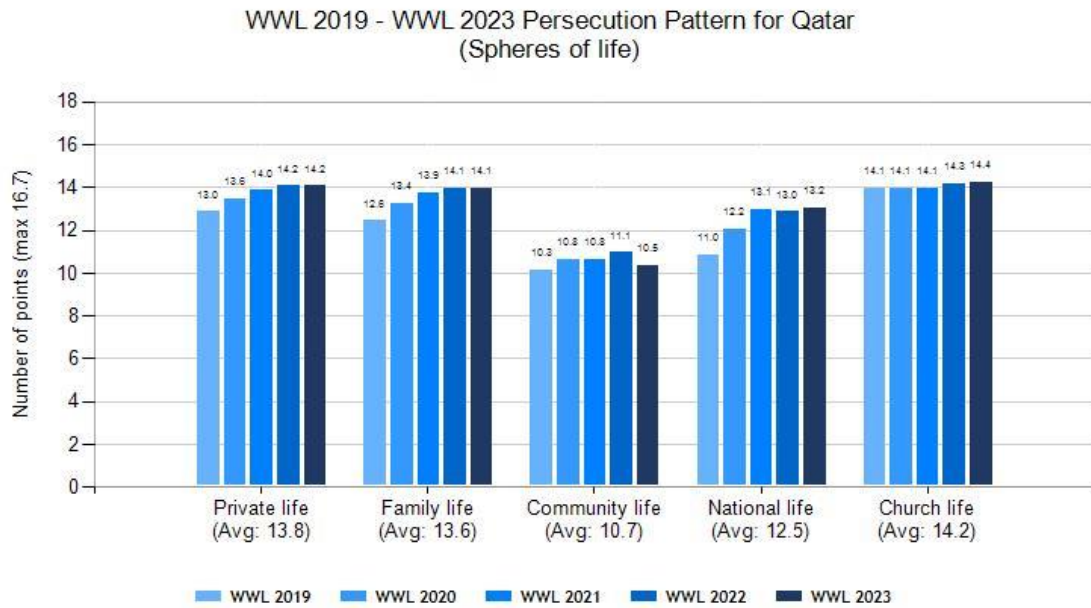
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

Qatar: WWL 2019 - WWL 2023	
Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2023	13.3
2022	13.3
2021	13.2
2020	12.8
2019	12.2

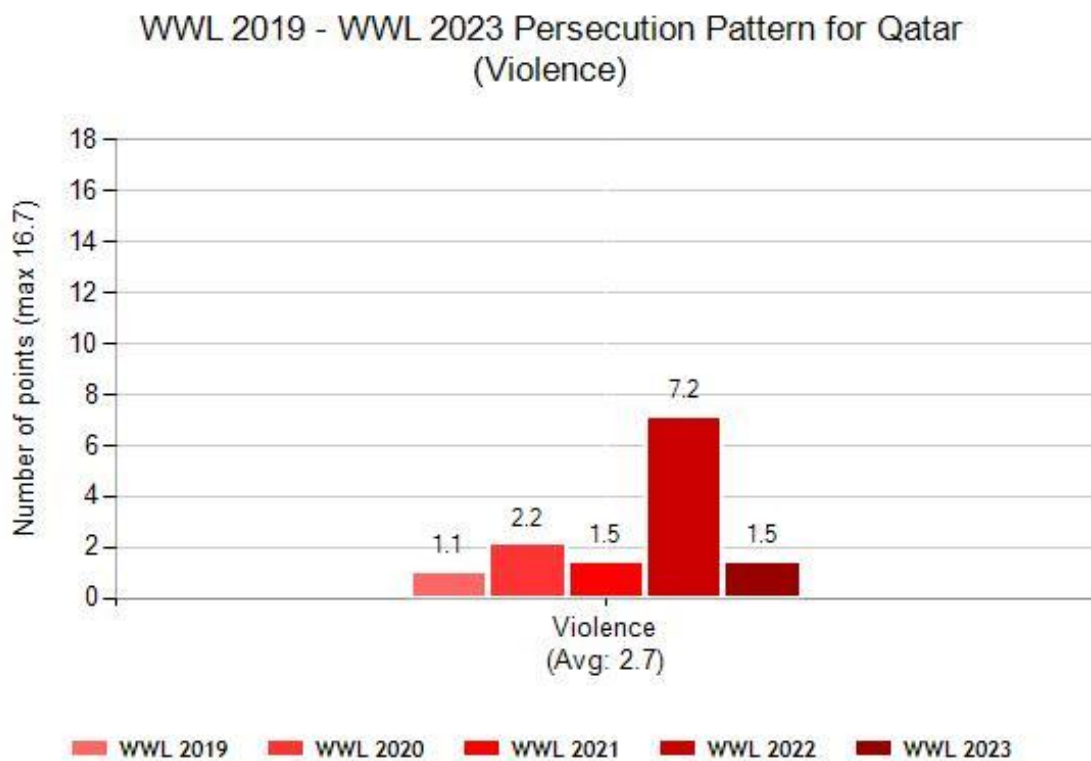
The average pressure on Christians has remained very high (well over 12 points in all five reporting periods).

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



The levels of pressure in the *Church sphere of life* have been stable at an extreme level over the last five reporting periods. The *Private* and *Family spheres* have both shown steady increases in pressure-levels and have levelled off at an extreme level.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The number of violent incidents recorded in Qatar has not changed dramatically from year to year. The scores for violence were at a very low/low level in the period WWL 2019 - WWL 2021. Qatar is a typical Gulf country in that very high levels of pressure ensure that almost nobody 'crosses the line'. 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 have been reported for WWL 2023, which explains the drop to a previous low violence score.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced marriage; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – death; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	-
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 risk 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. A country expert explains: “If Native Qataris converted to Christianity, they would be under intense pressure both from their government and from their clans or tribes. A Qatari woman would risk being killed by her family under tribal law.” Thus, those who convert tend to remain silent about their conversion.

Additionally, women from a Muslim background are legally restricted from marrying a non-Muslim. A frequently mentioned form of religious persecution facing female converts is 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. Some may even be married to a strictly religious uncle or nephew as his second wife, where she may live a life essentially as a sex-slave deprived of any community or respect. If already married before they convert, women may face

further pressure from their husband.

Housemaids working in Qatar often 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	Imprisonment by government
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. Usually male Christians come under 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.”

Converts 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 more extreme cases, men can face physical trauma or even death for their faith.

Furthermore, convert Christian men are also 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.

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 2021):

- Only Islam, Christianity and Judaism are legally recognized as religions in Qatar, and , only Sunni and Shia Muslims and eight Christian denominations are registered as official religious groups (p.3).
- 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.10).
- The Shia community reported "that unlike previous generations, they faced no anti-Shia prejudice. ... The Shia community maintained husseiniyas (Shia prayer halls), in addition to mosques overseen by the government."
- "In March [2021], the Baha'i International Community (BIC) said it was 'extremely concerned' by 'systematic attempts over many years' by the government to blacklist and deport Baha'is, in particular a lifelong resident of the country whose residency permit renewal was refused in January on what the community described as 'baseless charges'. He left the country in August." (p.1).

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 imple-

mented minor reforms in workplace conditions but no major improvements in human rights are 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: OECD 2019 report - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/QA.pdf>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: Amnesty International, 20 October 2020 - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde22/3175/2020/en/>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: freezer - <https://gulfnews.com/world/asia/philippines/family-grieves-philippine-maid-found-dead-in-kuwait-freezer-1.2174514>
- 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 new Research & Reports page of the website od.org. As in earlier years, they are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) using the following links:

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