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## Qatar: Country Dossier

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**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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# Introduction

## World Watch List 2020

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017	Total Score WWL 2016
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	11.1	94	94	94	92	92
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.0	93	94	93	89	88
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.5	9.4	92	91	91	91	87
4	Libya	15.3	15.5	15.8	16.0	16.4	11.3	90	87	86	78	79
5	Pakistan	14.0	13.9	15.0	14.9	13.7	16.7	88	87	86	88	87
6	Eritrea	14.5	14.9	15.9	15.9	15.4	10.9	87	86	86	82	89
7	Sudan	14.2	14.6	14.5	15.7	16.1	10.4	85	87	87	87	84
8	Yemen	16.6	16.4	16.4	16.7	16.7	2.6	85	86	85	85	78
9	Iran	14.1	14.3	14.1	15.8	16.5	10.4	85	85	85	85	83
10	India	12.9	13.0	13.5	15.0	13.5	14.8	83	83	81	73	68
11	Syria	13.5	14.2	13.0	13.9	14.4	12.6	82	82	76	86	87
12	Nigeria	12.2	11.9	13.5	12.8	13.0	16.7	80	80	77	78	78
13	Saudi Arabia	15.1	14.9	14.1	15.5	16.5	2.4	79	77	79	76	76
14	Maldives	15.4	15.6	14.0	15.9	16.6	0.7	78	78	78	76	76
15	Iraq	14.0	14.6	13.9	14.5	13.6	5.6	76	79	86	86	90
16	Egypt	12.1	13.1	10.7	13.2	10.5	16.1	76	76	70	65	64
17	Algeria	13.5	14.3	10.4	12.8	13.2	9.3	73	70	58	58	56
18	Uzbekistan	15.1	12.9	14.1	12.2	15.7	3.0	73	74	73	71	70
19	Myanmar	11.8	11.9	13.5	12.5	12.2	10.7	73	71	65	62	62
20	Laos	12.8	9.9	14.1	14.4	14.9	5.6	72	71	67	64	58
21	Vietnam	12.3	8.5	12.9	13.6	14.5	9.8	72	70	69	71	66
22	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.2	13.8	13.3	15.7	1.9	70	69	68	67	66
23	China	11.6	8.4	11.6	12.8	15.1	10.2	70	65	57	57	57
24	Mauritania	13.9	14.0	13.0	13.7	13.4	0.2	68	67	57	55	50
25	Central African Republic	10.1	9.1	13.1	9.8	10.2	15.6	68	70	61	58	59
26	Morocco	12.4	13.3	10.8	11.7	14.1	4.1	66	63	51	49	47
27	Qatar	13.6	13.4	10.8	12.2	14.1	2.2	66	62	63	66	65
28	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	10.2	9.4	11.8	15.6	66	48	-	-	-
29	Mali	9.2	8.2	12.8	10.0	11.7	13.7	66	68	59	59	55
30	Sri Lanka	11.5	9.0	11.0	10.9	9.6	13.1	65	58	57	55	53
31	Tajikistan	13.9	12.3	11.9	12.4	13.1	1.1	65	65	65	58	58
32	Nepal	12.4	10.8	9.9	12.1	12.2	7.0	64	64	64	53	53
33	Jordan	13.1	14.1	10.7	11.7	12.5	1.7	64	65	66	63	59

34	Tunisia	12.0	12.8	10.3	10.8	12.3	5.4	64	63	62	61	58
35	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.5	10.7	12.4	14.0	1.7	64	63	63	56	55
36	Turkey	12.6	11.8	10.7	13.3	11.3	3.7	63	66	62	57	55
37	Brunei	13.8	14.3	10.7	10.3	13.5	0.6	63	63	64	64	61
38	Bangladesh	11.1	9.9	12.7	11.1	8.9	9.3	63	58	58	63	57
39	Ethiopia	10.0	9.2	10.6	10.8	10.4	11.9	63	65	62	64	67
40	Malaysia	12.1	14.6	12.7	12.0	9.6	1.5	62	60	65	60	58
41	Colombia	8.9	7.8	11.9	9.8	8.9	15.0	62	58	56	53	55
42	Oman	12.7	13.1	10.0	11.5	12.7	2.0	62	59	57	53	53
43	Kuwait	13.2	13.1	9.9	11.5	13.4	0.7	62	60	61	57	56
44	Kenya	11.7	10.5	10.9	8.3	10.9	9.1	61	61	62	68	68
45	Bhutan	12.8	10.9	11.8	11.6	13.9	0.0	61	64	62	61	56
46	Russian Federation	12.2	8.3	10.7	10.4	12.1	6.9	60	60	51	46	48
47	United Arab Emirates	12.9	13.0	9.5	11.1	12.6	1.1	60	58	58	55	55
48	Cameroon	8.8	7.2	11.6	7.0	10.4	15.0	60	54	38	-	45
49	Indonesia	10.9	11.1	11.6	10.2	9.5	6.5	60	65	59	55	55
50	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.3	7.2	11.1	9.3	60	52	45	47	53
51	Palestinian Territories	12.2	13.0	9.2	10.2	11.9	3.1	60	57	60	64	62
52	Mexico	8.4	6.8	12.2	10.6	10.0	11.5	60	61	59	57	56
53	Azerbaijan	13.0	10.0	9.3	11.1	12.4	1.5	57	57	57	52	57
54	Comoros	11.7	11.5	9.1	9.9	13.9	0.9	57	56	56	56	56
55	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.3	11.1	9.4	11.9	1.1	57	56	54	48	46
56	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	10.3	10.0	11.2	0.2	56	56	56	57	58
57	Democratic Republic of the Congo	5.6	6.7	10.6	7.4	10.4	15.6	56	55	33	-	53
58	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	5.9	56	48	40	-	51
59	Bahrain	12.1	12.3	9.1	10.1	10.5	0.9	55	55	57	54	54
60	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	7.0	55	52	53	59	57
61	Cuba	9.6	5.6	9.5	11.8	12.0	3.5	52	49	49	47	42
62	Uganda	8.1	4.6	6.7	6.7	9.1	13.0	48	47	46	53	45
63	Burundi	5.1	5.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.7	48	43	-	-	-
64	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	3.7	45	46	-	-	-
65	South Sudan	5.7	1.5	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.6	44	44	-	-	-
66	Mozambique	6.9	4.6	7.1	5.2	8.0	11.7	43	43	-	-	-
67	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	1.1	43	43	-	-	-
68	Angola	6.4	3.6	7.0	8.7	10.4	6.7	43	42	-	-	-
69	Venezuela	3.8	4.4	10.6	9.3	9.5	4.8	42	41	34	-	-
70	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	6.6	3.5	42	43	-	-	-
71	Rwanda	5.3	4.4	6.7	7.8	10.1	7.2	42	41	-	-	-

72	Nicaragua	5.8	4.2	8.5	9.8	9.0	4.1	41	41	-	-	-
73	Togo	8.6	6.7	8.5	7.1	8.4	1.1	41	42	-	-	-

## Copyright notice

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## Brief note on 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 2020 reporting period was 1 November 2018 - 31 October 2019.

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).

*Revised: 6 January 2020*

# WWL 2020: Persecution summary / Qatar

## Brief country details

Pop 2019	Christians	Chr%
Qatar		
2,744,000	367,000	13.4

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2019).

World Watch List Qatar	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2020	66	27
WWL 2019	62	38
WWL 2018	63	27
WWL 2017	66	20
WWL 2016	65	21

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2016-2020 reporting periods.

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

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

## Brief description of 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 persecution in the reporting period

- During the WWL2020 reporting period, at least one incident has been reported in which an expatriate Christian community has been targeted because of proselytism accusations. Due to security concerns, no further details can be published.
- Because the number of converts from a Qatari background is very low, reports of violent incidents against them are rare.
- Violent incidents against Christians are anyway 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. According to a recent report from [Amnesty International](#) (AI), despite promises to improve labor conditions, thousands of migrant workers still suffer from labor abuses. [In an earlier report](#) (2014), AI highlighted practices of (sexual) abuse of especially female migrant workers, many of whom are Christian. (See further discussion under “Violence” below.)



## External Links - WWL 2020: Persecution summary

- Specific examples of persecution in the reporting period: Amnesty International - <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE2207932019ENGLISH.PDF>
- Specific examples of persecution in the reporting period: In an earlier report - [https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/qatar\\_my\\_sleep\\_is\\_my\\_break\\_final.pdf](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/qatar_my_sleep_is_my_break_final.pdf)

# WWL 2020: Keys to understanding / Qatar

## Link for general background information

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

## Recent 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.

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.

## Political and legal landscape

Qatar is an absolute monarchy, ruled by the Emir. Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani took over power from his father in 2013. Interestingly, he was educated in the UK. Qatar's Sheikh is dedicated to diversifying the economy and renewing national infrastructure. The EIU classifies the political system in place in Qatar as authoritarian. The conservative and mostly Wahhabi Qataris are not in favour of democracy, which they perceive as a Western concept bound to cause difficulties, as witnessed in several democratized Arab countries

The [Freedom of Thought report](#) ranks government and constitution as severely discriminating. 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. The Freedom of Thought report states: "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 association, public assembly, and 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."

FSI 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. However, not surprisingly, the average indicators remain stable, signalling that Qatar has managed to deal with the increased external pressure (if not, the score for the average indicators would have increased).

Another reason why Qatar is stable is 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 Islamists 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 archenemy 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. With the boycott in place, Saudi Arabia might be trying to force Qatar back into the vassal role it had in the past.

## Religious landscape

Qatar's population is estimated to be 2.75 million, of whom around 12% are indigenous Qatari's and the remainder expatriates.

MEC reports: "It is estimated that approximately 16% of the migrant population is Christian. Qatari citizens are all assumed to be Muslims, 90% Sunni and 10% Shia." 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 1990's, 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](#)".

Hence, in contrast with Saudi Arabia, 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 which is [expected to open soon](#). Although most 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 monitored and controlled – which usually happens under the pretext of ensuring their safety.

Religious Context: Qatar	Numbers	%
Christians	367,000	13.4
Muslim	2,198,000	80.1
Hindu	64,300	2.3
Buddhist	48,200	1.8
Ethnoreligionist	0	0.0
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	4,000	0.1
Atheist	1,900	0.1
Agnostic	60,700	2.2
Other	0	0.0

*Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2019). OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.*

## Economic landscape

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 two 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.

FSI's economic Indicators show Qatar to be relatively stable despite a sharp increase of external intervention (caused by the Saudi Arabia-led boycott).

Literacy rates are high at 97.7% and a large section of the population (86.9%) is employed. Poverty among expatriate workers is probably under-reported.

## Social and cultural landscape

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". 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.

HDI reports that life expectancy of Qataris is high at 78.3 years and children can expect 13.4 years in schooling, assuring a well educated middle class.

According to country experts, being Christian is an extra vulnerability in Qatar and can lead to higher levels of discrimination or abuse. However, skin colour and ethnic background often play a greater role. Hence, 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.

## Technological landscape

According to the [Human Development Index](#), 94% of the Qatari population use the Internet; an indication of the high technical development of the country. Internet users have to be careful and refrain from questioning government policies or criticizing Islam or Islamic practices. [Freedom House writes](#): "Security forces reportedly monitor personal communications, and non-citizens often self-censor to avoid jeopardizing their work and residency status. Social media users can face criminal penalties for posting politically sensitive content".

[RSF reports](#): The outspoken Qatari TV broadcaster Al-Jazeera has transformed the media landscape in the rest of the Arab world but 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.

## 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](#). None of the countries would benefit from a war and both Qatar and its 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.

## 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](#). 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 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 - WWL 2020: Keys to understanding

- Link for general background information: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14702226>. - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14702226>
- Political and legal landscape: EIU - <https://country.eiu.com/qatar>
- Political and legal landscape: Freedom of Thought report - <https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-western-asia/qatar/>
- Political and legal landscape: FSI - <https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/>
- Religious landscape: MEC - <https://www.meconcern.org/countries/qatar/>
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## WWL 2020: 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 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's arrival, Christianity had disappeared.

As Qatar was part of the important sea routes between Iraq and India, Qatar must have had contact with Christians even after it had no longer any native Christians. This 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 for 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. In 2008, Qatar allowed the opening of a number of large churches, located together in a church compound outside the capital city, Doha.

### Church spectrum today

Church networks: Qatar	Christians	%
Orthodox	6,700	1.8
Catholic	320,000	87.2
Protestant	17,400	4.7
Independent	13,300	3.6
Unaffiliated	9,900	2.7



Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>367,300</b>	<b>100.1</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	5,500	1.5
Renewalist movement	93,600	25.5

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2019).

*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.*

# WWL 2020: Persecution Dynamics / Qatar

## Reporting period

1 November 2018 – 31 October 2019. During this reporting period, several experts have been consulted to reflect on the levels of pressure on Christians in Qatar in comparison to the levels in neighboring Gulf countries. This has resulted in a slightly higher score for some *spheres of life*.

## Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 66 points, Qatar ranked 27 in WWL 2020.

Qatar scored 62 points in WWL2019, ranking 38. The 4 point rise in score is partly caused by a higher number of reported violent incidents and partly by a higher score in pressure for some *spheres 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.

## Persecution engines

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

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

### **Islamic oppression (Strong):**

The state religion is strictly conservative Wahhabi Islam. While Muslims are free to worship in public, non-Muslim religious groups (such as Christians) can only worship in private houses or designated places. Proselytizing is outlawed and can lead to sentences of up to ten years imprisonment.

Criticism of Islam is punished. 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 and ethnic antagonism (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

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

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

### Drivers of Islamic oppression:

- **Extended family (Very 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 about 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 the broader 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.

*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.*

#### **Drivers of Clan and ethnic antagonism:**

- **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, as they (only) care about preserving the honor and image of the family.
- **Government officials (Strong):** The government adds to the influence of *Clan and ethnic antagonism* by maintaining the status quo in society and adhering to its 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 the broader 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.

## **Geographical hotspots of persecution**

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. Qatari converts face the highest risks as society is conservative and family ties are strong. Western Christian expatriates are most often free to practice their beliefs, as long as they refrain from proselytizing. Non-Western Christians like the Filipinos are more likely to face discrimination and abuse, especially female domestic workers. It is a matter of debate how much their non-Muslim faith adds to their vulnerability to abuse.

## 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.

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.

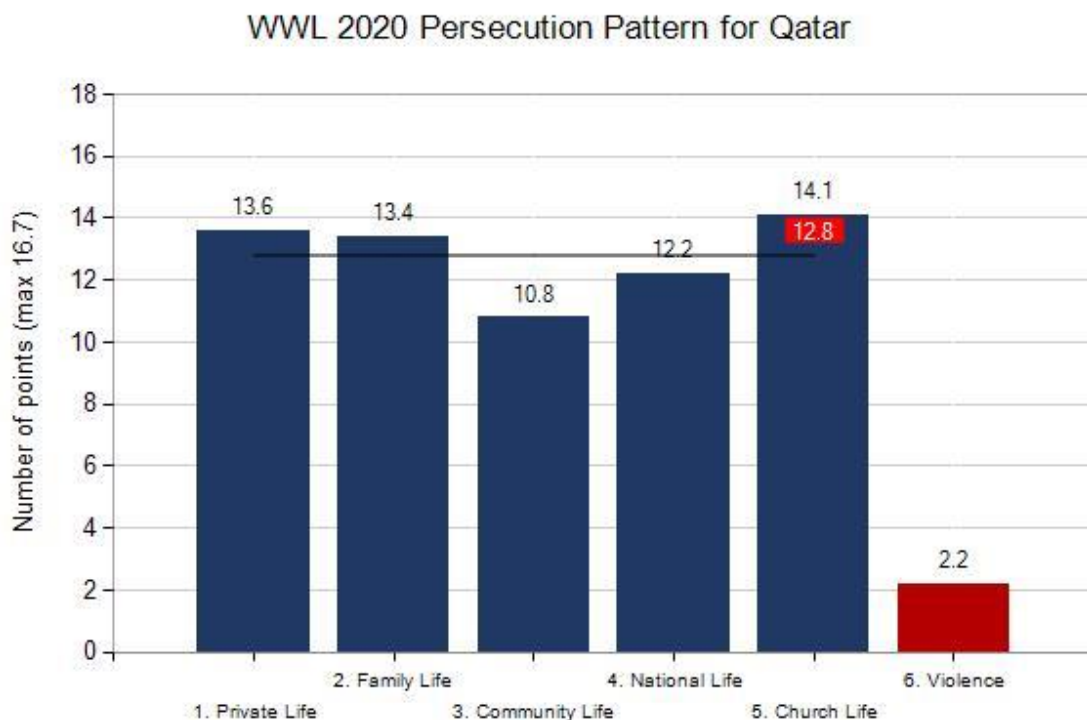
**Historical Christian communities:** All Christians belonging to these communities are already covered by the expatriate category. Hence, these communities are not treated as a separate category for scoring in WWL analysis.

**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 and is 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 WWL analysis, since all Christians here belong to the expatriate category.

## The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2020 Persecution pattern for Qatar shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (12.8 points), increasing from 12.2 in WWL 2019. Pressure on Christians, especially on converts from Islam to Christianity, remains at a very high level. (This increase is mainly due to a reassessment of the situation in the county compared to neighboring countries.)
- 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 1.1 in WWL 2019 to 2.2 in WWL 2020. This rise is due to incidents affecting expatriate Christians, but details cannot be provided for security reasons.

### Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, details are shown from four of the highest scoring block questions, with those items scoring highest listed first. 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 0 – 4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

### Private sphere:

- ***It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.) (Block 1.4 / Score: 3.5 points):*** Converts from Islam to Christianity face the highest risk here as faith-related posts can lead to discovery. However, also expatriate Christians cannot openly proselytize or criticize Islam.
- ***It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols (Block 1.5 / Score: 3.5 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).
- ***It has been risky for Christians to discuss their faith with those other than immediate family members (extended family, others) (Block 1.8 / Score: 3.5 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.
- ***Conversion been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another (Block 1.1 / Score: 3.25 points):*** Indigenous and foreign converts from Islam cannot openly practice their faith. Any hint that they may be Christians can have serious consequences.

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

### Family sphere:

- ***Registering the birth, wedding, death, etc. of Christians has been hindered or made impossible (Block 2.2 / Score: 3.5 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.
- ***Burials of Christians have been hindered or coercively performed with non-Christian rites (Block 2.5 / Score: 3.5 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.
- ***Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs (Block 2.7 / Score: 3.5 points):*** In a society saturated with Islam, it is very difficult for converts to raise their children in a Christian way.



- **Christian children have been pressured to attend anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education (Block 2.8 / Score: 3.5 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.

*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 dominated by conservative Islamic culture.*

#### **Community sphere:**

- **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.) (Block 3.1 / Score: 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).
- **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.) (Block 3.2 / Score: 3.25 points):** All communication is monitored in Qatar, but especially individual Christians involved in proselytism are highly likely to be monitored specifically.
- **Christians have been put under pressure to take part in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events (Block 3.5 / Score: 3.25 points):** All people in Qatar have to observe Ramadan in public, although certain places (like some malls or restaurants) are exempted. Converts will have to observe all Islamic rites, out of fear for discovery.
- **Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith (Block 3.7 / Score: 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).

*Lower-skilled expatriate Christians can face harassment and discrimination in their workplace and community - converts definitely will, 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 Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Block 4.1 / Score: 4 points):*** The legal system is based on Sharia law and conversion to a religion other than Islam is illegal.
- ***Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions (Block 4.9 / Score: 4 points):*** The Qatari government would not allow any NGO with clear Christian convictions to operate in Qatar.
- ***Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public (Block 4.8 / Score: 3.5 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.
- ***Christians, churches or Christian organizations have been hindered in publicly displaying religious symbols (Block 4.12 / Score: 3.75 points):*** Christian symbols can only be publicly displayed within the "Religious Complex", the compound outside Doha where all churches are located.

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

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

### Church sphere:

- ***Activities of churches have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed (Block 5.1 / Score: 4 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.
- ***Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts (Block 5.7 / Score: 4 points):*** This is impossible as converts are not even allowed to enter the "Religious Complex", let alone be part of a Christian community.
- ***Openly selling or distributing Bibles and other Christian materials has been hindered (Block 5.14 / Score: 3.75 points):*** 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.

- ***It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution (Block 5.20 / Score: 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.

*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 concentrated in a district outside the capital, Doha. This brings the risk of ghettoization and monitoring, which usually happens under the authorities’ pretext of ensuring protection. Reportedly, government security services protecting the churches also check for Muslims trying to visit church services. On a more positive note, the Qatari authorities granted land for the Lebanese Maronite and Filipino Evangelical congregations to build churches in 2015. Also, unregistered churches have not been hindered in their gathering for worship.*

## Violence

*The following 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.*

Qatar	Reporting period	Christians killed	Christians attacked	Christians arrested	Churches attacked	Christian-owned houses and shops attacked
WWL 2020	01 Nov 2018 - 31 Oct 2019	0	1100	No details can be published	No details can be published	0
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.*

- **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 reports](#): "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 imposed a temporary travel ban to Kuwait, after the body of a Philippine house-maid was found in a Kuwaiti family [freezer](#) in 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 conservative estimate has been made for the number of Christian house-maids being (sexually) abused because of their faith in the WWL 2020 reporting period.

## 5 Year trends

The following three charts show the situation for Christians in Qatar over the last five reporting periods.

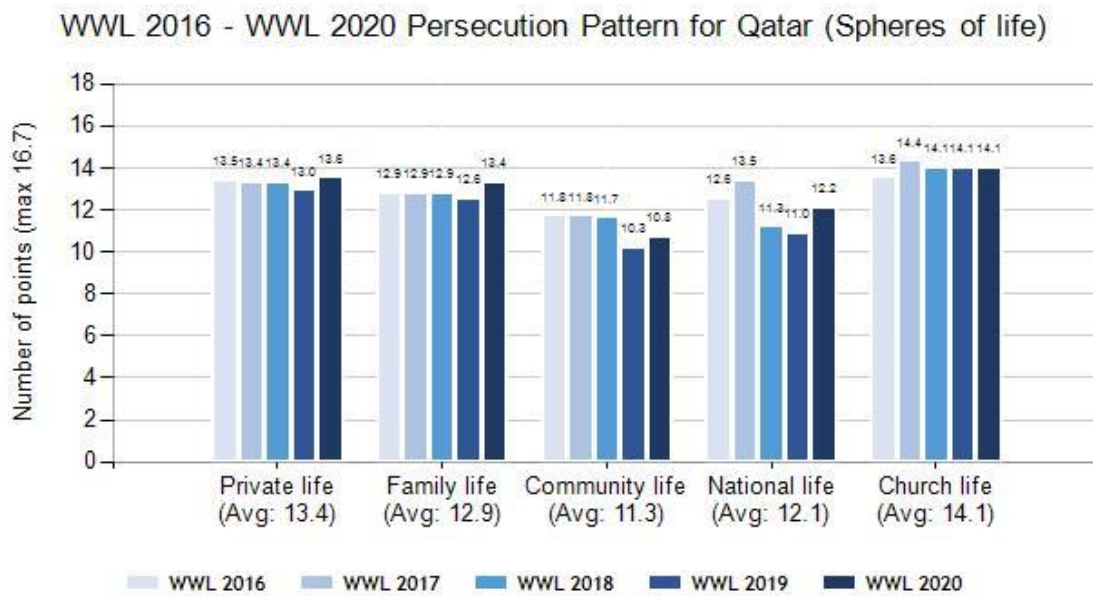
### Chart 1:

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

WWL 2016 - WWL 2020 Persecution Pattern history: Qatar	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2020	12.8
2019	12.2
2018	12.7
2017	13.2
2016	12.9

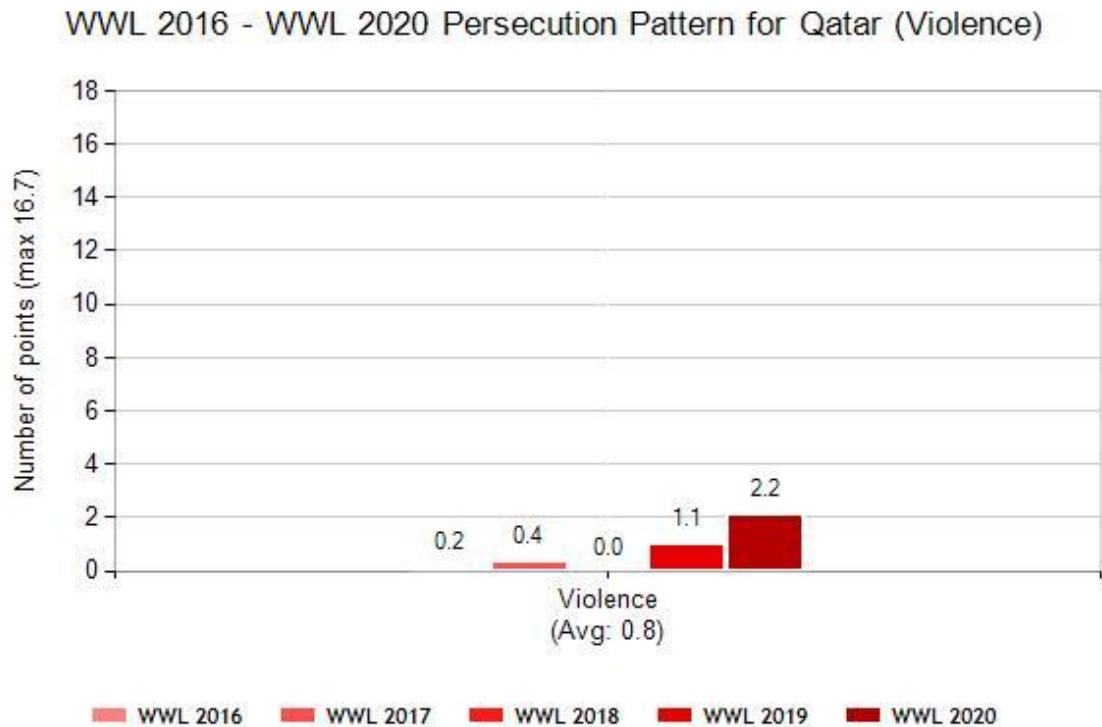
**Chart 2:**

While the levels of pressure in the *Private, Family and Church spheres of life* have been more or less stable over the last five reporting periods, there have been decreases in pressure in the *Community and National spheres of life* in more recent reporting periods.



**Chart 3:**

In the first few reporting periods, the scores for violence have remained more or less stable at a very low level. Although the number of violent incidents recorded in Qatar has not changed dramatically from year to year, there may be an increasing trend emerging since WWL 2019.



## Gender profile of persecution

### Female Pressure Points:

- ***Abduction***
- ***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***
- ***Trafficking***
- ***Travel ban/restriction of movement***
- ***Violence – death***
- ***Violence – physical***
- ***Violence – sexual***
- ***Violence – verbal***

While women in general in Qatar face restrictions and limitations to their human rights, due to Sharia and the cultural Wahabi interpretation of Islam, these same restrictions make Christian women particularly vulnerable to religious persecution. General limitations on women include being required to **obey her husband**, being legally vulnerable to **domestic violence**, and being **restricted legally to inherit half** of what a similarly-situated male relative would receive.

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.

This is especially difficult for female converts to Christianity as their families have the authority to remove rights to travel, keep them under house-arrest, deny access to money locked in their home, and, conversely, expel them from the family home in a society where a woman cannot easily live alone. Conversion from Islam to another religion is forbidden, and those who do so usually must conceal their new religious beliefs. If found, female converts risk being ostracized by their families or communities. They also risk facing physical violence, or even honor killings if their new faith is discovered. Thus, those who convert must 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 has the ability to 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. Further, in Quranic terms, a Qatari 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, resulting in sexual harassment or slave-like treatment. The ill-treatment of migrant workers, including sexual abuse, has become a high-profile issue. Although not primarily faith-related, there are claims that non-Muslim domestic migrant workers, almost all of whom are female, are more vulnerable to such abuse than Muslims.

Among the small number of Iraqi Christians, most pressure and violence comes from family and community - and these would typically be felt most keenly by women and girls first, followed by younger men and then by older men (reflecting levels of status and freedom generally within their culture). Married female converts are likely to be forcibly divorced because the women are the endorsers of faith-values to the children. As such they are intrinsic to the honor of the family. Any shame on the whole family will force it to respond harshly and the convert is almost certain to lose custody of any children.

#### **Male Pressure Points:**

- ***Denied access to social community/networks***
- ***Denied inheritance or possessions***
- ***Economic harassment via work/job/business***
- ***False charges; Forced to flee town/country***
- ***Forced out of home/expulsion***
- ***Incarceration by government***
- ***Violence – death***
- ***Violence – physical***
- ***Violence – psychological***



The repression on non-Islamic religious expression in Qatari society is limited by Christian self-censoring. When a Christian comes under public scrutiny, it is usually men as 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.

Church compounds for expatriates are also highly monitored. The deportation in 2014-2015 of Filipino Christian pastors, on a pretext of espionage, still serves as a stark warning to Christian leaders. 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.

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.

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.

## 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 [2018 International Religious Freedom report](#), only Sunni and Shia Muslims and eight Christian denominations are registered as official religious groups. 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 three Hindu temples in the country. It is assumed that the small Shia community faces some routine discrimination.

## Future outlook for the church

The outlook for Christians as viewed 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. However, with its growing ties with Iran and Turkey, political Islam and Islamist thinking could also get a firmer grip on the country.



- **Clan and ethnic antagonism:** 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 newer 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 - WWL 2020: Persecution Dynamics

- Violence: OECD reports - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/QA.pdf>
- Violence: freezer - <https://gulfnews.com/world/asia/philippines/family-grieves-philippine-maid-found-dead-in-kuwait-freezer-1.2174514>
- Gender profile of persecution: obey her husband - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/qatar>
- Gender profile of persecution: domestic violence - <https://www.amnestyusa.org/countries/qatar/>
- Gender profile of persecution: restricted legally to inherit half - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/QA.pdf%20>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: 2018 International Religious Freedom report - <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/QATAR-2018-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>

## Additional reports and articles

### WWR in-depth reports

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

At the time of publication there were no items specifically for Qatar.

### World Watch Monitor news articles

Articles are available at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/qatar>.

### Recent country developments

Up-to-date articles are available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Qatar> (password: freedom).