

World
Watch
Research

Qatar: Country Dossier

December 2020



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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research@od.org

Contents

Introduction	3
World Watch List 2021	3
Copyright notice	4
Sources and definitions	4
Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic.....	4
External Links - Introduction	5
WWL 2021 Short country profile / Qatar	5
Brief country details	5
Dominant persecution engines and drivers	5
Brief description of the persecution situation	6
Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period	6
Specific examples of positive developments	6
External Links - Short country profile.....	7
WWL 2021: Keys to understanding / Qatar	7
Link for general background information	7
Recent history	7
Political and legal landscape	8
Religious landscape	9
Economic landscape.....	11
Social and cultural landscape	12
Technological landscape	13
Security situation	14
Trends analysis	14
External Links - Keys to understanding	15
WWL 2021: Church information / Qatar	16
Christian origins.....	16
Church spectrum today.....	17
External Links - Church information.....	18
WWL 2021: Persecution Dynamics / Qatar	18
Reporting period	18
Position on the World Watch List	18
Persecution engines	18
Drivers of persecution.....	20

Areas where Christians face most difficulties	22
Christian communities and how they are affected	22
The Persecution pattern.....	23
Pressure in the 5 spheres of life	24
Violence.....	27
5 Year trends	29
Gender-specific religious persecution Female.....	31
Gender-specific religious persecution Male	32
Persecution of other religious minorities.....	34
Future outlook.....	34
External Links - Persecution Dynamics.....	34
Further useful reports.....	35

Introduction

World Watch List 2021

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	11.1	94	94	94	94	92
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.2	94	93	94	93	89
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.3	9.8	92	92	91	91	91
4	Libya	15.6	15.4	15.9	16.3	16.3	12.4	92	90	87	86	78
5	Pakistan	13.9	14.2	15.1	14.9	13.5	16.7	88	88	87	86	88
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.9	15.9	15.4	11.1	88	87	86	86	82
7	Yemen	16.6	16.6	16.5	16.7	16.7	3.9	87	85	86	85	85
8	Iran	14.5	14.5	13.9	15.7	16.5	10.6	86	85	85	85	85
9	Nigeria	13.3	13.2	13.9	14.1	14.1	16.7	85	80	80	77	78
10	India	13.0	12.9	13.5	14.9	13.7	15.4	83	83	83	81	73
11	Iraq	13.6	14.6	14.2	14.8	13.8	11.5	82	76	79	86	86
12	Syria	13.3	13.9	13.5	14.5	14.0	12.0	81	82	82	76	86
13	Sudan	13.4	13.4	13.7	13.6	15.7	9.1	79	85	87	87	87
14	Saudi Arabia	15.1	13.9	14.4	15.8	16.6	2.2	78	79	77	79	76
15	Maldives	15.4	15.5	13.9	15.8	16.6	0.4	77	78	78	78	76
16	Egypt	12.5	13.2	11.5	12.7	11.0	14.1	75	76	76	70	65
17	China	12.6	9.7	12.0	13.2	15.4	11.1	74	70	65	57	57
18	Myanmar	11.9	12.0	13.1	12.9	12.3	11.9	74	73	71	65	62
19	Vietnam	12.1	8.8	12.7	14.0	14.5	10.0	72	72	70	69	71
20	Mauritania	14.3	14.0	13.5	14.1	13.6	1.9	71	68	67	57	55
21	Uzbekistan	15.1	12.9	14.1	12.2	15.7	1.3	71	73	74	73	71
22	Laos	12.1	10.2	13.6	13.5	14.3	6.9	71	72	71	67	64
23	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.8	13.3	15.7	1.5	70	70	69	68	67
24	Algeria	13.9	13.9	11.5	13.1	13.4	3.9	70	73	70	58	58
25	Turkey	12.5	11.5	10.8	13.3	11.6	9.3	69	63	66	62	57
26	Tunisia	12.0	13.1	10.4	11.5	13.2	7.4	67	64	63	62	61
27	Morocco	12.6	13.5	11.2	12.4	14.1	3.7	67	66	63	51	49
28	Mali	9.4	8.2	12.7	10.3	11.5	15.4	67	66	68	59	59
29	Qatar	14.0	13.9	10.8	13.1	14.1	1.5	67	66	62	63	66
30	Colombia	11.4	8.8	12.4	11.0	9.7	13.9	67	62	58	56	53
31	Bangladesh	11.5	10.3	13.0	11.3	10.1	10.6	67	63	58	58	63
32	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.0	9.4	11.8	14.3	67	66	48	-	-
33	Tajikistan	14.0	12.3	11.9	12.5	13.2	2.2	66	65	65	65	58
34	Nepal	12.4	9.7	9.9	13.0	12.3	8.5	66	64	64	64	53
35	CAR	9.0	8.6	13.1	9.6	9.9	15.6	66	68	70	61	58
36	Ethiopia	9.9	8.5	10.7	10.3	10.8	14.4	65	63	65	62	64
37	Mexico	10.3	8.1	12.4	10.7	10.3	12.6	64	60	61	59	57
38	Jordan	13.1	13.9	11.4	11.6	12.4	2.0	64	64	65	66	63
39	Brunei	13.9	14.6	10.7	10.9	13.5	0.7	64	63	63	64	64
40	DRC	8.0	7.9	11.2	9.4	11.6	16.1	64	56	55	33	-
41	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.5	11.0	12.5	13.4	2.4	64	64	63	63	56
42	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.0	12.3	15.7	64	60	54	38	-
43	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	11.9	12.7	13.8	0.0	64	61	64	62	61
44	Oman	13.2	13.5	10.3	12.5	13.0	0.9	63	62	59	57	53
45	Mozambique	9.3	7.6	11.3	7.9	11.1	16.1	63	43	43	-	-
46	Malaysia	12.1	14.3	12.9	11.5	10.0	2.4	63	62	60	65	60
47	Indonesia	11.5	11.4	12.4	10.7	9.3	7.8	63	60	65	59	55
48	Kuwait	13.2	13.5	9.9	12.2	13.2	1.1	63	62	60	61	57
49	Kenya	11.7	9.2	10.5	8.0	10.3	12.8	62	61	61	62	68
50	Comoros	12.5	11.1	11.4	11.3	14.2	1.9	62	57	56	56	56

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017
51	Cuba	10.9	7.7	11.8	12.9	13.4	5.4	62	52	49	49	47
52	Sri Lanka	12.2	9.1	11.7	12.2	9.7	7.0	62	65	58	57	55
53	UAE	13.4	13.3	9.7	12.0	12.4	1.1	62	60	58	58	55
54	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.3	7.2	11.6	10.6	62	60	52	45	47
55	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.3	11.2	10.4	12.0	1.3	58	57	56	54	48
56	Palestinian Territories	12.5	13.3	9.1	10.4	11.7	0.9	58	60	57	60	64
57	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	10.2	58	55	52	53	59
58	Russian Federation	12.3	8.0	10.2	10.5	12.1	3.9	57	60	60	51	46
59	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	10.3	10.0	11.2	0.0	56	56	56	56	57
60	Bahrain	12.1	12.5	9.1	10.7	10.5	0.9	56	55	55	57	54
61	Azerbaijan	12.8	9.8	9.4	11.1	12.6	0.0	56	57	57	57	52
62	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	3.7	53	56	48	40	-
63	Nicaragua	6.9	4.6	9.9	11.3	10.0	8.1	51	41	41	-	-
64	Burundi	5.1	5.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.9	48	48	43	-	-
65	Uganda	8.1	4.6	6.7	6.7	9.1	12.0	47	48	47	46	53
66	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	5.9	47	45	46	-	-
67	Honduras	6.8	5.0	10.6	7.6	9.0	7.6	46	39	38	-	-
68	Angola	6.4	3.6	7.0	10.1	11.4	7.2	46	43	42	-	-
69	South Sudan	5.7	1.5	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.0	43	44	44	-	-
70	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	0.6	43	43	43	-	-
71	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	9.8	0.7	43	41	42	-	-
72	Rwanda	5.3	4.4	6.7	7.8	10.1	8.1	42	42	41	-	-
73	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	6.6	3.3	42	42	43	-	-
74	El Salvador	6.6	4.9	9.8	4.2	8.7	7.8	42	38	30	-	-

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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).
- 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”.
- The WWL 2021 reporting period was 01 October 2019 - 30 September 2020.
- 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).

Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic

In the WWL 2021 reporting period, travel restrictions and other measures introduced by the governments of various countries to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic did cause delays and create the need for restructuring grass-roots research in some cases. Through the agile cooperation of Open Doors field networks, research analysts, external experts and an increased use of technological options, Open Doors is confident that the WWL 2021 scoring, analysis and documentation has maintained required levels of quality and reliability.

External Links - Introduction

- Sources and definitions: World Watch List Documentation - <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>

WWL 2021 Short country profile / Qatar

Brief country details

Qatar: Population (2020 UN estimate)	Christians	Chr%
2,792,000	367,000	13.1

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020)

Qatar: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	67	29
WWL 2020	66	27
WWL 2019	62	38
WWL 2018	63	27
WWL 2017	66	20

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2017-2021 reporting periods

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

There are two categories of Christian communities in Qatar; they are separate from each other and have to be careful when interacting with each other. The largest group - the community of expatriate Christians - is made up of Christian migrant workers. Proselytizing Muslims is strictly forbidden and can lead to prosecution and deportation. However, large worship events have been allowed in the recent past. Many migrant workers have to live and work in poor conditions, while their Christian faith adds to their vulnerability. Despite their living conditions, these Christian communities are growing.

The other group consists of converts from Islam to Christianity. Both converts from an indigenous and migrant background bear the brunt of persecution. Local Qatari converts 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.

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- During the WWL2021 reporting period, at least one incident has been 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 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 or not mistreatment is due to a worker's Christian faith. However, it is estimated that thousands of expatriate Christians face abuse. According to a report by [Amnesty International](#) - AI (AI, "All Work No Pay", 2019), despite promises to improve labor conditions, thousands of migrant workers still suffer from labour abuses. [In an earlier report](#) (AI, "My Sleep Is My Break", 2014), AI highlighted practices of (sexual) abuse of especially female migrant workers, many of whom are Christian.

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 related 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 - Short country profile

- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Amnesty International - <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE2207932019ENGLISH.PDF>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: In an 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 2021: Keys to understanding / Qatar

Link for general background information

- [Qatar country profile - BBC News](#)

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 abroad (most notably in Libya).

This changed in 2017 when Saudi Arabia led the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt to boycott Qatar and sever all diplomatic and economic ties. 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 among a number of other reasons. In December 2020, it was announced that new efforts are being made to reconcile the countries and resolve the dispute, most probably under pressure from the USA, which is an ally to countries on both sides of the dispute ([Financial Times, 4 December 2020](#)). However, given the different interests, especially on the geopolitical level and with no apparent (financial) reason for Qatar to give in to any of the demands, a final solution might still be far away.

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 "Religious Complex" just outside Doha (Al-Jazeera, 20 June 2008).

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. Interestingly, he was educated in the UK. Qatar's Sheik is dedicated to diversifying the economy and renewing national infrastructure. Qatar's political system is classified as 'authoritarian' by the Economist Intelligence Unit ([EIU, Democracy Index 2019](#)). The conservative and mostly Wahhabi Qataris are not in favour of democracy, which they perceive as a Western concept bound to cause difficulties, as attempts to democratize several Arab countries have shown.

Unusual for the region, there is little public expression of social or economic discontent. This is probably due to the fact that the state distributes its wealth generously among the Qatari citizens which leads to political apathy. Fragile State Index political indicators show a sharp rise in external intervention for 2017, which is in line with the start of the Saudi-led boycott, affecting both the political as well as the economic indicators. ([FSI](#), last accessed 19 December 2020) However, not surprisingly, the average indicators remain stable, signaling that Qatar has managed to deal 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 due to the absence of sectarian divisions. However, Qatar did play an active role in the Arab Spring movement abroad, especially in Libya where it cooperated in military intervention. It played 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 the Shiite uprising there in 2011. The reasons for this were to maintain stability in the Gulf region and uphold a Sunni, pro-Islamist agenda. The latter being a major difference compared to neighboring Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which do not support pro-Islamist groups (and which even designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization).

In addition to supporting Islamist groups and political Islam, Qatar also angered Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates by establishing a quite independent role for itself. It has relationships with Saudi Arabia's arch-enemy Iran, tries 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. Al-Jazeera also criticizes the governments of neighboring countries and this might especially have angered Saudi Arabia and its allies. In addition, since the boycott Qatar has increased its ties with Turkey. This has even further annoyed Saudi Arabia, as Turkey is the regional safe haven for the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups. With the boycott in place, Saudi Arabia might be trying to force Qatar back into the vassal role it had in the past.

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.

Other sources report:

- According to [Middle East Concern](#) (MEC, accessed 19 December 2020): "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."

Religious landscape

Qatar: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	367,000	13.1
Muslim	2,226,000	79.7
Hindu	85,000	3.0
Buddhist	50,000	1.8
Ethno-religionist	0	0.0
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	3,000	0.1
Atheist	2,000	0.1
Agnostic	59,000	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 February 2020)

According to [Middle East Concern](#), the majority of Qataris (90%) are Sunni and only 10% Shia (MEC, accessed 19 December 2020). 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 version of Wahhabism, which is less strict than in Saudi Arabia. This difference is also known as the "[Wahhabism of the sea](#)" versus the "[Wahhabism of the land](#)" (Huffpost, 12 April 2017). Hence, in contrast with 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 one area 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 is also well-known for its propagation of Wahhabism and 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 (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 17 September 2020):

"Custom outweighs government enforcement of laws banning religious discrimination, and legal, cultural, and institutional discrimination is prevalent. Whilst Qatar's constitution and other laws provide for freedom of [...] worship, these freedoms are framed within limits based on sharia law and "morality concerns". Converting to another religion from Islam is considered apostasy and remains a capital offense in Qatar. A blasphemy accusation could be taken as evidence of apostasy. However since 1971 no punishment for apostasy has been recorded. Proselytizing on behalf of an organization, society, or foundation of any religion other than Islam can be punished by up to 10 years in prison, and the proselytization of any religion other than Islam on one's own behalf can be punished with a sentence of up to five years. However, the government's response to such proselytization is usually deportation rather than legal action."

According to [Middle East Concern](#) (MEC, accessed 19 December 2020):

- "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. In principle, those considered apostates face severe sanctions under Islamic law, including the death penalty."

Economic landscape

According to the [World Factbook](#) (accessed 19 December 2020) and [World Bank data](#) (December 2020):

- **GDP per capita (PPP):** \$62,019 (2019 est.)
- **Unemployment:** 0.082%, with youth unemployment being 0.345%, 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's April 2020](#) and [October 2020 Economic Update](#):

- **COVID-19:** "Qatar has been struck very hard by COVID-19 both through global demand and price channels as well as through the domestic health impact (more than 120,000 cases reported by September 9, 2020), the second highest exposure in the GCC. Yet stringent containment measures, aggressive testing and trace policies, as well as the effectiveness of the Qatari health care system, have resulted in the second lowest death rate amongst this group of countries (73 deaths per one million population). Nearly 240,000 tests per million have been conducted in Qatar and there are no visible signs of a second wave."
- **Economic growth:** "COVID-19 and the sharp fall in hydrocarbon revenues will lead to a contraction of real GDP growth of 2% in 2020. The decline has been mitigated by infrastructure related spending ahead of the FIFA World Cup in 2022, continued expansion of LNG capacity, and fiscal and monetary response. Steps taken to improve the business environment, as well as the final push ahead of the World Cup are expected to underpin growth in the medium-term."

Other sources report:

- The World Bank's [World by Income and Region report](#) (accessed 19 December 2020) puts the Qatari economy in the high income category .
- The [2020 Fragile State Index](#) (accessed 19 December 2020) shows some improvement in the economic indicators on average, with "Human Flight and Brain Drain" being low. The indicator External intervention increased sharply in 2017 due to the Qatar diplomatic crisis and remains quite high, indicating Qatar's isolated position in the region.
- The [Economist Intelligence Unit](#) (accessed 19 December 2020) writes: "We expect the boycott of Qatar by the Arab quartet to continue to dominate the political and economic agenda [...]. Plans to accelerate economic diversification will be constrained substantially by the impact of the coronavirus, weak oil prices and global volatility. We expect the economy to contract by 3% in 2020 as a result of an oil price slump and the effects of the pandemic on demand and investment."

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 old boycott of Qatar by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and other allies has led to a diversification of the Qatari economy, but has not crippled 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.

Literacy rates are high and a large section of the population (86.9%) is employed, according to World Bank. Poverty among expatriate workers is probably under-reported though. Although probably not primarily faith related, Christian expatriates do experience labor abuse, including low and non-paid salaries, confiscation of passports and other ways 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.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the [World Factbook](#) (accessed 21 December 2020):

- **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 2020, 99.2% of the population lived in urban areas.
- **Literacy rate:** 93.5% of the population can read and write; with more women than men being able to read and write (94.7%) and women (92.4%)
- **Population/age:** The total population is around 2.7 million, 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:** 79.4 years on average; women (81.6 years), men (77.2 years).

According to the [UN Global Human Development Indicators](#) (2019):

- **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 on the Human Development Index (HDI).
- **Education:** On average, Qataris are expected to have 12.0 years of schooling.
- **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.

More than 80% of the country's population are expatriate migrant workers, 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 [have been made](#) in 2018, but the question remains whether things will change in practice (The Guardian, 6 September 2018).

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 colour 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 [World Internet Stats](#) (accessed June 2020):

- **Internet usage:** 100% penetration - survey date: December 2019
- **Facebook usage:** 100% penetration – survey date: February 2020.

According to [World Bank's country profile](#) (2018):

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 141.9 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. Although Qatar is not included in Freedom House's [Freedom on the Net Report 2019](#), according to its [Freedom in the World 2020 Report](#): "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". [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, Article 136 *bis*, 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 reports: "The outspoken Qatari TV broadcaster Al-Jazeera has transformed the media landscape in the rest of the Arab world but the Arabic section ignores what happens in this small emirate, including conditions for the foreign workers who make up most of the population. Qatari journalists are left little leeway by the oppressive legislative

arsenal – whose victims include the Doha News website, closed in 2016 – and the draconian system of censorship. Reporting on the government, royal family and Islam are off limits as in the rest of the Persian Gulf and violators risk imprisonment." ([RSF](#), accessed 19 December 2020)

Security situation

Although the peace and trust between Qatar and its neighbors are at an all time low due to the Saudi-led boycott, there is no high risk of any kind of military confrontation. The only threat seems to be a cyberwar, as the countries are [allegedly spying on one another](#) (Reuters, 1 April 2019). None of the countries would benefit from a war and both Qatar and its current enemies are close 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.

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.

Trends analysis

1) Qatar is stable but the Saudi-led blockade is likely to cause financial loss

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](#) (Focus Economics, 3 November 2020). In some ways, the crisis seems to be more of a power play, without the intention of it ever becoming an 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.

2) Rapid modernization is a challenge to current cultural norms

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.

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 indication that persecution may increase in the future. However, Qatar's political situation looks less stable 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 - Keys to understanding

- Link for general background information: Qatar country profile - BBC News - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14702226>
- Recent history: Financial Times, 4 December 2020 - <https://www.ft.com/content/5ea4f29c-33bc-42e2-8e2c-57ba900dd0a8>
- Recent history: first church - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2008/6/20/qatar-opens-first-church-quietly>
- Political and legal landscape: EIU, Democracy Index 2019 - <https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index>
- Political and legal landscape: FSI - <https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/>
- Political and legal landscape: Middle East Concern - <https://www.meconcern.org/countries/qatar/>
- Religious landscape description: Middle East Concern - <https://www.meconcern.org/countries/qatar/>
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- Religious landscape description: Freedom of Thought Report - <https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-western-asia/qatar/>
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- Economic landscape: World Factbook - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/qa.html>
- Economic landscape: World Bank data - <https://data.worldbank.org/country/qatar>
- Economic landscape: World Bank's April 2020 - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/gcc/publication/qatar-economic-update-april-2020>
- Economic landscape: October 2020 Economic Update - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/gcc/publication/economic-update-october-2020-qatar>
- Economic landscape: World by Income and Region report - <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/the-world-by-income-and-region.html>
- Economic landscape: 2020 Fragile State Index - <https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/>
- Economic landscape: Economist Intelligence Unit - <http://country.eiu.com/qatar>
- Economic landscape: 86.9% - <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.EMP.TOTL.SP.ZS?locations=QA>
- Social and cultural landscape: World Factbook - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/qa.html>
- Social and cultural landscape: UN Global Human Development Indicators - <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/QAT>
- Social and cultural landscape: reports by civil society groups - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2016/03/qatar-world-cup-of-shame/>
- Social and cultural landscape: failing to protect - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2014/04/foreign-domestic-workers-qatar-shocking-cases-deception-forced-labour-violence>
- Social and cultural landscape: have been made - <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/sep/06/qatar-law-change-milestone-migrant-workers-world-cup-2022-exit-permits>
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- Technological landscape: Freedom in the World 2020 Report - <https://freedomhouse.org/country/qatar/freedom-world/2020>
- Technological landscape: Amnesty International (20 January 2020) - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/01/qatar-repressive-new-law-further-curbs-freedom-of-expression/>
- Technological landscape: RSF - <https://rsf.org/en/qatar>
- Security situation: allegedly spying on one another - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-raven-media-specialreport/special-report-u-s-hackers-helped-uae-spy-on-al-jazeera-chairman-bbc-host-idUSKCN1RD2PY>
- Trends analysis: ample fiscal buffers - <http://www.focus-economics.com/countries/qatar>

WWL 2021: 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 a church compound 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	7,000	1.9
Catholic	320,000	87.2
Protestant	17,700	4.8
Independent	12,000	3.3
Unaffiliated	10,000	2.7
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
Total	366,700	99.9
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	5,500	1.5
Renewalist movement	98,500	26.8

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020)

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 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, for which the Lebanese Maronite patriarch laid the cornerstone in April 2018 ([Naharnet, 19 April 2018](#)).

External Links - Church information

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

WWL 2021: Persecution Dynamics / Qatar

Reporting period

1 October 2019 - 30 September 2020

Position on the World Watch List

Qatar: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	67	29
WWL 2020	66	27
WWL 2019	62	38
WWL 2018	63	27
WWL 2017	66	20

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2017-2021 reporting periods

The main reason for the increase of one point in WWL 2021 is a slight increase in average pressure, rising 0.4 points to 13.2 points. This was mainly caused by an increase in reported pressure in the *National sphere of life*. Christians in Qatar, especially converts from Islam to Christianity, remain under very high pressure from the Qatari government and Qatari society in particular. The violence score went down from 2.2 to 1.5 points as less violent incidents were reported.

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

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 an 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 per engine	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	-	-	-	-	-	
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Violent religious groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	-	
One's own (extended) family	Strong	-	-	Very strong	-	-	-	-	-	
Political parties	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Organized crime cartels or networks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	

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.

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 (Very 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. 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 in some cases.

Drivers of Clan oppression

- **Extended family (Very strong):** Although it is clear that the Islamic punishment for apostasy - capital punishment - is a key element in 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 is a real shame for them since 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 government will not protect a convert against its own family, but regard this 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.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Qatar is a very small country with the capital Doha being the centre 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.

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 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. 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, with the Maronite church expected to be opening in the near future.

In October 2020 Christians gathering in house churches were told that in future they may only meet at the church compound, although the authorities are fully aware that the Religious Complex is overcrowded. Hence, it is expected that it will even be more difficult for 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

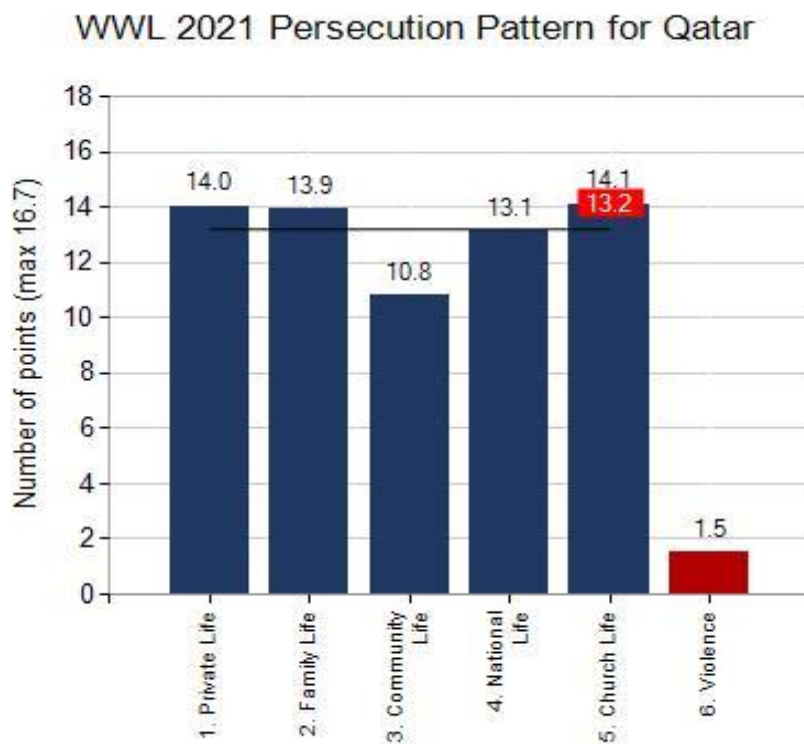
Christians with a Muslim background are heavily persecuted in Qatar. They are considered apostates and face discrimination and harassment from society and even risk being killed by their family. Apostasy is also a crime punishable under the criminal law. However, no execution or other punishment for apostasy has been recorded since the country’s independence in 1971. Almost all Qatari converts 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 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 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, 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 WWL analysis, since all Christians here belong to the expatriate category.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2021 Persecution pattern for Qatar shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (13.2 points).
- All *spheres of life* show very high or extreme levels of pressure, with the levels being highest in *Church, Private* and *Family 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 face hindering evangelization among Muslims.
- The score for violence went down from 2.2 points in WWL 2020 to 1.5 points in WWL 2021.

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 2021 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: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

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

Indigenous and foreign converts from Islam cannot openly practice their faith. Any hint that they may be Christians can have serious consequences.

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 as faith-related posts on social media platforms can lead to discovery. However, also expatriate Christians cannot openly proselytize or criticize Islam.

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 can 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.

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 register a Christian marriage (having a church 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 within state schools and private schools; the provision of non-Islamic religious instruction within schools is prohibited.

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 communication is monitored in Qatar, but especially individual Christians suspected of being involved in proselytism are highly likely to be specifically targeted for monitoring.

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 converts and non-Qatari converts will face severe harassment, if their conversion is known. Expatriate Christians can also face harassment and discrimination, although this often also 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 being made known.

Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.25 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).

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.

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)

The Qatari government would not allow any NGO with clear Christian convictions to operate in Qatar.

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

Christian symbols can only be publicly displayed within the "Religious Complex", the compound outside Doha where all churches are located.

Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.75 points)

Criticizing the government or Islam is not possible 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.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

The "Religious Complex" 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 (Christian) activity outside the compound.

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", let alone be part of a Christian community.

Block 5.14: Openly selling or distributing Bibles (or other Christian materials) has been hindered. (3.75 points)

The publication, importing 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.

Block 5.20: It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution. (3.75 points)

The churches are very careful not to fall out of favor with their Qatari hosts. Criticism of the government is never appreciated and most churches apply self-censorship in this regard. Churches might carefully address certain issues (for example labour abuses) if they have a good relationship with someone in power.

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. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures. In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10, 100 or 1000) is given. (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 1000 could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain.) In cases where it is clear that (many) more Christians are affected, but a concrete number could be given according to the number of incidents reported, the number given has to be understood as being an absolutely minimum figure. The symbol "x" denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security considerations.

Qatar: Violence Block question	WWL 2021	WWL 2020
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	1
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	0	2
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

Qatar: Violence Block question	WWL 2021	WWL 2020
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	1000
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	0
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	10	100
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

- **Christians forced to leave the country:**

Several expatriate Christians have been forced to leave the country after allegedly having been involved with proselytizing.

- **Christians attacked:**

It is widely known that house-maids 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 (2014) reports on the restrictions on freedom of movement and communication, humiliating treatment and forced labour suffered by domestic workers in Qatar."

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 house-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 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 house-maids are either the perpetrators of the abuse themselves or have no real interest in their well-being. The house-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 house-maid does not want to disappoint her family.

For the above reasons, a symbolic number of ten Christian house-maids being (sexually) abused because of their faith has been scored for the WWL 2021 reporting period.

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

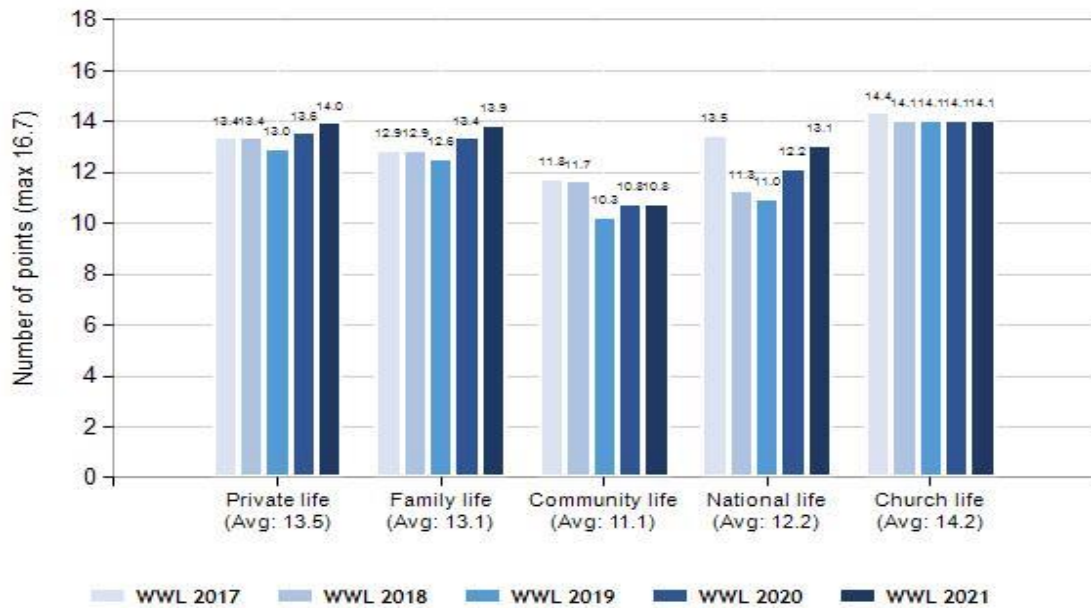
Qatar: WWL 2017 - WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2021	13.2
2020	12.8
2019	12.2
2018	12.7
2017	13.2

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

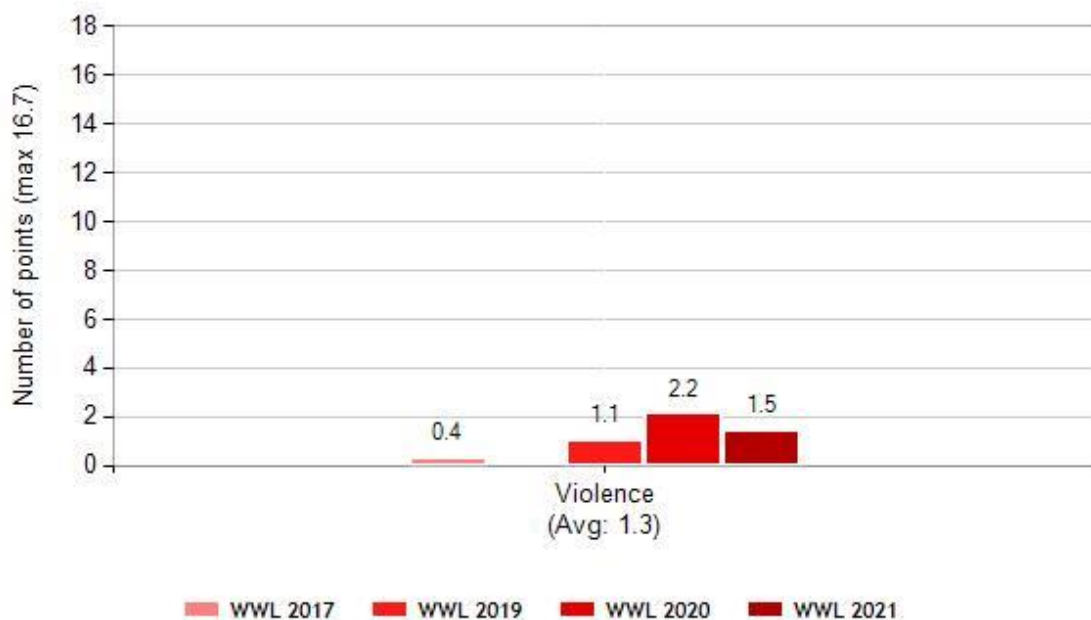
The chart below shows: The levels of pressure in the *Church sphere of life* have been stable at an extreme level over the last four reporting periods. The *Private, Family* and *National spheres* have all shown increases in pressure-levels over the last three reporting periods.

WWL 2017 - WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern for Qatar
(Spheres of life)



5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

WWL 2017 - WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern for Qatar
(Violence)



The chart above shows: 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 level in WWL 2017 - WWL 2019. In the last two reporting periods the score has been higher, but only reaching the

'low' category. Qatar is a typical Gulf country in that very high levels of pressure ensure that almost nobody 'crosses the line'.

Gender-specific religious persecution Female

Female Pressure Points
Abduction
Denied access to Christian religious materials
Denied access to social community/networks
Denied custody of children
Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse
Forced divorce
Forced marriage
Forced out of home – expulsion
Incarceration by family (house arrest)
Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Violence – death
Violence – physical
Violence – psychological
Violence – sexual
Violence – Verbal

While women in general 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. General limitations on women include being required to [obey their husbands](#) (Human Rights Watch, Qatar: Events of 2018), being [legally vulnerable](#) to domestic violence and being restricted legally to inherit half of what a similarly situated male relative would receive (UNDP: “Qatar: Gender Justice and the Law”).

Qatari women and girls are subject to guardianship by their male family members, which means that there are accepted privacy standards in the culture: Whatever happens in the family home cannot be interfered with by the authorities.

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 risk being ostracized by their families and local community. Their families have the authority to limit their travel, keep them under house-arrest, deny them financial support and access to the internet, phone or books. It is much easier to apply pressure like this on women and girls. As a country expert explains: “The family could lose influence over a [male family member] as he could walk away from the family and become independent. This is not desired, so with [males] one wants to apply different kinds of measures. For ladies, independence is not a real option, so forcing dependency places them in a relation of master-slave in the hope to change the believer back to Islam.” Whilst rarer, women have also been expelled from the family home, and must navigate a society that is hostile to women living alone. Converts also risk facing physical violence, or in the most extreme cases, honor killings. 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 one of the most religious uncles or nephews 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 be pressured to divorce by their husbands and lose custody of their children. Women are the “endorsers of faith-values” to the children, a country expert explained, and as such her conversion will bring shame upon the family. The loss of this role, as well as being a mother, can result in hopelessness and aimlessness.

House maids 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 (sexual) abuse.

Gender-specific religious persecution Male

Male Pressure Points
Denied access to social community/networks
Denied inheritance or possessions
Economic harassment via business/job/work access
False charges

Forced out of home – expulsion
Imprisonment by government
Violence – death
Violence – physical
Violence – psychological
Violence – Verbal

Besides the official restrictions on non-Islamic religious expression in Qatari society, Christians try to keep a low profile by self-censoring. When a Christian comes under public scrutiny, it is usually a male Christian, since it is essentially men who are visible in the public sphere and so most at the forefront of interaction with the authorities. Those in Christian leadership are required to report details of church activities; these are also men and are particularly subject to scrutiny.

Male converts are not immune to domestic pressure; when their conversion becomes known, the larger family can threaten that their wives and children will be taken away and placed with another family. 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 and psychological trauma for their faith, be expelled from the family home, or even lose their lives.

Furthermore, 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. They may also be victims of unjust court cases and false imprisonment, although instances of this are relatively rare. As men are the primary providers, if he is imprisoned or persecuted at work, the loss of income can affect his whole family and threaten his sense of purpose.

Church compounds for expatriates 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

Only Islam, Christianity and Judaism are legally recognized as religions in Qatar, and according to the US State Department's [2019 International Religious Freedom report](#), only Sunni and Shia Muslims and eight Christian denominations are registered as official religious groups (p.3). However, 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 at least several unofficial Hindu temples in the country. It is assumed that the small Shia community faces some routine discrimination.

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. In addition, with the current political rift with Saudi Arabia - which claims to be the main Wahhabi country - Qatar might turn its back on Wahhabism, which could then lead to less pressure on Christian activities. However, with its growing ties with Iran and Turkey, political Islam and Islamist thinking could also get a firmer 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 returns to a pure form of Islam.

Dictatorial paranoia

As Qatar prepares to host the Football World Cup in 2022, its poor treatment of foreign workers has 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.

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: freezer - <https://gulfnews.com/world/asia/philippines/family-grieves-philippine-maid-found-dead-in-kuwait-freezer-1.2174514>

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: obey their husbands - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/qatar>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: legally vulnerable - <https://arabstates.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Qatar%20Country%20Summary%20-%20English.pdf>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: 2019 International Religious Freedom report - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/qatar/>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on World Watch Research's Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) and on the World Watch Monitor website:

- <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Qatar>
- <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/Qatar>