



## QATAR: Country Dossier

June 2018



**Open Doors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research Unit

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# World Watch List 2018

		1. Private Life	2. Family Life	3. Community Life	4. National Life	5. Church Life	6. Violence	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2018	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2017	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2016	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2015	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2014
Rank	Country	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	92	92	92	90
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.0	93	89	88	81	78
3	Somalia	16.0	16.2	16.1	16.3	16.4	10.4	91	91	87	90	80
4	Sudan	14.2	14.5	14.3	15.6	16.0	12.0	87	87	84	80	73
5	Pakistan	14.4	13.5	13.8	15.0	13.1	16.7	86	88	87	79	77
6	Eritrea	15.2	14.5	15.8	16.1	15.2	9.4	86	82	89	79	72
7	Libya	15.2	15.3	14.2	15.7	15.5	10.4	86	78	79	76	71
8	Iraq	14.7	14.7	14.9	14.9	15.1	11.3	86	86	90	86	78
9	Yemen	16.7	16.6	16.4	16.5	16.7	2.6	85	85	78	73	74
10	Iran	14.0	14.1	14.5	15.8	16.4	10.0	85	85	83	80	77
11	India	12.6	12.7	13.2	14.7	12.9	14.4	81	73	68	62	55
12	Saudi Arabia	14.9	13.7	14.2	15.5	16.4	4.1	79	76	76	77	78
13	Maldives	15.2	15.5	13.5	15.8	16.7	1.1	78	76	76	78	77
14	Nigeria	11.8	11.5	13.1	12.1	12.1	16.5	77	78	78	78	70
15	Syria	14.4	14.3	14.1	14.5	14.7	3.7	76	86	87	83	79
16	Uzbekistan	15.5	12.1	13.0	13.1	16.0	3.5	73	71	70	69	68
17	Egypt	11.3	12.8	12.2	11.7	9.5	12.4	70	65	64	61	61
18	Vietnam	12.4	8.4	12.7	14.2	13.8	7.4	69	71	66	68	65
19	Turkmenistan	15.2	10.3	12.9	12.8	15.2	1.9	68	67	66	63	62
20	Laos	12.9	8.6	13.6	13.9	14.9	3.5	67	64	58	58	62
21	Jordan	13.2	13.3	11.5	10.9	13.0	4.3	66	63	59	56	56
22	Tajikistan	13.3	11.3	11.8	11.8	12.9	4.3	65	58	58	50	47
23	Malaysia	12.0	14.9	12.8	12.4	9.3	3.9	65	60	58	55	49
24	Myanmar	11.6	11.1	13.2	10.4	11.0	7.8	65	62	62	60	59
25	Nepal	12.6	11.9	10.7	11.5	12.4	4.6	64		(not in WWL)		
26	Brunei	14.3	14.2	10.7	10.2	13.5	0.9	64	64	61	58	57
27	Qatar	13.4	12.9	11.7	11.3	14.1	0.0	63	66	65	64	63
28	Kazakhstan	12.8	10.0	10.2	12.2	13.7	3.7	63	56	55	51	49
29	Ethiopia	9.8	10.0	10.8	10.9	10.5	10.4	62	64	67	61	65
30	Tunisia	11.9	13.2	10.6	10.7	12.0	3.9	62	61	58	55	55
31	Turkey	12.5	9.7	9.8	11.7	9.6	8.7	62	57	55	52	(not in WWL)
32	Kenya	12.0	10.9	10.0	7.9	11.7	9.4	62	68	68	63	48
33	Bhutan	11.9	11.6	12.4	11.4	13.1	1.1	62	61	56	56	54
34	Kuwait	13.4	12.6	11.6	10.9	12.3	0.4	61	57	56	49	50
35	Central African Republic	9.0	8.1	10.1	8.9	8.8	16.1	61	58	59	67	67
36	Palestinian Territories	12.1	12.8	10.7	10.5	12.6	1.1	60	64	62	58	53
37	Mali	11.4	9.6	11.2	8.1	9.2	9.6	59	59	55	52	54
38	Indonesia	10.3	11.0	11.5	10.0	9.3	6.9	59	55	55	50	46
39	Mexico	8.3	7.6	12.1	10.7	9.7	10.4	59	57	56	55	(not in WWL)
40	United Arab Emirates	13.6	12.2	10.0	10.4	11.8	0.2	58	55	55	49	51
41	Bangladesh	10.4	8.8	11.4	9.6	7.5	10.0	58	63	57	51	46
42	Algeria	12.3	13.1	7.5	10.4	12.4	2.0	58	58	56	55	54
43	China	9.2	7.2	8.0	10.7	13.3	9.1	57	57	57	57	51
44	Sri Lanka	11.1	7.6	10.5	11.3	10.1	6.9	57	55	(not in WWL)	51	55
45	Azerbaijan	13.1	9.1	9.3	11.1	12.4	2.4	57	(not in WWL)	57	50	(not in WWL)
46	Oman	12.1	12.2	9.9	9.4	12.6	1.1	57	53	53	55	56
47	Mauritania	11.5	11.3	11.1	12.2	11.0	0.0	57	55	(not in WWL)	50	51
48	Bahrain	12.9	13.1	10.2	9.9	10.3	0.2	57	54	54	(not in WWL)	48
49	Colombia	7.9	7.6	11.9	8.6	8.5	11.9	56	53	55	55	56
50	Djibouti	12.2	12.2	10.3	9.9	11.7	0.0	56	57	58	60	46

## WWL 2018 Persecution Watch Countries<sup>1</sup>

		1. Private Life	2. Family Life	3. Community Life	4. National Life	5. Church Life	6. Violence	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2018
Rank	Country	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score
51	Comoros	11.7	11.5	9.1	9.4	13.9	0.4	56
52	Kyrgyzstan	11.7	9.5	10.0	8.1	11.6	2.8	54
53	Tanzania	10.1	10.3	10.1	9.5	9.0	3.9	53
54	Russian Federation	11.1	8.4	10.1	8.9	10.7	2.0	51
55	Morocco	10.4	11.5	7.6	8.8	12.0	0.6	51
56	Cuba	8.5	4.9	10.7	10.4	12.2	2.4	49
57	Uganda	10.9	8.7	9.5	8.7	4.8	3.9	46
58	Niger	9.9	9.7	9.0	7.0	7.1	2.6	45

<sup>1</sup> These countries reached a score of 41 points or more but did not receive enough points to be included in the WWL Top 50.

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## Introduction

This country report is a collation of documents based around [Open Doors World Watch List \(WWL\)](#)<sup>1</sup> including statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations, and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database ([WCD](#))<sup>2</sup>. Further news and analysis is supplied by [World Watch Monitor](#)<sup>3</sup> and WWR staff.

QATAR		
World Watch List	Score	Rank
WWL 2018	63	27
WWL 2017	66	20
WWL 2016	65	21
WWL 2015	64	18
WWL 2014	63	19

<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/countries/>

<sup>2</sup> WCD website: <http://www.brill.com/publications/online-resources/world-christian-database>

<sup>3</sup> See: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/>

# WWL 2018: Keys to understanding QATAR

## Link for general background information:

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

## Recent country history

Since declaring independence from Great Britain in 1971, Qatar has gone through massive economic, social and political changes. The country has been dominated by the Al Thani family for almost 150 years. Once a poor (pearl-) fishing nation, Qatar has developed into a prosperous and modern country, due to the exploitation of oil and gas fields since the 1940s.

Until June 2017, Qatar seemed to be a stable nation, maintaining friendly relations with the USA and Saudi Arabia, but also with Iran, Hamas and Hezbollah. It is also the only Arab nation to have trade relations with Israel. Apart for a few online protests, the Arab Spring did not seem to cause any unrest in Qatar, despite its active role in the Arab Spring movement abroad. This suddenly changed when certain Gulf countries and Egypt, led by Saudi-Arabia, cut off all diplomatic and economic ties between 5 and 6 June 2017. Since then, all land and sea borders between Qatar and respectively Saudi-Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates have been closed.

The official reason for the boycott is Qatar's alleged support for terrorist groups. More important is the quite independent role Qatar has sought to establish for itself, especially through its news station Al-Jazeera (AJ), the Middle East's most watched satellite TV channel, founded in 1996. It is said to have been an engine of the Arab Spring and also served as a mouthpiece for opposition leaders and insurgents. AJ did also not withhold from criticizing governments of neighboring countries, and this might especially have caused the wrath of Saudi Arabia and its allies. Next to that, Qatar has maintained friendly ties with Iran, the arch enemy of the Saudi kingdom. With this move, Saudi Arabia might try to force Qatar back into the vassal role it had in the past. Although US President Donald Trump probably (indirectly) has emboldened the Saudi's to take this step, the US government, strategic ally to both countries, has called upon the countries to find a peaceful solution for their conflict. However, it does not seem that the crisis will be solved in the short term.

## The religious landscape

Qatar has been relatively lenient towards the growing Christian expatriate community and has provided land to build churches. The country's first official Christian house of worship was built in 2008; the second was opened in 2009. Officially recognized denominations with church facilities built in official compounds are the Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Anglican and Indian Orthodox churches. Other Christian groups can operate under the patronage of these recognized churches. In 2015, the Filipino Evangelical Church obtained recognition and "was granted land for a place of worship alongside other churches

within the ‘Religious Complex’, and approval has also been given for a Maronite church”.<sup>4</sup> Although most local Christian expatriates welcome this development, there is a flipside since churches concentrated in one area can lead to “ghettoization”. As such, Christians can also be easily controlled and monitored – which usually happens under the pretext of ensuring their safety.

## The political landscape

Apart from a few online protests against the powerful Emir and his perceived pro-Western foreign policy, there have been hardly any open anti-government criticism or revolts in Qatar. Salaries for security service members and other Qatari public sector employees were increased considerably and a few domestic policy reforms were announced, but these are not considered to be any more than cosmetic and are aimed at preventing criticism of Qatar’s support for opposition movements abroad in the face of the country’s own lack of democracy at home. On the other hand, the conservative and mostly Wahhabi Qataris are not so in favor of democracy. They perceive this as a Western concept which leads to difficult situations as witnessed in several democratized Arab countries. Unusual for the region, there is no social or economic discontent expressed, since the state distributes its wealth generously. This materialistic saturation leads to political apathy. Another factor is the little political influence religious scholars have and the absence of sectarian divisions. However, Qatar did and does play an active role in the Arab Spring abroad, especially in Libya where it cooperated in military intervention. In Iraq and Syria, as in Libya, it is aiding Islamic militants. Nevertheless, it supported the ruling government of Bahrain by sending troops to crackdown on revolting Shiites. Stability in the Gulf region and a Sunni, pro Islamist agenda are obviously significant factors here.

## The socio-economic landscape

Qatar – which has the world’s third largest natural gas reserves - has had the world’s highest GDP growth rate for years. Petroleum plays a pivotal role in many aspects. “Despite the government’s concerted diversification efforts, oil and gas revenues still account for around half of GDP, some 90% of fiscal receipts and the bulk of exports, making the country highly vulnerable to global price swings.”<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, there is still harrowing poverty among some migrant communities, especially the Nepalese. The government is encouraging diversification of the economy and the development of a more knowledge-based society.

The large number of foreign workers also plays an important role in the progress of Qatar. The population is composed almost entirely of migrant laborers - more than 80% of the country’s population – which is the world’s highest ratio of migrants/citizens. Expatriates (including some from the West) are generally perceived and treated by Qataris as slaves. Working conditions for these migrants can be inhumane and dangerous; they face underpayment, lack of proper living conditions (e.g. unsanitary, overcrowded labor camps), domestic violence and sexual abuse. It is not uncommon for them to die in the work place. Forced labor and human trafficking are also major problems. Since 2013, reports by civil society groups unveiled that

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.meconcern.org/countries/qatar/>, last accessed on 27 July 2017.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.focus-economics.com/countries/qatar/>, last accessed on 27 July 2017.

workers in Qatar are experiencing “modern-day slavery”.<sup>6</sup> This has become a serious issue as Qatar is preparing itself to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup. The accusation concerning modern-day slavery is particularly relevant in the context of domestic work. According to Amnesty International, reporting in April 2014: “The Qatari authorities are failing to protect migrant domestic workers who face severe exploitation, including forced labor and physical and sexual violence”.<sup>7</sup>

## Concluding remarks

Despite the political crisis with Saudi Arabia and allied countries, the political, social and economic situation of Qatar does not seem unstable - also due to its ample fiscal buffers.<sup>8</sup> 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 could harm Qatar’s economy in the long term, which might cause an economic fallback for all immigrant workers, including the Christians among them.

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

As it prepares for the 2022 FIFA World Cup, Qatar and its deplorable treatment of migrant workers have increasingly caught the world’s attention. Under pressure from the West, Qatar is implementing minor - according to human rights organizations: cosmetic - reforms in the labor conditions for migrant workers. In spite of the pressure to improve human rights in Qatar, no major improvements are expected in the strict Islamic country which is known for its overall control of society. As such, no major changes in religious freedom for Christians are expected in the near future.

## WWL 2018: Church History and Facts

### How many Christians?

Pop 2017	Christians	Chr%
2,338,000	211,000	9.0

Source: WCD, May 2017

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2016/03/qatar-world-cup-of-shame/>, last accessed on 27 July 2017.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2014/04/foreign-domestic-workers-qatar-shocking-cases-deception-forced-labour-violence>, last accessed on 27 July 2017.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.focus-economics.com/countries/qatar>, last accessed on 27 July 2017.

## How did Christians get there?

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

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

## What church networks exist today? <sup>10</sup>

Orthodox	Catholic	Protestant	Independent	Unaffiliated	Double-aff	Evangelical	Renewalist
6,000	167,000	16,500	11,900	9,000	-	4,800	38,300

Source: WCD, May 2017

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

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

<sup>9</sup> Bonnéric, J.: Christianity in the Arab-Persian Gulf: an ancient but still obscure history, *Le carnet de la MAFKF, Recherches archéologiques franco-koweïtiennes de l'île de Failaka (Koweït)*, 23 December 2015, available at <http://mafkf.hypotheses.org/1286>, last accessed 29 September 2016.

<sup>10</sup> **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. **Evangelicals:** 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. **Renewalists:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal movements.

## Religious context (selection)

Christian	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Ethno-religionist	Jewish	Bahai	Atheist & others <sup>11</sup>
211,000	1,963,000	58,200	45,000	-	-	3,900	57,600

Source: WCD, May 2017

## Notes on the current situation

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

## WWL 2018: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

**Reporting period:** 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

**WWL 2018** Points: 63 / Position: 27

WWL 2017 Points: 66 / Position: 20

WWL 2016 Points: 65 / Position: 21

## Where persecution comes from

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

## How Christians are suffering

There are two groups of Christians in Qatar, which are strictly separated from each other. Expatriate communities consisting of Christian migrant workers are the biggest group. The government only allows them to worship in public at a designated place outside the capital Doha. Proselytizing Muslims is strictly forbidden and can lead to prosecution and banishment from the country. Many of those migrant workers have to live and work in poor conditions, while their Christianity adds to their vulnerability. Despite their living conditions, these Christian communities are growing.

The other group consist of converts from Islam to Christianity. Both converts from an indigenous and migrant background bear the brunt of persecution. Many indigenous Christians

<sup>11</sup> This category includes Atheists, Agnostics and New religionists.



converted outside the country. They face pressure from both family members and the local community to recant their Christian faith. Converts from a migrant background face high pressure and are controlled by their social environment in the labor camps they live in. Even their employers can be a source of persecution. Both indigenous and migrant converts risk discrimination, harassment, police monitoring and all sorts of intimidation by vigilante groups. Moreover, a change of faith (away from Islam) is not officially recognized and is likely to lead to legal problems in personal status and property matters. Despite this, there are hardly ever reports of Christians being killed, imprisoned or harmed for their faith.

## Examples

World Watch Monitor reported in February 2017 about the harsh conditions for Christian migrant workers in Qatar.<sup>1</sup> In 2022, Qatar wants to host the FIFA World Cup. The country seems determined to make a good impression – to look like a modern, glamorous, successful country that is welcoming to everyone who is willing to spend money and have a good time. This cannot hide however the other side of Qatar - a profoundly intolerant country for non-Muslims with a deep division between the extremely rich Qatari nationals and the hundreds of thousands of often exploited laborers, mostly from Asian countries.

## WWL 2018: Persecution Dynamics

**Reporting period:** 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

**WWL 2018 Points: 63 / Position: 27**

WWL 2017 Points: 66 / Position: 20

WWL 2016 Points: 65 / Position: 21

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## Position on World Watch List (WWL)

The WWL 2018 score of 63 is 3 points less than in WWL 2017. Despite this decrease, Christians in Qatar, especially converts from Islam to Christianity, remain under very high pressure from the Qatari government and Qatari society in particular. A scoring refinement in registering the situation of converts from Islam to Christianity in Qatar contributed to the decrease in points. There was also less violence reported during the WWL 2018 reporting period.

## Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Qatar <sup>12</sup>	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	Very strong
Religious nationalism	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	Strong
Denominational protectionism	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	Medium
Organized corruption and crime	Not at all

### Islamic oppression (Very strong):

The state religion is strictly conservative Wahhabi Islam. While Muslims are free to worship in public, non-Muslim religious groups (Christians) can only worship in private houses or designated places. Proselytizing is outlawed and can lead to sentences of up to ten years imprisonment. Criticism of Islam is punished. Conversion from Islam to another religion constitutes apostasy, which is forbidden and socially unacceptable. Family law is regulated by *Sharia*, the Islamic legislation. Nearly all Qatari citizens and nationals are by definition either Sunni or Shia Muslims.

### Ethnic antagonism (Strong):

Typical for this persecution engine are situations in which age-old norms and values shaped in a tribal context are forced upon Christians. In the case of Qatar, *Ethnic antagonism* is clearly mixed with Islam. This particularly affects converts from Islam to Christianity.

### Dictatorial paranoia (Medium):

Qatar is an absolute monarchy, ruled by the Emir who is a descendant of the Qatari royal family. The government created a welfare state, with many financial benefits for Qatari nationals. The government expects obedience in return and does not allow any opposition. Besides that, because of the low number of nationals compared to very high number of expatriates, the government tries to keep the country Islamic. Although expatriate Christians are relatively free to practice their belief, the government monitors all activities. The country is well policed; the many expatriates in the country have to behave carefully as they can easily be expelled from the country.

<sup>12</sup> The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

## Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Qatar	Level of influence
Government officials at any level from local to national	Strong
Ethnic group leaders	Strong
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Strong
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Not at all
Violent religious groups	Not at all
Ideological pressure groups	Not at all
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Strong
Own (extended) family	Very strong
Political parties at any level from local to national	Not at all
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Not at all
Organized crime cartels or networks	Not at all
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Not at all

### Drivers of Islamic oppression:

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

Conversion from Islam to Christianity is socially totally unacceptable in Qatar. The government will act against any Christian who makes an attempt to share the Gospel, since proselytizing is illegal and punishable under the law. No Christians have been officially prosecuted for proselytizing, but some have been expelled from the country without due process in recent years.

Qatar is also well known for its spreading of Wahhabism, known for its ultraconservative view of Islam. While the country tries to be open and modern, this strict interpretation has its grip on the country. In particular because society and government enforce it in public, e.g. by enforcing public dress codes, virtually prohibiting the drinking of alcohol, by limiting the freedom of expression (i.e. criticism of Islam) and by forcing other religions to worship in private only.

Besides this, a conservative Islamic preacher like Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who has millions of viewers via the Qatari-based Al Jazeera network, is also based in Qatar. Although he does not support Wahhabism, he is seen as an important intellectual voice for the Muslim Brotherhood and he has been very clear that apostasy has to be punished with the death penalty.

### Drivers of Ethnic antagonism:

Since *Ethnic antagonism* is clearly mixed with *Islamic oppression*, it is hard to identify specific drivers. Nevertheless, family honor is an age-old norm and shaming it by conversion from Islam

to Christianity is socially totally unacceptable in Qatar. Converts face the risk of being ostracized by their families and might even be killed for it.

**Drivers of dictatorial paranoia:**

The Qatari government does not allow any criticism, especially not from (foreign) Christians. The country is well policed, with the security forces monitoring all activities in the country. Expatriates speaking out against the government will most probably be deported.

## Context

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

Since declaring independence from Great Britain in 1971, Qatar has gone through massive economic, social and political changes. Once a poor (pearl-) fishing nation, Qatar has developed into a prosperous and modern country, due to the exploitation of its abundant oil and gas fields.

Until June 2017, Qatar seemed to be a stable nation, maintaining friendly relations with the USA and Saudi Arabia, but also with Iran, Hamas and Hezbollah. Apart for a few online protests, the Arab Spring did not seem to cause any unrest in Qatar, despite the country's active role in the Arab Spring movement abroad. This suddenly changed when certain Gulf countries and Egypt, led by Saudi-Arabia, cut of all diplomatic and economic ties on 5-6 June 2017. Since then, all land and sea borders between Qatar and respectively Saudi-Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates have been closed. The official reason for the boycott is Qatar's alleged support for terrorist groups.

The conservative and mostly Wahhabi Qataris are not in favor of democracy. They perceive this as a Western concept that leads to difficult situations as witnessed in several democratized Arab countries. Unusual for the region, there is no social or economic discontent expressed, since the state distributes its wealth generously. This materialistic saturation leads to political apathy.

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

According to the Qatar 2016 International Religious Freedom Report, only Sunni and Shia Muslims and eight Christian denominations are registered as official religious groups. However, other groups like Hindus, Buddhists, adherents of Bahai and unregistered Christian groups were free to worship in private, despite lacking designated places and facilities for their meetings.

## 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 in the special compound built on land provided by the authorities outside of the capital Doha. The number of expatriate Christians is growing, as many workers convert to Christianity during their stay. Already, there are traffic and parking problems at the church complex. Also, 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. The construction needs to be completed within three years.

### **Historical Christian communities:**

There are no historical Christian communities in Qatar.

### **Communities of converts to Christianity**

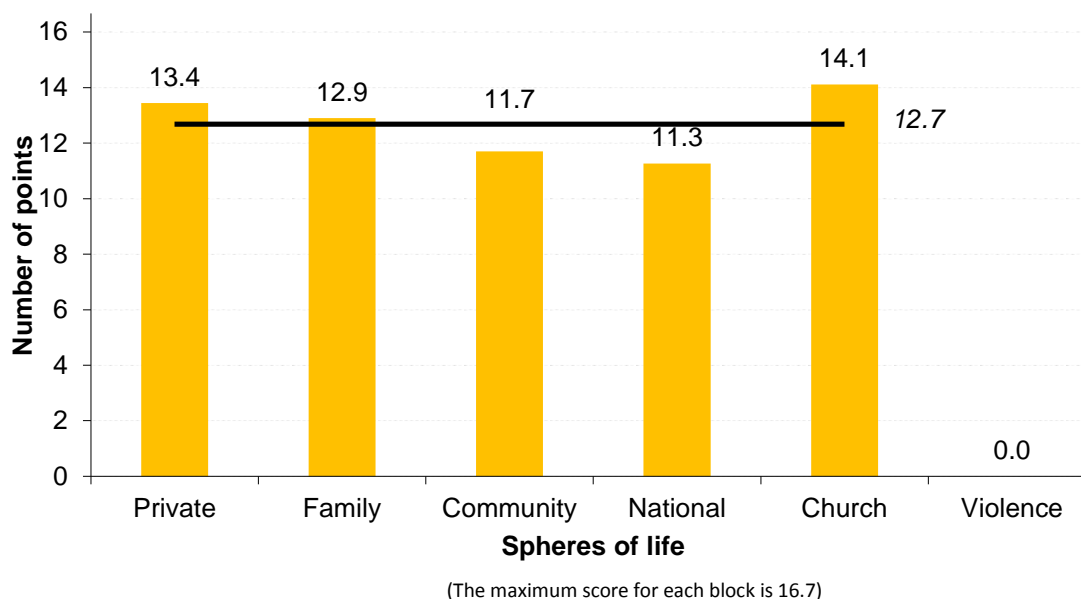
Christians with a Muslim background are heavily persecuted in Qatar. They are considered apostates and face discrimination and harassment from society and even risk being killed by their family. Apostasy is also a crime and punishable under the criminal law. However, no execution or other punishment for apostasy has been recorded since the country's independence in 1971. Almost all Qatari converts converted abroad and the majority of them do not return to the country out of fear. Most of the converts are foreign workers. The level of pressure on both groups (indigenous and foreign converts) is very high. 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. 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.

### **Non-traditional Christian communities:**

There are no non-traditional Christian communities in Qatar.

## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

### WWL 2018 Persecution Pattern for Qatar



The WWL 2018 Persecution pattern for Qatar shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Qatar remains very high, although it went down from 13.2 in WWL 2017 to 12.7.
- Pressure is extreme in the *Church sphere*, underlining the marginalized position of the Church in Qatar as a religious group which is not allowed to play a public role. The very high levels of pressure in the *Private* and *Family spheres* reflect the dire position of converts from Islam to Christianity.
- The score for violence went down from 0.4 in WWL 2017 to 0.0 in the WWL 2018 reporting period. (During the WWL17 reporting period it was reported that the visa of some Christians were not extended. Although this has most probably happened during the WWL2018 reporting period as well, no reports were made.) The very low score underlines two things: Firstly, the heavy pressure on Christians is institutionalized in such a way that the Qatari government has no reason to act violently against them. Secondly, the high level of social and governmental control prevents acts of violent persecution becoming public.

#### Private sphere:

Indigenous and foreign converts from Islam cannot openly practice their faith. Any hint that they may be Christians can have serious consequences. Christians from the West have relatively more freedom to privately practice their faith, as long as they do not evangelize Muslims. Lower-skilled Christian workers have to act carefully and their freedom in the *private sphere* depends on the attitude and religion of fellow migrant workers who live in the same labor camps, where there is often hardly any privacy. In the case of domestic workers, mostly women, it also depends on the attitude of their employers.

**Family sphere:**

All Qataris are considered Muslims. For a Muslim family, it is a great disgrace when one of its members leaves Islam. Converts run the great risk of honor killing, physical violence or being ostracized, if their families or communities discover their faith. As a result, converts tend to keep their Christian faith secret for fear of gossip and betrayal. For expatriate Christians, it is difficult to live as a Christian and to raise a Christian family in an environment which is dominantly Islamic.

**Community sphere:**

All Christians are more or less put under pressure to renounce their faith through all kinds of discrimination. Lower-skilled expatriate Christians can experience harassment and discrimination in their workplace and community - converts will for sure if their new faith is known. Discrimination in dealing with the authorities affects all Christians. Christian parents are allowed to teach religious education to their children at home, but non-Muslim religious education is prohibited in both public and private schools.

**National sphere:**

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

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

**Church sphere:**

Expatriate Christians can only gather for worship in private or designated places. Outward symbols of faith, like crosses on churches, are illegal. There are six registered and many unregistered churches in Qatar that serve the large group of foreign workers, but converts are not allowed to attend. Official church recognition is hard to obtain. The churches are mostly concentrated in a district outside the capital Doha. This brings the risk of ghettoization and monitoring, which usually happens under the authorities' pretext of ensuring protection. Reportedly, government security services protecting the churches also check for Muslims trying to visit a church service. 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 for importing. On a more positive note, the Qatari authorities granted land for the Lebanese Maronite and Filipino Evangelical congregations to build churches in 2015, however no church has been built yet. Also positive news to report is that unregistered churches have not been hindered in their worship.

**Violence:**

No violence has been reported during the reporting period. However, Open Doors is aware of the very worrisome situation of low-skilled expatriate workers. According to Amnesty International, they are vulnerable at the hands of their employers - especially domestic workers who are excluded from any labor protection.<sup>13</sup> Open Doors fears that Christian workers, especially women, are even more vulnerable and are being discriminated against because of their faith.<sup>14</sup> However, there are currently no clear signs of persecution-related mistreatment of Christian expatriate workers. More research into this subject will be conducted in the near future.

## Gender profile of persecution

**Female:**

Female Christians risk abduction, rape and other forms of abuse. In Quranic terms, a Muslim is free to have sex with whatever his "right hand possesses". This includes wives and female slaves. House maids working in Qatar are often viewed as belonging to this category. Many Qatari households have a domestic worker, many among them are Christian which makes them even less significant in the eyes of the Qataris and more vulnerable to sexual abuse. It goes without saying that the impact of sexual abuse is deeply traumatic.

**Male:**

Most of the time, Christian men are the breadwinner for their families and face the brunt of discrimination (at their workplaces) to help their families. Men can also easily become the victim of discrimination in the labor camps.

## Future outlook

Despite the political crisis with Saudi Arabia and allied countries, the political, social and economic situation of Qatar does not seem unstable - 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 could harm Qatar's economy in the long term, which might cause an economic fallback for all immigrant workers, including the Christians among them.

Another major challenge for the country is to maintain its cultural and religious standards amidst rapid modernization and development. As it prepares for the World Soccer Games in 2022, Qatar and its deplorable treatment of foreign 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 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 on society. As such, no major changes in religious freedom for Christians are expected in the near future.

<sup>13</sup> Amnesty International Report 2016/17, pp. 302, 303.

<sup>14</sup> See for example: <http://www.dohastories.org/?p=153>, last accessed on 7 December 2017.



## Policy considerations

Open Doors suggests the following recommendations:

- Qatar’s Fourth National Human Development Report (2015) found that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) human rights recommendations set in 2014 were falling short of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, and limited by their non-binding status. The GCC Human Rights Bureau should extend “respect for all religions” (GCC Human Rights Declaration 2014) to enshrine full freedom of religion, including conversion and the right to association and assembly. The international community should engage with the GCC Human Rights Bureau and call for full and binding rights provisions.
- The government of Qatar should remove reservations to Article 14 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child on freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
- The international community should hold Qatar accountable on Freedom of Religion or Belief in line with international human rights treaties as part of its call for improvement of migrant worker rights.
- The government of Qatar should remove apostasy laws and guarantee the rights of all citizens to freedom of religion.
- The government should uphold article 35 of the Permanent Constitution and fully investigate and penalize discrimination against Christians, in particular those of Muslim background.
- The Qatar National Vision 2030 seeks to remove barriers that people face on account of religion, and to sponsor and support dialogue among civilians, promoting coexistence between different religions and cultures.<sup>15</sup> Under the QNV 2030, a plan with indicators should be created to measure progress toward full enjoyment of Freedom of Religion or Belief.
- The government should properly investigate and punish (domestic) violence committed against Christians.

## WWR in-depth reports

There are currently no in-depth reports on Qatar available at:  
<http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/> (password: freedom).

## Open Doors article(s) from the region

There are currently no Open Doors articles on Qatar available at:  
<http://opendoorsanalytical.org/articles/> (password freedom).

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<sup>15</sup> See: [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/qatar\\_nhdr4\\_english\\_15june2015.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/qatar_nhdr4_english_15june2015.pdf), last accessed on 7 October 2017.

## World Watch Monitor news articles

Up-to-date articles are available at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/qatar/>

- [The Christian migrants building Qatar’s football stadiums](#)  
20 February 2017  
Four-storey apartment blocks house hundreds of Asian labourers. This is Doha’s Industrial Zone, where all the hard groundwork is done to maintain Qatar’s image as a modern state. The roads here in some areas are bad, there are no streetlights, and the air is filled with fumes.

## Recent country developments

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

- [Egypt/Qatar: Improved security is goal of Qatar “blockade”](#)  
6 July 2017  
Following the diplomatic isolation of Qatar in the Arab world, Qatar has responded that this “blockade” is “uncivilized” and “an act of aggression”.
- [Qatar: Diplomatic pressure after emir’s speech supports terrorism](#)  
13 June 2017  
Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen have severed diplomatic relations with Qatar, accusing Doha of supporting terrorism.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/02/the-christian-migrants-building-qatars-football-stadiums/>