

# WORLD WATCH LIST 2026

SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

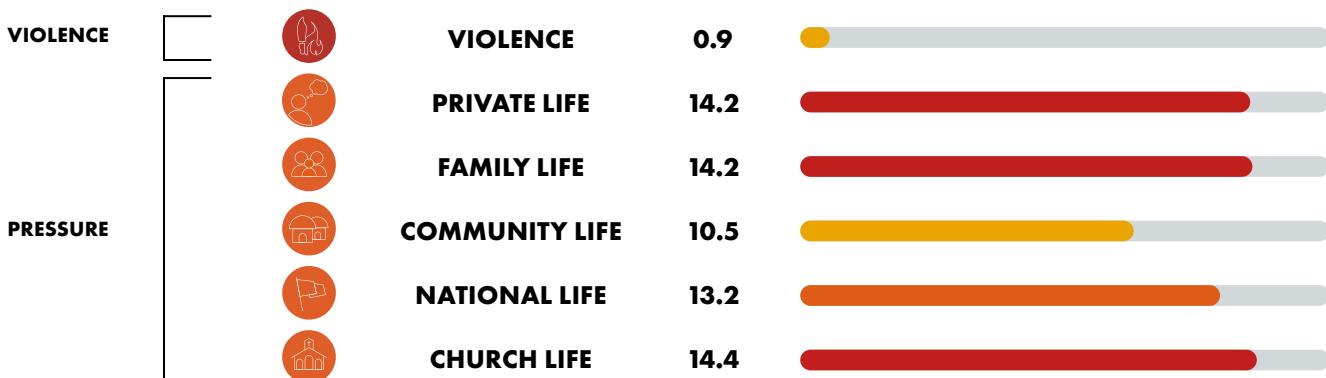
WORLD WATCH LIST NO.  
**44**

## QATAR



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### 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 ( $6 \times 16.7 = 100$ ).

### Key findings

There are two main categories of Christians in Qatar. The first and largest group is made up of migrant workers. A persistent issue they face is the lack of sufficient church space at the official Religious Complex outside the capital, Doha. In January 2025, the Evangelical Churches Alliances Qatar (ECAQ) began building a church to serve its 129 member congregations. While large worship events previously have been permitted, proselytizing Muslims is strictly forbidden and can result in prosecution and deportation. Many Christian migrant workers endure poor living and working conditions, while their Christian faith adds to their vulnerability. The second group includes converts from Islam to Christianity. They face intense pressure from their families, while migrant converts are primarily controlled by the norms of their home communities rather than Qatari cultural practices. Both groups risk discrimination, harassment, and surveillance by authorities. Changing religion from Islam is not officially recognized, which creates serious legal challenges in matters of personal status and property.

## Quick facts

### LEADER

Emir Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani

### POPULATION

2,757,000

### NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

390,000<sup>1</sup>

### MAIN RELIGION

Islam

### GOVERNMENT

Absolute Monarchy



## Context

Religious context	Number of adherents	% of adherents in country
Christians	390,000	14.2
Muslims	1,778,000	64.5
Hindus	466,000	16.9
Others	122,700	4.4
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>

Source<sup>2</sup>

Qatar is a peninsula on the northeastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula, bordered by Saudi Arabia to the south and surrounded by the Persian Gulf, which has historically made it a crossroads for trade and cultural exchange between Iraq, Iran, and India. Once a pearl fishing nation, Qatar's exploitation of oil and gas fields since the 1940s has resulted in a prosperous state.

The country is an absolute monarchy ruled by the al-Thani family. The state distributes its wealth generously, which has largely resulted in the absence of much of the social and economic discontent affecting other countries in the wider region. Qataris are a largely homogeneous group with strong family ties, and many aim to maintain their Islamic norms and cultural identity in the face of growing Westernization. Qatar's constitution establishes Islam as the state religion and Islamic law as a primary legislative source, while guaranteeing freedom of religious practice as long as public order and morality are maintained. Muslims are effectively

prohibited from changing their religion, and non-Islamic proselytism is strictly forbidden, carrying prison sentences and deportation.

Remnants of a Nestorian church on Qatar's south-east coast and a Nestorian cross found in central Qatar provide rare material evidence of early Christianity in the region. Documentary evidence suggests that Nestorian and Arab Christians settled in Qatar as early as the 4th-5th centuries, with figures like Isaac of Nineveh, a renowned 7th-century bishop, originating there. Nestorian Christianity flourished in Qatar and the wider Gulf until a few centuries after the rise of Islam, after which it faded. Due to its strategic location on maritime routes between Iraq and India, Qatar maintained contact with Christian communities even after its own Christian population disappeared.

The Christian presence in the country has been growing again since the start of the development of the industrial production of gas and oil industry in the 1970s and the subsequent influx of expatriate workers. Although expatriate Christians have 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. The Qatari government considers Christianity a foreign influence, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regulating churches in the country.

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

<sup>2</sup> 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

Qatari government policy and culture are dictated by strict adherence to Wahhabi Islam and Sharia law. Converts from Islam to Christianity, by default, are treated as second-class citizens who risk the loss of economic support, family security and legal protection on account of their Christian faith.

### CLAN OPPRESSION

Tribalism still plays a huge role in Qatari society. Religion is highly connected to family identity. Leaving Islam is interpreted as betraying one's family. In general, families put strong social pressure on converts to make them return to Islam. In many cases, converts are alienated from their families.

### DIKTATORIAL PARANOIA

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 political 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 expatriates must behave carefully as they can easily be expelled from the country.

## How the situation varies by region

Qatar is a very small country, with the capital Doha being the center of all activities. The risks faced by Christians, and especially by converts from Islam to Christianity, depend on their community. Local converts from Islam endure the most persecution as they face family and societal pressure, while expatriate converts to Christianity experience similar pressures as in their home countries, as they often live within their own national or ethnic communities.

## Who is affected?

### COMMUNITIES OF EXPATRIATE CHRISTIANS

Most Christian workers in Qatar are migrants from Asia, mainly Roman Catholics. Other Christian migrants come from Africa. Many of these workers face poor treatment irrespective of their religion, but Christians are especially vulnerable and some are pressured to become Muslims. Overcrowding in existing churches and strict government restrictions makes it difficult for them to practice their faith, and using residential spaces for worship is increasingly challenging.

### HISTORICAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Historical Christian communities are included in the expatriate category.

### CONVERTS TO CHRISTIANITY

Converts to Christianity from a Muslim background in Qatar face severe rights violations, including legal punishment, social discrimination and even threats to their lives. Seen as betraying both faith and family, they endure intense pressure from relatives, employers and the community to renounce their Christian faith.

### NON-TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Non-traditional Christian communities are included in the expatriate category.



## How are men and women differently affected?

### **WOMEN**

Restrictions on women's rights due to Sharia and the cultural Wahhabi interpretation of Islam make women vulnerable. If their conversion is discovered, female converts risk ostracization, house arrest and being cut off from all means of communication. They may further be harshly beaten, expelled from their homes or subjected to forced medical mental health treatment or exorcism. Qatari converts are legally restricted from marrying a non-Muslim and risk forced marriage to a Muslim as a corrective measure. Housemaids working in Qatar, many of whom are Christians, often face sexual harassment or slave-like treatment.

#### **Female typical pressure points:**

- Denied access to Christian religious materials
- Denied inheritance or possessions
- Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse
- Forced marriage
- Incarceration by family (house arrest)
- Violence – sexual

### **MEN**

Besides official restrictions on non-Islamic religious expression, Christians try to keep a low profile by self-censoring. Male Christians come under public scrutiny, since it is men who are visible in the public sphere and at the forefront of interaction with the authorities. Those in Christian leadership, who are typically male, are required to report details of church activities, subjecting them to scrutiny. Converts risk domestic pressure; if discovered, families can threaten the removal of their wife and children, leaving them isolated or they can be forced out of their homes. They can additionally face pressures in the area of employment, impacting status and financial stability.

#### **Male typical pressure points:**

- Economic harassment via business/job/work access
- Forced out of home – expulsion
- Imprisonment by government
- Violence – physical
- Violence – psychological



## WWL 5 year trend

WWL Year	Position on Open Doors World Watch List	Persecution rounded score out of 100
2026	44	67
2025	41	67
2024	40	67
2023	34	68
2022	18	74

The overall score remained the same. Average pressure on Christians, especially on converts from Islam to Christianity, remained at the very high level of 13.3 points. Violence remained below 1 point. Converts both from an indigenous and migrant background experience the most difficulty in living out their faith. Converts continued to face restrictions and persecution from the government, society and their own families. Expatriate Christian communities are tolerated, but their facilities are restricted and monitored, while acts of evangelism are strictly prohibited.

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## Examples of violence in the reporting period

Violent incidents against Christians are rarely reported, perhaps because Christian migrant workers who are targeted want to keep their jobs and the government prefers not to have a record of such occurrences in their files. It also can be difficult to discern whether or not a case of mistreatment has been due to a worker's Christian faith or some other factor. However, it is estimated that thousands of expatriate Christians face abuse. According to a 2020 report by Amnesty International (AI, "Why do you want to rest", 2020), thousands of migrant workers are suffering from labor abuses despite initiatives and laws to improve labor conditions. As highlighted in an earlier report (AI, "My Sleep Is My Break", 2014), sexual abuse of female migrant workers, many of whom are Christian, is common. Pressure on converts from Islam to Christianity remains very high.



## PRIVATE LIFE

Private practice of the Christian faith is made difficult for both converts and expatriate workers (such as construction laborers) due to social, economic and legal pressures. Public practice of Christianity is illegal. Doing so could be interpreted as either criticism of Islam or proselytization, both of which risk severe legal penalties such as prison or deportation. Furthermore, social deviance from Islam by revealing one's Christian faith can result in public harassment or loss of economic opportunity.

## FAMILY LIFE

Raising and maintaining a Christian family for converts to Christianity is difficult due to high social pressure. Since there is no recognition of conversion from Islam to Christianity, the state refuses to recognize Christian ceremonies such as the marriage of converts from Islam to Christianity. Children of parents who have converted to Christianity cannot be exempted from Islamic education. Finally, all families are beholden to Sharia law, which can result in the forced separation of children from family members for those who convert to Christianity.

## COMMUNITY LIFE

Qatari society is dominated by adherence to Wahhabism, a fundamentalist interpretation of

the Islamic faith and Sharia law. As such, local communities and authorities can quickly become hostile to those viewed as "foreign" or in opposition to Islam. Expatriate Christians can face harassment and discrimination on the basis of ethnic and religious differences in wider Qatari society.

## NATIONAL LIFE

Qatar's government is an Islamic absolute monarchy, and its legal system is based on Sharia law. As a result, the authorities restrict the activities of Christian non-governmental organizations, censor public Christian expressions of faith, and may arrest or deport individuals who are seen as criticizing Islam or the State.

## CHURCH LIFE

Qatar's first church was cautiously opened in 2008 marking a large step forward for the growing community of expatriate workers, mainly from South Asia and the Philippines. However, the opening was surrounded by controversy, with many Qatari nationals opposing an officially Christian building in a Muslim country. Police patrols monitor the complex constantly, both to ensure Christians abide by regulations and to maintain peace. Due to regulations, it is increasingly becoming difficult to use villas outside the church complex to gather for worship.



## International obligations & rights violated

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

1. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ([ICCPR](#))
2. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ([ICESCR](#))
3. Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment ([CAT](#))
4. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women ([CEDAW](#))
5. Convention on the Rights of the Child ([CRC](#))

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

- Christians face restrictions in employment in the public sector and experience discrimination in the private sector (ICCPR Arts. 25 and 26, and ICESCR Art. 6)
- Christian converts are ostracized and faced with opposition by their families and threatened with divorce and loss of child custody (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christian children are harassed because of their parents' faith (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Christians face harassment and violence if they talk about their faith or engage in proselytization (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)

## Situation of other religious minorities

Adherents of Baha'i in Qatar face government intimidation, including employment discrimination, non-renewal of work permits and pressure that has forced many to leave the country. The Baha'i community has reported ongoing discrimination and restrictions with little improvement despite efforts to engage authorities. Meanwhile, the sizeable expatriate Hindu and Buddhist communities, though not officially recognized, are generally tolerated and maintain several unofficial temples, but members express a desire for a formally recognized place of worship.



## Open Doors in Qatar

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



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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.

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