

FINAL WWL 2019 COUNTRY DOSSIER

QATAR

LEVEL 3/EMBARGO

(Reporting period: 1 November 2017 – 31 October 2018)

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Introduction

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Introduction

World Watch List Qatar	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2019	62	38
WWL 2018	63	27
WWL 2017	66	20
WWL 2016	65	21
WWL 2015	64	18

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country was among the fifty highest scoring countries (Top 50) in the WWL 2015-2019 reporting periods.

Please note: The highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”.

WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Qatar

Link for general background information

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14702226>

Recent country history

Since declaring independence from Great Britain in 1971, Qatar has gone through massive 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, due to the exploitation of oil and gas fields since the 1940s.

Until June 2017, Qatar seemed to be a stable nation, maintaining friendly relations with the USA and Saudi Arabia, but also with Iran, Hamas and Hezbollah. Apart for a few online protests, the Arab Spring did not seem to cause any unrest in Qatar, despite its active role in the Arab Spring movement abroad. This suddenly changed when the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt, led by Saudi-Arabia, severed all diplomatic and economic ties in June 2017. Since then, all land and sea borders between Qatar and Saudi-Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates have been closed. The official reason for the boycott is Qatar's alleged support for terrorist groups. More important is the quite independent role Qatar has sought to establish for itself, especially through its news station Al-Jazeera, the Middle East's most viewed satellite TV channel, founded in 1996. It is said to have been an engine of the Arab Spring movement, serving also as a mouthpiece for opposition leaders and insurgents. Al-Jazeera also criticizes the governments of neighboring countries and this might especially have angered Saudi Arabia and its allies. Besides this, Qatar has maintained friendly ties with Iran, the arch-enemy of the Saudi kingdom. With the boycott in place, Saudi Arabia might be trying to force Qatar back into the vassal role it had in the past. Although US President Donald Trump has probably (indirectly) emboldened the Saudis to take this step, the US government is an ally of both countries and has called upon the countries to find a peaceful solution. It does not seem that the crisis will be solved in the short term, however; it has already lasted for more than a year and no diplomatic talks seem to be taking place between Qatar and the boycotting states. Saudi-Arabia [does allow some Qatari citizens](#) to enter the country for the *hajj*, the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca. In July 2018, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, [ruled](#) that the United Arab Emirates had violated the rights of Qatari nationals who were banned from the country when the UAE joined the boycott against Qatar. Qatar [recently joined](#) the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), although it made some exceptions regarding principles not compatible with Sharia law. In addition, it remains to be seen if the country really will [improve the treatment of migrant workers](#).

The religious landscape

Qatar has been relatively lenient towards the growing Christian expatriate community and has provided land to build churches. The country's first official Christian house of worship was built in 2008; the second was opened in 2009. Officially recognized denominations with church facilities built in official compounds are the Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Anglican and Indian Orthodox churches. Other Christian groups can operate under the patronage of these recognized churches. In 2015, the Filipino Evangelical Church obtained recognition and was granted land for a place of worship alongside other churches within the "Religious Complex", and approval has also been given for a Maronite church. Although most local Christian expatriates welcome this development, there is a flipside since the concentration of churches in one area can lead to

“ghettoization”. As such, Christians can also be easily controlled and monitored – which usually happens under the pretext of ensuring their safety.

The political landscape

Apart from a few online protests against the powerful Emir and his perceived pro-Western foreign policy, there have been hardly any open anti-government criticism or protests in Qatar. The political power is maintained in a very narrow family circle. This facilitates quick and united policies. Salaries for security service members and other Qatari public sector employees were increased considerably and a few domestic policy reforms were announced, but these are not considered to be any more than cosmetic and are aimed at preventing criticism of Qatar’s support for opposition movements abroad in the face of the country’s own lack of democracy at home. The conservative and mostly Wahhabi Qataris are not in favor of democracy, which they perceive as a Western concept bound to cause difficulties, as witnessed in several democratized Arab countries.

Unusual for the region, there is no public expression of social or economic discontent, probably due to the fact that the state distributes its wealth generously. This materialistic saturation leads to political apathy. Another factor is the small amount of political influence religious scholars have and the absence of sectarian divisions. However, Qatar did play an active role in the Arab Spring abroad, especially in Libya where it cooperated in military intervention. It continues to play an active role in Iraq, Syria and Libya by supporting Islamic militants. It also supported the ruling government of Bahrain by sending troops to crack down on revolting Shiites. The reasons for this were to restore stability to the Gulf region and uphold a Sunni, pro Islamist agenda.

The socio-economic landscape

Qatar – which has the world’s third largest natural gas reserves - has had the world’s highest GDP growth rate for years. Petroleum plays a pivotal role in many aspects. In its 27 November 2018 update, Focus Economics [states](#): "Despite the government’s concerted diversification efforts, oil and gas revenues still account for around half of GDP, some 90% of fiscal receipts and the bulk of exports, making the country highly vulnerable to global price swings." On the other hand, there is still harrowing poverty among some migrant communities, especially the Nepalese. The government is encouraging diversification of the economy and the development of a more knowledge-based society.

The large number of foreign workers - more than 80% of the country’s population - has also played an important role in Qatar, which has the world’s highest ratio of migrants/citizens. Expatriates (including some from the West) are generally perceived and treated by Qataris as slaves. Working conditions can be inhumane and dangerous; they face underpayment, lack of proper living conditions (e.g. unsanitary, overcrowded labor camps), domestic violence and sexual abuse. The number of deaths at the work place is high - a possible sign of inadequate safety measures. Forced labor and human trafficking are also major problems. Since 2013, [reports by civil society groups](#) revealed that workers in Qatar are experiencing "modern-day slavery". This has become a serious issue as Qatar is preparing itself to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup. The accusation concerning modern-day slavery is particularly relevant in the context of domestic work. According to Amnesty International, reporting 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 [have been made](#) in 2018, but the question remains whether things will change in practice.

Concluding remarks

Despite the political crisis with Saudi Arabia and allied countries, the political, social and economic situation of Qatar seems stable - which is also due to its [ample fiscal buffers](#). In some ways, the crisis seems to be more of a power play, without the intention of ever becoming an armed conflict. On the other hand, the blockade does harm Qatar's economy in the long term, which might cause an economic fallback for all immigrant workers, including the Christians among them.

Another major challenge for the country is to maintain its cultural and religious standards amidst rapid modernization and development.

As it prepares for the 2022 FIFA World Cup, Qatar and its deplorable treatment of migrant workers have increasingly caught the world's attention. Under pressure from the West, Qatar is implementing minor - according to human rights organizations: cosmetic - reforms in the labor conditions for migrant workers. 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.

External Links - WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Qatar

- Recent country history: does allow some Qatari citizens
<http://www.arabnews.com/node/1339471/saudi-arabia>
- Recent country history: ruled
<https://www.icj-cij.org/en/case/172>
- Recent country history: recently joined
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/06/qatar-finally-joins-two-key-human-rights-treaties-but-what-does-it-really-mean-for-migrant-workers/>
- Recent country history: improve the treatment of migrant workers
<https://www.euronews.com/2018/12/05/qatar-has-modified-controversial-labour-laws-after-world-cup-outcry>
- The socio-economic landscape: states
<http://www.focus-economics.com/countries/qatar>
- The socio-economic landscape: reports by civil society groups
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2016/03/qatar-world-cup-of-shame/>
- The socio-economic landscape: failing to protect
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2014/04/foreign-domestic-workers-qatar-shocking-cases-deception-forced-labour-violence>
- The socio-economic landscape: have been made
<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/sep/06/qatar-law-change-milestone-migrant-workers-world-cup-2022-exit-permits>
- Concluding remarks: ample fiscal buffers
<http://www.focus-economics.com/countries/qatar>

WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

How many Christians?

Pop 2018	Christians	Chr%
2,695,000	220,000	8.2

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

How did Christians get there?

There is a long history of Christian presence in the Arab-Persian Gulf, covering a period most likely from the end of the 4th century until at least the 9th century. Various theories have been developed on the partial Christianization of the Gulf area. For example, Arab tribes who were in direct contact with the Christian center in al-Hira in Central Iraq could have played a role in bringing the Christian faith to the Gulf. Furthermore, the Church of the East (Nestorians), may well have developed missionary activities in this region which contributed to the conversion of local populations to Christianity. Another factor might have been [the persecution of Nestorians](#) by “Shapur II who ruled over the Persian Sassanid Empire from 309 to 379. This led to the migration of Christian people outside the Empire, perhaps to the Gulf.” (Source: Bonnéric, J.: *Christianity in the Arab-Persian Gulf*, 2015)

In conclusion, there are many historic sources which mention the presence of bishops and monasteries in the Gulf and attest to the existence of Christian communities in the Gulf region. Yet within a few centuries after Islam's arrival, Christianity had disappeared. Over the past 100 years, expatriates – among them Christians - have entered Qatar, especially after the discovery of oil.

What church networks exist today?

Church networks: Qatar	Christians	%
Orthodox	6,300	2.9
Catholic	174,000	79.1
Protestant	17,000	7.7
Independent	12,700	5.8
Unaffiliated	9,900	4.5
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
Total	219,900	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	5,100	2.3
Renewalist movement	33,600	15.3

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: Believers 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.

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

Public worship of religions other than Islam is restricted. The country's first official Christian house of worship was built in 2008. Nearly all Christians in the country are expatriates, but there is a handful of Qatari Christians with a Muslim background, besides several belonging to other nationalities. The majority of expatriate Christians are Roman Catholic.

Officially recognized denominations using church facilities built within official compounds are the Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Anglican, Indian Orthodox, the Menonite church and Filipino protestant churches. Other Christian groups can operate under the patronage of these recognized churches.

Religious context

Religious Context: Qatar	Numbers	%
Christians	220,000	8.2
Muslim	2,298,000	85.3
Hindu	61,800	2.3
Buddhist	48,300	1.8
Ethnoreligionist	0	0.0
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	4,300	0.2
Atheist	1,800	0.1
Agnostic	60,200	2.2
Other	0	0.0

OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

Notes on the current situation

The government has provided land for church compounds, but this can lead to "ghettoization". It also means that Christians can be easily controlled and monitored – which usually happens under the pretext of their safety.

Although the majority of Christians are expatriates, the majority of expatriates are Muslims.

External Links - WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

- How did Christians get there?: the persecution of Nestorians
<http://mafkf.hypotheses.org/1286>

WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

With a score of 62 points Qatar ranked 38th in WWL 2019.

What type of persecution dominates?

- **Islamic oppression:** The state religion is conservative Wahhabi Islam. Non-Muslim religious groups (Christians) can only worship in private houses or at a designated compound. Proselytizing is outlawed and can lead to sentences of up to ten years imprisonment. Tribal norms and values – mixed with Islam - are forced upon Christians. This affects converts in particular.
- **Dictatorial paranoia:** Qatar is an absolute monarchy. The government has created a welfare state with many financial benefits for Qatari nationals. The government expects obedience in return and does not allow any opposition. Although expatriate Christians are relatively free to practice their faith, the government monitors all activities.
- **Ethnic antagonism:** Tribalism still plays a huge role in the Qatari society, despite the arrival of modern technology and architecture. There is a continuing influence and enforcement of age-old norms and values.

Who is driving persecution?

Christians experience persecution at all levels of society: The government, the local community and even one's family can be dangerous for Christians, especially for converts from Islam to Christianity. No other religion than Islam is seen as an acceptable faith and Sharia law prescribes a wide range of rules for personal, family and community life. Qatar's society is bound by conservative Islamic norms, enforced by ordinary citizens and the government. The state religion is strictly conservative Wahhabi Islam.

What it results in

There are two groups of Christians in Qatar, which are separated from each other and have to be careful when interacting with each other. Expatriate communities consisting of Christian migrant workers are the biggest group. Proselytizing Muslims is strictly forbidden and can lead to prosecution and banishment from the country. However, large worship events have been allowed in the recent past. Many of the migrant workers have to live and work in poor conditions, while their Christianity adds to their vulnerability. Despite their living conditions, these Christian communities are growing.

The other group consist of converts from Islam to Christianity. Both converts from an indigenous and migrant background bear the brunt of persecution. Many indigenous Christians converted outside the country. They face pressure from both family members and the local community to recant their Christian faith. Converts from a migrant background face high pressure and are controlled by their social environment in the labor camps they live in. Even their employers can be a source of persecution. Both indigenous and migrant converts risk discrimination, harassment, police monitoring and all sorts of intimidation by vigilante groups. 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. Despite this, there are hardly ever reports of Christians being killed, imprisoned or harmed for their faith.

Violence

The following table is based on reported cases. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures.

Qatar	Reporting period	Christians killed	Christians attacked	Christians arrested	Churches attacked	Christian-owned houses and shops attacked
WWL 2019	01 Nov 2017 - 31 Oct 2018	0	20	0	0	0
WWL 2018	01 Nov 2016 - 31 Oct 2017	0	0	0	0	0

Christians killed refers to the number of Christians killed for faith-related reasons (including state-sanctioned executions). Christians attacked refers to the number of Christians abducted, raped or otherwise sexually harassed, forced into marriage to non-Christians or otherwise physically or mentally abused (including beatings and death-threats) for faith-related reasons. Christians arrested refers to the number of Christians detained without trial or sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment or similar things for faith-related reasons. Churches attacked refers to the number of churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons. Christian-owned houses and shops attacked refers to the number of houses of Christians or other property (including shops and businesses of Christians) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons.

Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period

Violent incidents against Christians are rarely reported. The country is well policed and it is in general peaceful. However, incidents where Christian migrant workers are targeted probably go unreported because it is in nobody's interest to go public with any details; 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 mistreatment is due to a worker's Christian faith. However, in general it is assumed that the faith of non-Muslim migrant workers, including Christians, leads to extra vulnerability.

WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 62 points Qatar ranked 38th in WWL 2019. Despite the drop of 1 point compared to WWL 2018, Christians in Qatar, especially converts from Islam to Christianity, remain under very high pressure from the Qatari government and Qatari society in particular. The small decrease is caused by a reduction in the pressure experienced by expatriate Christians and non-Qatari converts.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines: Qatar	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	EA	Medium
Denominational protectionism	DPR	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 (long version).

Islamic oppression (Strong):

The state religion is strictly conservative Wahhabi Islam. While Muslims are free to worship in public, non-Muslim religious groups (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 punished. Conversion from Islam to another religion constitutes apostasy, which is forbidden and 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.

Ethnic antagonism (Medium):

Tribalism still plays a huge role in Qatari society, despite the arrival of modern technology (and 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

Drivers of Persecution: Qatar	IO	RN	EA	DPR	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG	-	MEDIUM	-	-	-	MEDIUM	-
Government officials	Strong	-	Medium	-	-	-	Medium	-
Ethnic group leaders	Strong	-	Strong	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	Weak	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Medium	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
One's own (extended) family	Very strong	-	Very strong	-	-	-	-	-
Political parties	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Organized crime cartels or networks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. Please note that "-" denotes "not at all". For more information see WWL Methodology (long version).

Drivers of Islamic oppression:

Conservative Islamic society is the biggest threat to Christians in Qatar. Employees are tied to their employers and thus vulnerable to their bosses' demands. The latter can easily discriminate, humiliate or abuse expatriate Christians, especially the poor and low-skilled workers from South East Asia and North Africa. Expatriate Christians also face discrimination or mistreatment by their fellow Muslim expatriates.

Conversion from Islam to Christianity is socially unacceptable in Qatar. The government will act against any Christian who makes an attempt to share the Gospel, 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.

Qatar is also well known for its propagation of Wahhabism, known for its ultra-conservative view of Islam. While the country tries to be open and modern, this 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, by limiting the freedom of expression (i.e. criticism of Islam) and by allowing other religions only to worship in private.

The Al-Jazeera news network is also based in Qatar. Conservative Islamic preachers like Yusuf al-Qaradawi have millions of viewers via 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.

Drivers of Ethnic antagonism:

In the case of converts from Islam to Christianity, a convert's family is the biggest driver of persecution. Age old norms (such as protecting family honor) are still intact; shaming a family through conversion from Islam to Christianity is totally unacceptable. Converts face the risk of being ostracized by their families and might even be killed for it.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia:

The Qatari government does not allow any criticism of state 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.

Context

For a more detailed overview, please see the Keys to Understanding section above.

Until June 2017, Qatar seemed to be a stable nation, maintaining friendly relations with the USA and Saudi Arabia, but also with Iran, Hamas and Hezbollah. Apart for a few online protests, the Arab Spring did not seem to cause any unrest in Qatar, despite the country's active role in the Arab Spring movement abroad. This suddenly changed when certain Gulf countries and Egypt, led by Saudi-Arabia, cut of all diplomatic and economic ties in June 2017. Since then, all land and sea borders between Qatar and respectively Saudi-Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates have been closed. The official reason for the boycott is Qatar's alleged support for terrorist groups.

The conservative and mostly Wahhabi Qataris are not in favor of democracy. They perceive this as a Western concept that can only lead to difficulties, as witnessed in several democratized Arab countries. Unusual for the region, there seems to be no social or economic discontent publicly expressed; this is probably due to the fact that the state distributes its wealth generously. This materialistic saturation leads to political apathy.

The large number of foreign workers plays an important role in Qatar. They make up more than 80% of the country's population which is the world's highest ratio of foreigners/citizens. Expatriates are generally perceived and treated by Qataris as slaves, especially those from Africa and Asia. Working conditions can be inhumane and dangerous; they face underpayment, lack of proper living conditions (e.g. unsanitary, overcrowded labor camps), domestic violence and sexual abuse. It is not uncommon for them to die at the work-place. Forced labor and human trafficking are also major problems.

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, independent of their religion. If such workers are Christian, this can add to their vulnerability and they are under strong 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 compound built on land provided by the authorities outside of the capital, Doha. Already, there are traffic and parking problems at the church complex and many Christians think that the complex will soon be too small to house all Christians in Qatar gathering for worship. A positive development in 2015 was the allotting of land to the recently registered Lebanese Maronite and Filipino Evangelical congregations to build churches.

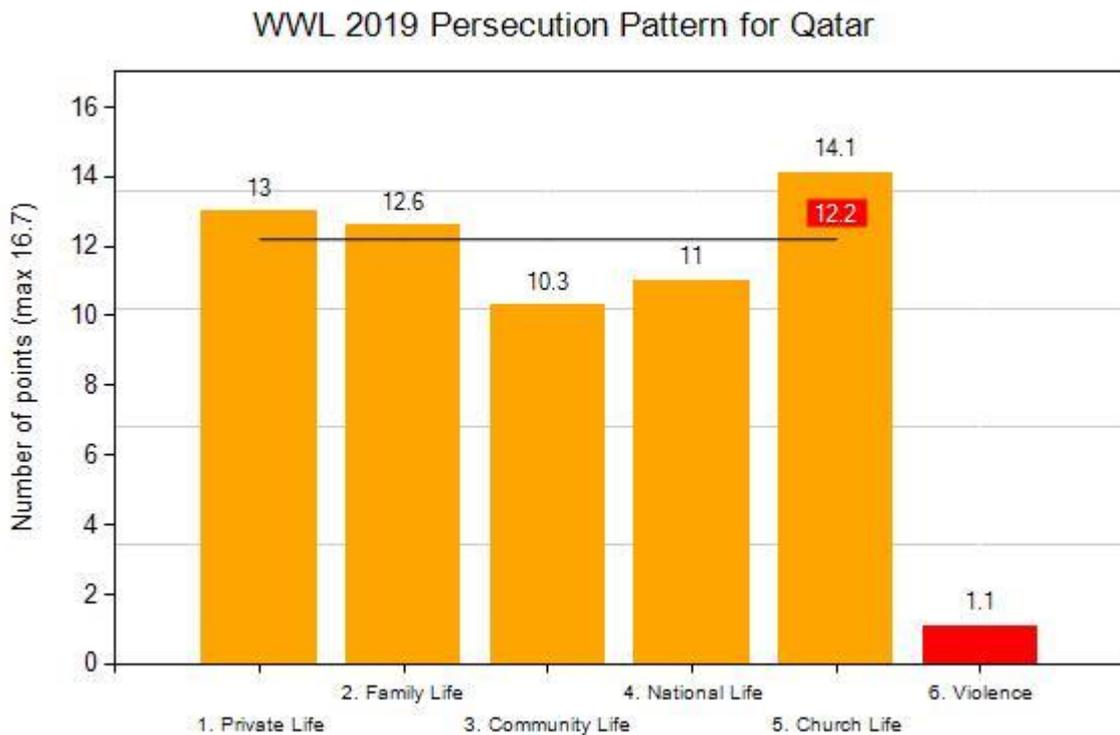
Historical Christian communities: These communities are not treated as a separate category for scoring in the WWL analysis, since all Christians here belong to the expatriate category.

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 and 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 converts converted abroad and the majority of them do not return to the country out of fear. Local converts are very much under control by their families. They face pressure from both family members and the local community to recant their Christian faith. Most of the 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 on converts has to be understood in a 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, but also means leaving the family, which poses a threat to the loyalty of the group. Being seen as 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 the WWL analysis, since all Christians here belong to the expatriate category.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence



The WWL 2019 Persecution pattern for Qatar shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (12.2), decreasing from 12.7 in WWL 2018. The reason for this decrease is that less pressure for expatriate Christians has been reported.
- Although all *spheres of life* show high or very high levels of pressure, pressure is highest in *Church* and *Private life*. This reflects the difficulties converts face to practice and share their faith among their own family members. The extremely high score for *Church life* reflects the difficulties the churches face when trying to build new churches for example and the limitations they have to evangelize among Muslims.
- The score for violence went up from 0.0 in WWL 2018 to 1.1 in WWL 2019. This rise is due mainly to a more detailed scoring of the situation of domestic maids within Qatari households. Their Christian faith reportedly causes increased vulnerability for (sexual) abuse.

Private sphere:

Indigenous and foreign converts from Islam cannot openly practice their faith. Any hint that they may be Christians can have serious consequences. Christians from the West have relatively more freedom to privately practice their faith, as long as they do not evangelize Muslims. Lower-skilled 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, mostly women, it also depends on the attitude of their employers.

Family sphere:

All Qataris are considered Muslims. For a Muslim family, it is a great disgrace when one of its members leaves Islam. Converts run the great risk of 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 dominantly Islamic.

Community sphere:

All Christians are more or less put under pressure to renounce their faith through all kinds of discrimination. Lower-skilled expatriate Christians can experience harassment and discrimination in their workplace and community - converts will for sure if their new faith is known. Discrimination in dealing with the authorities affects all Christians. 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.

National sphere:

The legal system is based on Sharia law and conversion to a religion other than Islam is illegal. 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 serious 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 policy does not seem to make a 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.

Church sphere:

Expatriate Christians can only gather for worship in private or designated places. Outward symbols of faith, like 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. The churches are mostly 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. The publication, import and distribution of religious materials are heavily regulated. Churches are no longer allowed to use their own channels for importing Bibles and are forced to use a secular bookshop. On a more positive note, the Qatari authorities granted land for the Lebanese Maronite and Filipino Evangelical congregations to build churches in 2015, however no church has been built yet. Also positive news to report is that unregistered churches have not been hindered in their worship.

Violence:

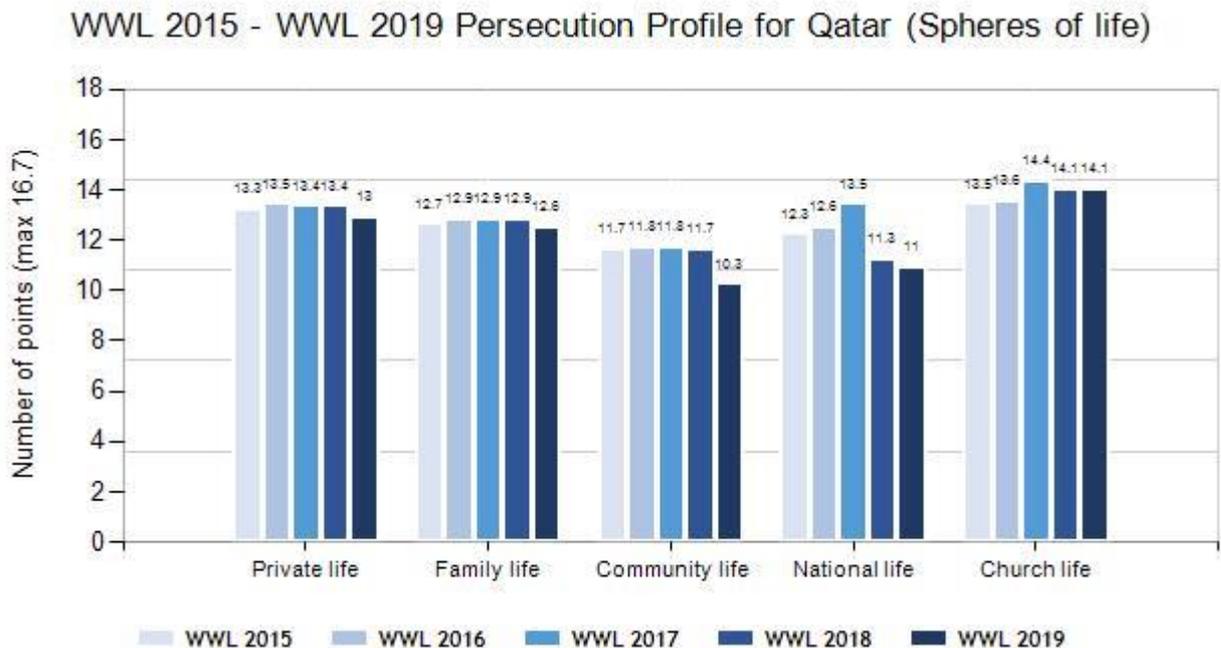
The increase in the violence score is due to the situation of domestic maids (and other vulnerable migrant workers) being scored in more detail. It is widely known that maids working in the domestic sphere are vulnerable for (sexual) abuse. However, statistics are scarce as almost all persons, organizations and states involved have no interest in revealing the true situation: Qatar needs the

maids to work in households, but has a shame culture and does not want a bad reputation. Also, the home countries of the maids 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 imposed a temporary travel ban to Kuwait, after the body of a Philippine maid was found in a freezer). The employers of abused maids are either the perpetrators of the abuse themselves or have no real interest in their well-being. The maids 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 maid 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 maids' religion. Nevertheless, given the high number of Christian expatriates in the country, it is safe to assume that several Christian maids have been (sexually) abused because of their faith.

For a summary of the statistics on violence and examples, please see the Short and Simple Persecution Profile section above.

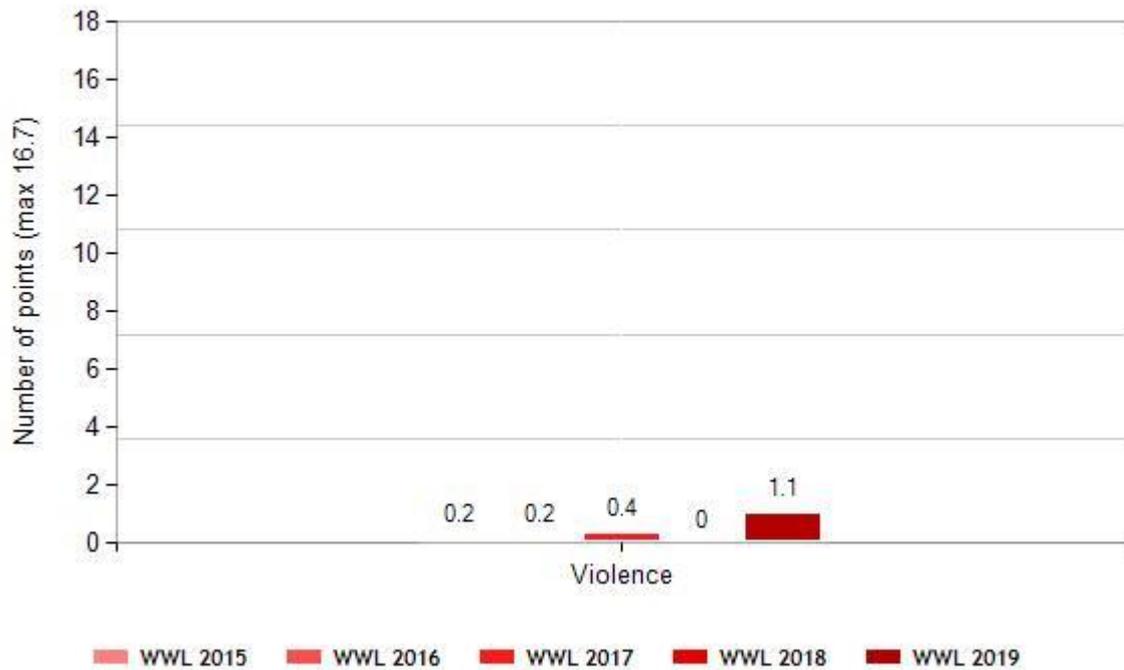
5 Year trends

While the levels of pressure in the *private, family and church spheres of life* have been more or less stable over the last five years (first chart), there have been small decreases in pressure in the *community and national spheres of life*. The second chart, showing average pressure, shows that the overall level of pressure on Christians has remained very high (well over 12 points in all five reporting periods). The drop in average pressure in WWL 2019 reflects the lower pressure experienced by expatriate Christians in particular. The number of violent incidents recorded in Qatar has not changed dramatically per year and hence the scores (third chart) have remained more or less stable at a very low level.



WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Pattern history: Qatar	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2019	12.2
2018	12.7
2017	13.2
2016	12.9
2015	12.7

WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Profile for Qatar (Violence)



Gender specific persecution

Female:

Women in general in Qatar are treated as being inferior to men. Christian women are particularly vulnerable and risk abduction, rape and other forms of abuse. Tribalism also affects the level of persecution experienced by converts from Islam to Christianity. Clan pressure is felt most keenly by women and girls (with younger men next in line and finally older men) corresponding to the general levels of status and freedom within the culture. Qatari women and girls are subject to guardianship by their male family members. There is an accepted level of privacy within the culture which limits the authority of local officials - i.e. the authorities have no right to interfere in whatever happens in a Qatari family home. This affects expatriate workers who are considered the property of the sponsor and can result in sexual harassment or virtual slavery. In Quranic terms, a Muslim is free to have sex with whatever his "right hand possesses". This includes wives and female slaves. House maids working in Qatar are often viewed as belonging to this category. Many Qatari households have a domestic worker, many among them are Christian which makes them even less significant in the eyes of the Qataris and more vulnerable to sexual abuse. It goes without saying that the impact of sexual abuse is deeply traumatic.

Another key restriction on women who come from a Muslim background is the legal marriage restriction whereby they cannot marry a non-Muslim. Besides this legal restriction, female converts are likely to be married off to a conservative Islamic uncle or nephew (often as a second wife). On paper, this is to make her recant her faith and live like a proper Muslim woman, while in reality the likelihood is that she is forced to live the life of a (sex) slave deprived of any respect.

Married female converts are likely to be divorced and lose custody of any children, which can cause severe hopelessness and depression.

Male:

Most of the time, Christian men are the family breadwinners and face the brunt of discrimination at their workplaces. Christian men can also easily become victims of discrimination in the labor camps. If the husband is fired, the whole family will suffer.

Convert men are likely to be threatened that their wives and children will be taken away from them if they do not recant. Depending on the situation, a wife may agree to continue living with their husband on condition that their children grow up unaware of the father's Christian faith.

Persecution of other religious minorities

Only Islam, Christianity and Judaism are legally recognized as religions in Qatar, and according to the US State Department's [2017 International Religious Freedom report](#), only Sunni and Shia Muslims and eight Christian denominations are registered as official religious groups. Other religious communities such as the sizeable expatriate Hindu and Buddhist communities have no official recognition - although, as in the case of informal church groups, their gatherings are generally tolerated and proceed without interference. Qatari nationals are predominantly Sunni. It is assumed that the small Shia community faces some routine discrimination.

Future outlook

The political outlook: Despite the current political crisis with Saudi Arabia and allied countries, internally the political, social and economic situation of Qatar does not seem unstable - aided by its ample fiscal buffers. In some ways, the crisis with Saudi Arabia seems to be more of a political power-struggle in which no side intends any escalation involving armed conflict. On the other hand, the blockade is going to harm Qatar's economy in the long-run, which might cause financial losses for immigrant workers, including the Christians among them.

The outlook for Christians - through the lens of:

- *Islamic oppression:* Although Qatar looks very modern on the surface, it remains a Wahhabist 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. In addition, with the current political rift with Saudi Arabia - which claims to be the main Wahhabist country - Qatar might turn its back on Wahhabism, which could then lead to less pressure on Christian activities.
- *Ethnic antagonism:* A major challenge for the country is to maintain its cultural and religious standards amidst rapid modernization. Although the tribal influence is still dominant at the moment, the newer generation is not likely to want 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 returns to a pure form of Islam.

- *Dictatorial paranoia:* As Qatar prepares to host the Football World Cup in 2022, its deplorable treatment of foreign workers have increasingly caught the world's attention. Under pressure from the West, Qatar is implementing 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.

Conclusion: 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 indication that persecution may increase in the future. However, Qatar's political situation remains volatile in a regional context; the ongoing 'blockade' by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt, imposed in part because of the perceived closeness of Qatar's ties with Iran, has ironically served to strengthen ties with Iran, at least economically, as well as with Turkey. The continued hard-line stance against Christians in Iran, and the seemingly deteriorating situation for Christians in Turkey, could suggest that Qatar might come under increased pressure from its new allies to further restrict Christian activities. However, that is unlikely to be a serious threat in the short term.

External Links - WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution of other religious minorities: 2017 International Religious Freedom report <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/281246.pdf>

Additional Reports and Articles

WWR in-depth reports

A selection of in-depth reports is available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/> (password: freedom).

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