

WORLD WATCH LIST 2026

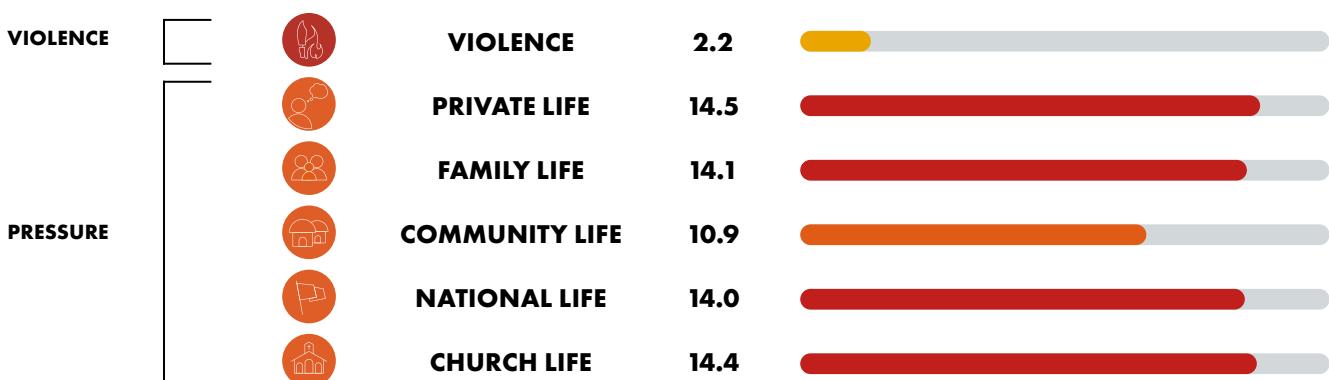
SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

WORLD WATCH LIST NO.
38

OMAN



LEVELS OF VIOLENCE AND PRESSURE



Each of the six categories is scored out of a maximum of 16.7 points. The categories added together total 100 points (6 x 16.7 = 100).

Key findings

During the WWL 2026 reporting period, the Omani government deported an unprecedented number of expatriate Christians accused of proselytizing. Both Omani converts from Islam to Christianity and several expatriate Christians have been detained under these accusations in recent years. Of these two categories present in Oman, converts bear the brunt of persecution. Converts are put under pressure from both the government as well as family and society to recant their faith. They can be expelled from their jobs and homes and face problems with child custody and inheritance. Expatriate Muslims converting to Christianity are primarily controlled by their social environment. Often, the social norms of their home countries apply to them rather than Omani cultural norms. Expatriate Christian communities are tolerated, but their facilities are restricted, and meetings are monitored to record any political statements and the attendance of any Omani nationals.

Quick facts

LEADER

Sultan and Prime Minister
Haitham bin Tarik Al Said

POPULATION

4,781,000

NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

191,000¹

MAIN RELIGION

Islam

GOVERNMENT

Absolute Monarchy



Context

Religious context	Number of adherents	% of adherents in country
Christians	191,000	4.0
Muslims	4,241,000	88.7
Hindus	256,000	5.3
Others	94,000	2.0
Total		100%

Source²

Oman is located on the southeastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula at the crossroads of Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. It has a long maritime tradition that historically connected it with Iraq, Iran and India, and it once ruled the East African island of Zanzibar. While its coastal areas are characterized by multiethnicity and relative tolerance, the inlands are tribal.

Christianity first reached Oman through the missionary work of Theophilus Indus (unknown-364 AD). He erected a church in Sohar, Oman. In 424 AD, Bishop Yohannan from Sohar attended a Nestorian synod. According to tradition, Islam reached Oman in 632 AD, and while Christianity has faded away since then, Sohar's Bishop Stephanus still attended a Church Council in 676 AD. Oman's strategic position on the trade route between Iraq and India fostered continuing contact with Christians, which intensified during Portuguese rule (1515-1650) and later under British influence after treaties in 1798 and 1891 made Oman a

British Protectorate, encouraging foreign presence. In 1893, missionaries Peter Zwemer and James Cantine established the Muscat Station, leading to a strong medical ministry and the founding of the Protestant Church of Oman, which remains active in Muscat (Ruwi and Ghala), Salalah and Sohar. The Roman Catholic Church re-established its presence in the region in the mid-19th century, eventually overseeing Catholics in Oman from Abu Dhabi, with the first Catholic church in Oman built in Muscat in 1977.

The country is ruled by a monarch (Sultan Haitham bin Tariq since January 2020) and classed as authoritarian. Oman's Basic Law declares Islam as the state religion and Islamic law as the basis for legislation. Religious activities are strictly regulated, and non-Muslim worship is only permitted in designated church compounds. Expatriate Christians generally have freedom to worship within these designated compounds provided they do not engage in proselytism. Just like all other Omanis and expatriates in the country, Christians and churches understand their online activities are monitored and that they need to avoid discussing sensitive issues in public.

Most Omanis practice a brand of Islam unique to Oman called Ibadism, which has been characterized as "moderate conservatism", a mixture of austerity and tolerance. Ibadi Muslims are generally tolerant of non-Muslims, which has contributed to Oman's international image as a model of tolerance and diplomacy. However, pressure on Omani converts from Islam to Christianity, and on expatriate Christians involved in proselytizing, remains very high.

¹Gina A. Zurlo, ed., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2025

² Other refers to all the rest to make up 100%: Gina A. Zurlo, ed., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2025

Main sources of persecution and discrimination

ISLAMIC OPPRESSION

Converts to Christianity from an Omani Muslim background face the highest levels of pressure from family, who see conversion as a betrayal of family honor and will likely expel converts from their home. For converts from Islam originating from elsewhere (e.g., Pakistan or the Levant), much depends on the response within their surrounding community in Oman. As long as they avoid unrest, they have less to fear from the Omani government, although their Omani employers can dismiss them, risking deportation if no new job is found. The government does not recognize conversion and suspected Omani converts have been interrogated by officials, commanded to stop meeting, and have faced legal problems and threats of losing their jobs and homes. Proselytizing is illegal and punishable under the law. While no Christians have been formally prosecuted for proselytizing, some have been expelled without due process in recent years.

CLAN OPPRESSION

Tribal values are blended with Islamic values: to be Omani is to be Muslim, and to leave the faith is a dishonor and shame to family and society. Converts face the risk of being ostracized or subjected to immense pressure to return to Islam.

DICTATORIAL PARANOIA

Freedom House rates the country as “not free” (Freedom House/Global Freedom 2025) and states: “The regime restricts virtually all political rights and civil liberties, imposing criminal penalties for criticism and dissent.” The media also faces harassment and intimidation. Pressure on Christians in this regard has further increased under the new Sultan, with most Christians applying strict self-censorship to avoid accusations of proselytizing or criticizing the government.

How the situation varies by region

Omani society remains strongly tribal and openly shaped by Islamic traditions. Although Muscat and the coastal areas are considered more tolerant, levels of pressure on Christians are high throughout the country. Government pressure has increased in recent years and is now affecting the whole country.

Who is affected?

COMMUNITIES OF EXPATRIATE CHRISTIANS

Most Christian expatriates, primarily from the Philippines, India and Western countries, are concentrated in urban areas. Several expatriate communities, including Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Protestant groups, are found in cities like Muscat and Sohar in the north and Salalah in the south. Their facilities face restrictions to avoid offending local nationals.

HISTORICAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

This category is not included in the WWL scoring and analysis.

CONVERTS TO CHRISTIANITY

Converts to Christianity from Islam risk isolation and pressure to renounce their faith from family and society. They can lose citizenship and child custody, as the law prohibits a father who leaves Islam from retaining paternal rights over his children.

NON-TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

This category is not included in the WWL scoring and analysis.



How are men and women differently affected?

WOMEN

In Oman's conservative society, women live under strict male guardianship reinforced by the Personal Status Law, which limits their rights in marriage, custody and inheritance. Converts to Christianity face house arrest, isolation, denial of Christian resources and abuse from their families. Unmarried converts may be coerced into marriage with Muslim men, while women registered as Muslims are legally barred from marrying Christians. Although not primarily faith related, Christian migrant housemaids often endure sexual abuse and slave-like treatment.

Female typical pressure points:

- Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites
- Denied access to social community/networks
- Denied food or water
- Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse
- Enforced religious dress code
- Forced marriage
- Incarceration by family (house arrest)
- Travel bans/restrictions on movement
- Violence – physical
- Violence – psychological
- Violence – sexual
- Violence – verbal

MEN

For men in Oman, conversion from Islam to Christianity brings severe consequences. Male converts are ostracized by family and community, losing vital financial support, education and job opportunities in Oman's network-based society. No family will permit their daughter to marry a convert, and married men risk divorce and automatic loss of child custody, as the law deems them unfit guardians. Many are expelled from their homes, left in extreme vulnerability. Expatriate Christian men face workplace discrimination and risk losing work permits for visible faith activities.

Male typical pressure points:

- Denied custody of children
- Denied inheritance or possessions
- Violence – verbal



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WWL 5 year trend

WWL Year	Position on Open Doors World Watch List	Persecution rounded score out of 100
2026	38	70
2025	32	70
2024	31	69
2023	47	65
2022	36	66

Oman retained an overall rounded score of 70 points. During WWL 2026, an unprecedented number of foreign Christians accused of proselytism were forced to leave the country. However, less other violent incidents were reported overall, causing a decrease in the violence score from 3.0 to 2.2 points. This was partially offset by pressure increasing in the National and Church spheres of life. Omani citizens who convert to Christianity continue to be put under pressure from the government, family and society to recant their faith. Expatriate Christian communities are tolerated, but their facilities are restricted and monitored and any act of evangelism is strictly prohibited.

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Examples of violence in the reporting period

Christians in Oman, especially suspected converts from a Muslim background, are strictly monitored by the security services, forcing them into self-censorship. Most Omani converts from Islam to Christianity keep their new faith hidden and are forced to practice privately and individually. They are highly aware of the volatile consequences of breaking family norms and have seen and heard of the consequences for those converts in Oman and other Gulf countries who have revealed their new faith or attempted to gather with other Christians, namely severe physical, mental and emotional abuse by family members and local authorities. Many converts distance themselves from expatriate Christians, fearing their relationship might endanger them too. The expatriate Christian community remains monitored and is frequently obliged to self-censor. No further details can be shared due to security concerns.



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PRIVATE LIFE

Expatriate Christians whom the government suspects of evangelizing to Muslims can be accused of proselytism, which can lead to deportation. Oman is one of the few countries where Islam is the state religion, but conversion is not a crime as long as it is not done publicly. Given the tribal culture, however, a convert will be ostracized and lose all social security normally provided by the family.

FAMILY LIFE

All children born to Omani parents, including converts to Christianity, are considered Muslim. Non-Muslim children cannot be exempted from compulsory Islamic classes in state schools. A convert husband will lose his right to custody upon divorce (this would not be different for a convert wife, but women, in general, do have custody rights).

COMMUNITY LIFE

Christians, especially suspected converts and expatriates suspected of evangelism, are monitored by the government and society, who will inform the security services if they are aware of any “suspicious circumstances” or disruptions to societal norms. They can be harassed or interrogated by the police. In a tribal society like Oman, employment is usually obtained through family relationships.

Suspected Omani converts face significant challenges in obtaining employment. Christian expatriate workers may experience discrimination. Their Christian faith is an extra vulnerability in this regard, although racism is a prevailing factor.

NATIONAL LIFE

The Omani Constitution (Article 28) only guarantees the “freedom to practice religious rites” under the condition that they “do not ... contradict morals”. Hence, there is no freedom to convert from Islam to Christianity. Christians will try to keep a low political profile in order to avoid provoking a hostile reaction from the government. Only Christian organizations offering a clear benefit to Omani society (e.g., a hospital) are welcomed.

CHURCH LIFE

Churches apply self-censorship and are careful not to organize public activities or print large quantities of Christian material that would be interpreted as proselytism. The government acts against any church that integrates converts. The publication, import and distribution of religious materials are heavily regulated; churches are no longer allowed to use their own channels for importing Bibles. All religious organizations must be registered with the authorities.

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International obligations & rights violated

Oman has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights under the following international treaties:

1. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ([ICESCR](#))
2. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women ([CEDAW](#))
3. Convention on the Rights of the Child ([CRC](#))

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

- Children of Christian converts are forced to receive Muslim religious education and to participate in religious ceremonies and festivals that are not in line with their religious beliefs (CRC Art. 14)
- Female converts to Christianity do not have the option of marrying a Christian spouse, as women registered as Muslims are legally restricted from marrying a non-Muslim (CEDAW Article 16)

Situation of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department, Hindus, Buddhists and non-Ibadi Muslims are relatively free to practice their own beliefs and gather in designated areas. Although officially prohibited, they also meet in private locations. Atheism is viewed with suspicion in Oman and frequently disparaged by clerics, including the Grand Mufti. All religious places, including mosques, are strictly regulated to avoid political discontent being expressed.



Open Doors in Oman

Open Doors raises prayer support for the believers/church in Oman.



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ABOUT THIS DOSSIER

- The content of this Country Dossier is based on detailed analysis carried out by World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. This dossier may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © 2026 Open Doors International.
- All 50 Country Dossiers – along with the latest update of WWL Methodology – can be accessed [here](#).
- The WWL 2026 reporting period was 01 October 2024 - 30 September 2025.

All photos in this dossier are for illustrative purposes.