

World Watch Research

Qatar:

Background Information

September 2024



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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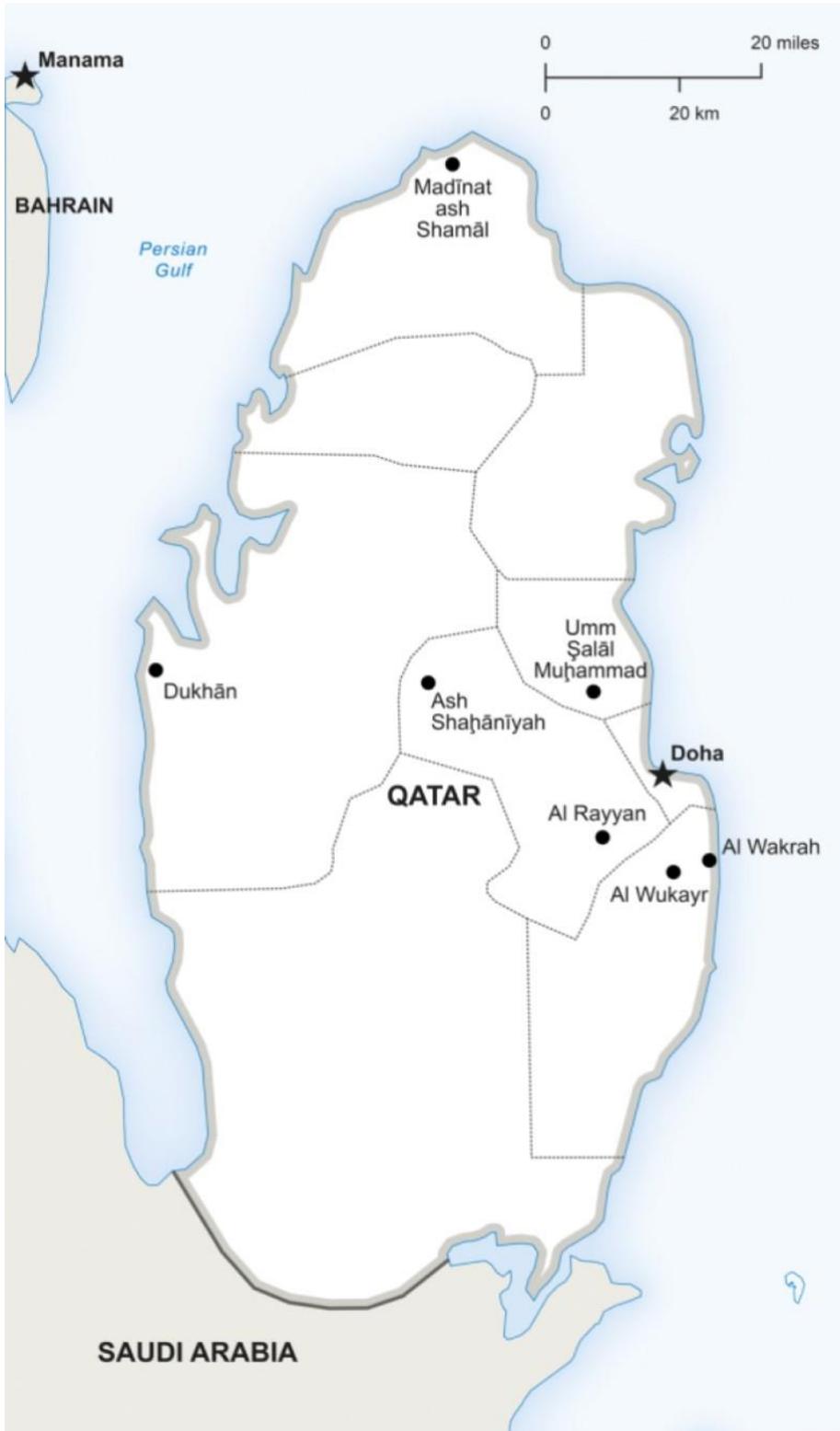
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World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- Background country information (published annually in summer)
- Persecution dynamics (published annually in January).

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Map of country



Qatar: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
2,737,000	381,000	13.9

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Recent history

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

Qatar has sought to establish a unique role for itself, especially through its news station Al-Jazeera, the Middle East's most viewed satellite TV channel, founded in 1996.

Until June 2017, Qatar was a stable nation, maintaining friendly relations with the USA, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Hamas and Hezbollah. Apart for a few online protests, the influence from the Arab Spring uprisings elsewhere did not seem to cause any unrest in Qatar, despite the country's active role in the Arab Spring movement and its aftermath 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. All land and sea borders between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates were closed until January 2021. The official reason for the boycott was Qatar's alleged support for terrorist groups (among a number of other reasons). Qatar's support for the Muslim Brotherhood (which is designated as a terrorist organization by Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the UAE) was the main issue of concern ([The Atlantic, 2 July 2017](#)). However, using its vast financial reserves, Qatar did not give in and an official restoration of ties took place following the Al-Ula agreement in January 2021 ([BBC News, 5 January 2021](#)). Nonetheless, it seems that Qatar has reduced its support for the Muslim Brotherhood to a certain extent, with a number of its leaders being told to leave the country ([Washington Institute, 3 February 2021](#), [MENA Research Center, 7 June 2022](#)). Following further rapprochement between Qatar and Egypt during 2023, Qatar requested that around 100 Egyptians with connections to the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups leave the country ([Mada Masr, 8 June 2023](#)).

On the geopolitical level, due to its supportive attitude towards Islamist groups, Qatar has developed a role as international intermediary between Western countries and Islamist ruled countries like Afghanistan and Iran. It played a major role in discussions surrounding the USA's withdrawal from Afghanistan, while also offering a neutral meeting place for talks between the USA and Iran ([New York Times, 7 September 2021](#), [AP News, 30 June 2022](#)). It further increased its global intermediary position following the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war in October 2023, during which the country functioned as a key broker in hostage negotiations ([BBC News, 23 October 2023](#)). See also below: *Political and legal landscape*.

The Christian presence in the country has been growing since the start of the development of the gas and oil industry in the 1970s with the subsequent influx of expatriate workers. Although expatriate Christians enjoyed a limited level of religious freedom, it took until 2008 before the first church was inaugurated in the strictly monitored [Mesaimmer Religious Complex](#) just outside Doha (Doha Guides, accessed 14 January 2024).

Political and legal landscape

Qatar is an absolute monarchy, ruled by Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani who took over power from his father in 2013 and was educated in the UK. Qatar's Sheikh is dedicated to diversifying the economy and renewing national infrastructure. Qatar's political system is classified as 'authoritarian' by the Economist Intelligence Unit ([EIU Democracy Index 2023](#)). The conservative Qatari government is not in favor of democracy, which they perceive as a Western concept bound to cause difficulties, as attempts to democratize other Arab countries have shown. The state distributes its wealth generously, which has largely resulted in the absence of much of the social and economic discontent which has characterized the region since the beginning of the Arab Spring. However, in a major development, first-ever legislative elections were held in October 2021 for the new Shura council, with 30 elected and 15 appointed members. The elections were organized along tribal lines, resulting in the election of known businessmen and former government officials. It is to be expected that they will mainly focus on the key interests of their constitutions, including opposing reform of labor rights for migrant workers ([AGSIW, 7 October 2021](#)).

Qatar considers Christianity a foreign influence, with the Ministry of Foreign affairs regulating the churches in the country. Although keeping a strict separation between Qataris and expatriate Christians, attitudes towards the Christian expatriate community are generally respectful, as the Qataris have accepted that giving the Christian community some freedom is in Qatar's best interest.

According to Middle East Concern ([MEC Qatar profile](#), accessed 30 August 2024):

- "The constitution of Qatar enshrines Islam as the religion of the State and Islamic law as a main source of legislation. The constitution affirms the principle of non-discrimination, including on the basis of religion. It guarantees freedom of religious practice provided that public order and morality are maintained. The Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) are legally recognised. Under applicable Islamic law, Muslims are effectively prohibited from changing their religion. Non-Islamic proselytism is strictly prohibited and is punishable by prison sentences ... – though in recent years the government has preferred to deport without legal proceedings those suspected of proselytising. Islamic personal status laws apply for citizens, and Islamic custody provisions apply to non-Muslims as well as Muslims. ... The importation of non-Islamic religious materials is permitted for recognised groups, though it is strictly monitored and regulated."

Unusual for the wider region is the fact that there is little public expression of social or economic discontent. Next to the government's tight grip on the freedom of expression, this is probably due to the state generously distributing its wealth among the Qatari citizens; this in turn leads to general political apathy. Fragile State Index political indicators (FSI 2024) show a sharp rise in external intervention for 2017, in line with the start of the Saudi-led boycott. The average indicators remained stable, signaling that Qatar managed to deal successfully with the increased external pressure (if that were not the case, the score for the average indicators would have increased).

Another reason why Qatar is stable is because sectarian divisions (between Sunnis and Shiites) are less profound and are not leading to visible tensions as is the case in neighboring countries. However, Qatar did play an active role in the Arab Spring movement abroad, especially in Libya where it cooperated in military intervention. It also played an active role in Iraq, Syria and Libya by supporting Islamic militants. The reasons for this were to increase its regional influence and uphold a Sunni, pro-Islamist

agenda. The latter highlights one of the major differences compared to neighboring Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which do not support pro-Islamist groups (and which - as stated above - designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization).

In addition to supporting Islamist groups and political Islam, Qatar also angered Saudi Arabia and the UAE by establishing a quite independent role for itself: It has contact with Saudi Arabia's regional rival Iran and has often mediated between Iran and the USA ([Arab Weekly, 26 July 2021](#)). Another clear example is the mediation Qatar was involved in before and after the take-over of Afghanistan by the Taliban in August 2021. Although Qatar has hosted a Taliban office for almost a decade, its key diplomatic role became very clear after the fall of Kabul, with almost all evacuation flights being arranged via Qatar ([BBC News, 2 September 2021](#)).

Qatar is also trying 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, especially from the Muslim Brotherhood. Al-Jazeera also criticized the governments of neighboring countries and this might have particularly angered Saudi Arabia and its allies. In addition, Qatar has continued to increase its ties with Turkey ([Al-Monitor, 8 August 2024](#)). This remains another issue of tension between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, as Turkey is the regional safe haven for the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups; nevertheless, from 2022 onwards, Turkey has reduced its support for Islamist groups, especially since Turkey has been working to improve its ties with Saudi-Arabia ([Council on Foreign Relations, 4 May 2022](#)). Following the Al-Ula agreement, Qatar is apparently aligning itself more in accordance with Saudi wishes, but even so it is unlikely that Qatar will completely sever ties with the Muslim Brotherhood ([AGSIW, 14 April 2021](#)).

Gender perspective

The Qatari legal landscape has long been restrictive towards women and girls; laws discriminate against women in relation to marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance. The proportion of seats held by women in the Majlis Al-Shura (Shura Council), which corresponds to an advisory body with limited powers, is about [4.4%](#), the lowest it has been since 2017 (IPU, 2023). [Reservations](#) made by the Qatari government to numerous articles still stand, including Article 9 (which grants women the right to pass on/retain their nationality) and Article 16 (which provides for the elimination of discrimination against women as they enter or exit a marriage), despite ratifying CEDAW in 2009 (UNDP, Qatar: Gender Justice and the Law, 2019). The concept of male guardianship is incorporated into Qatari law and practices, which limits the freedom of women. Without it they may not be able to travel, work, attend university or marry. General limitations on women include being required to obey their husbands in the context of male guardianship ([HRW 2023 Qatar country chapter](#)). They are also [legally vulnerable](#) to domestic violence and are legally restricted to inherit half of what a similarly situated male relative would receive (UNDP, Qatar: Gender Justice and the Law, 2019). Whilst rape is outlawed under Article 279 of the Penal code, there are no provisions against marital rape. Whereas the husband has the right to unilaterally divorce her, she must attain a judicial decree and risks losing access to her children. For this reason many women choose to stay in abusive marriages.

Religious landscape

Qatar: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	381,000	13.9
Muslim	1,779,000	65.0
Hindu	460,000	16.8
Buddhist	53,900	2.0
Ethnic religionist	0	0.0
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	16,200	0.6
Atheist	3,300	0.1
Agnostic	42,500	1.6
Other	0	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

According to Middle East Concern ([MEC Qatar profile](#), accessed 30 August 2024), 90% of Qataris are Sunni and only 10% Shiites. Qatar is one of the only two Wahhabi countries in the world, following a very puritan version of Islam. The other Wahhabi country is Saudi Arabia, but since the 1990s Qatar has adopted its own, less strict version of Wahhabism. This difference is also known as the "[Wahhabism of the sea](#)" versus the "[Wahhabism of the land](#)" (Huffpost, 12 April 2017). Hence, in contrast to Saudi Arabia, Qatar has been relatively lenient towards the growing Christian expatriate community and has provided land to build churches. Although most Christian expatriates welcome this, there is a flipside since the concentration of churches in the one Abu Hamour area of Doha can lead to 'ghettoization'. As such, Christians can also be easily monitored and controlled – which usually happens under the pretext of ensuring their safety. Qatar's ban on re-opening villa house-churches outside of the designated religious complex after COVID-19 restrictions were eased, can be viewed as another measure to keep control over the Christian population, although no repercussions followed for those who did re-open (US State Department, [IRFR 2021 Qatar, p.7](#)). Representatives of the villa house-churches continue to advocate for increased space, but the Qatari government has appeared to ignore those requests ([IRFR 2022 Qatar, p. 9](#)).

While the country makes efforts to be open and modern, the 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 in public, by limiting the freedom of expression (to prevent criticism of Islam) and by allowing other religions only to worship in private.

Reports from other sources

According to Humanists International's [Freedom of Thought Report](#) (updated 29 February 2024):

"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'. Legal, cultural, and institutional discrimination against, women and girls, LGBTI+people, non-Qatari nationals, certain local tribes, and other minorities is prevalent."

"Leaving Islam is a capital offense punishable by death in Qatar. However, since 1971 no punishment for apostasy has been recorded." ... [Nevertheless, m]ultiple fatwas on Islam Web are clear that insulting the prophet must be punished by death, often without giving them a chance to repent. ... Islam Web is a website directly employed, funded, and managed by the government. It promotes the Salafi literalist school of Sunni-Islam, a radical interpretation of Islam considered incompatible with the promotion of co-existence."

According to Middle East Concern ([MEC Qatar profile](#), accessed 30 August 2024):

- "Expatriate Christians enjoy considerable freedom in Qatar, provided that their activities are restricted to designated compounds and, in particular, that they avoid interaction with Muslims that could be construed as proselytism. In recent years there have been several cases of expatriate Christians being deported, it is assumed because of activities considered to have been proselytism (though for most deportations no reasons are stated). The recognized churches find their current facilities inadequate; the 'Religious Complex' is typically overcrowded on days of worship as churches seek to accommodate multiple congregations of various nationalities and languages. Robust security arrangements at the Religious Complex facilitate enforcement of a strict entry ban on Muslims, except where prior permission has been granted. Qatari nationals or other Muslims who choose to leave Islam are likely to face strong family and societal pressure. In extreme cases those who leave Islam can face violent responses from family members".

Economic landscape

According to the [World Factbook Qatar](#), accessed 30 August 2024:

- **GDP per capita (PPP):** \$113,200 (2022 est.)
- **Real GDP growth rate:** 4.21% (2022 est.)
- **Inflation rate (consumer prices):** 3.03% (2023 est.)
- **Unemployment:** 0.13% (2023 est.), with youth unemployment being 0.6% (2023 est.), making it a country with one of the lowest (youth) unemployment rates in the world.

According to World Bank's [Macro Poverty Outlook Qatar \(Spring 2024\)](#):

- **General:** "Notwithstanding its large hydrocarbon resources and associated liquefied natural gas (LNG) revenues, Qatar is pursuing a long-term strategy focused on economic diversification. Growth in tourism, new infrastructure projects, and the launch of the Third National Development Strategy (NDS3) are expected to support the economy. Nevertheless, the hydrocarbon sector continues to play a major role, as external and fiscal surpluses remain contingent on LNG exports."

- **Economic growth:** "Following a significant 4.2 percent growth in 2022, driven primarily by hosting the FIFA World Cup, the economy has exhibited modest growth in year 2023, reaching 1.6 percent year-on-year (y-o-y) in H1 2023, driven mainly by hydrocarbon sector growth (3.2 percent) and, to a much lesser extent, non-hydrocarbon sectors growth (0.6 percent)."
- **Outlook:** "Real GDP growth is projected to strengthen marginally in 2024 but remain modest at 2.1 percent. Non-oil growth will continue to be robust at 2.4 percent, driven by a growing tourism sector. Qatar's state-of-the-art infrastructure will allow the country to reap the benefits through the hosting of several major global events in 2024. The hydrocarbon sector is expected to decelerate to a 1.6 percent growth in 2024, affected by capacity constraints. Yet, a major boost is anticipated for the period Q4 2025 to 2027, with the North Field expansion project coming online."
- **Potential risks:** "However, challenges remain. Gas production and prices continue to be key determinants of fiscal and external accounts balances. More recently, these risks have been compounded by the potential impact of the conflict in the Middle East on energy price volatility, as well as its impact on incoming tourism and investment in the region. Recent Houthi attacks on the Red Sea shipping routes risk also affecting the European demand for Qatari gas in the near term, while Qatar's growing dependence on China as a key trading partner—China was Qatar's largest LNG buyer in 2022, accounting for 21.7 percent of Qatar's exports—raises concerns about the country's vulnerability to potential economic downturns in China."

Reports from other sources

- The World Bank's [World by Income and Region report](#) (accessed 25 July 2024) puts the Qatari economy in the high income category .
- The Fragile State Index ([FSI 2024 Qatar](#)) shows further improvement in 2024 in the already positively low economic indicators "Economy" and "Human Flight and Brain Drain", but 'Economic Inequality' continued to increase. The indicator 'External intervention' increased sharply in 2017 due to the Qatar diplomatic crisis, but has been decreasing since, despite a slight uptick in 2024.
- The [Economist Intelligence Unit \(EIU 2024 Qatar\)](#) writes: "EIU expects the emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, to remain secure in office, supported by strong public backing (helped by a generous social contract with Qataris) and his handling of regional challenges, including rebuilding of relations with the Gulf countries and Egypt. We expect the elected Advisory Council to remain loyal to the emir. The Qatar National Vision 2030, which forms the centrepiece of the government's strategy to develop and diversify the economy and to advance environmental management and social development, will shape policy in 2024-28. The long-term plan is to generate a favourable business environment to support higher investment and employment. Occasional riyal volatility might occur on the offshore market, but the ample reserves of the Qatar Investment Authority (the sovereign wealth fund) mean that the Qatar Central Bank will be able to easily defend the peg to the US dollar throughout 2024-28"

The World Bank classifies Qatar as having a high income economy. This is not surprising since it has the world's third largest natural gas reserves. Petroleum also plays a dominant role in the economy, despite the government's efforts to diversify. The three year boycott of Qatar by Saudi Arabia, the UAE and other allies led to a diversification of the Qatari economy, but did not cripple 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. The [boycott was lifted](#) in January 2021 (NBC News, 5 January 2021).

A large section of the population (89.%) is employed, according to [World Bank Qatar data](#) (Labor force participation rate 2023). However, poverty among expatriate workers is likely to be under-reported. Although probably not primarily faith-related, Christian expatriates do experience labor abuse, including low and non-paid salaries, confiscation of passports and other forms of unfair treatment.

Qatari converts from Islam to Christianity are very likely to be placed under economic pressure: There is a high chance they will lose employment and economic benefits provided by the state, if their conversion becomes known.

Gender perspective

Female converts are additionally vulnerable due to patrilineal inheritance practices and lower employment rates. Whilst Qatar has achieved gender parity in education and has one of the highest female [labor force participation](#) rates in the region, 96.8% of men are in the workforce compared to 60.5% of women (World Bank, Gender Data Portal 2023). Male converts who lose their jobs may suffer the shame of not being able to provide for their dependent family members. Despite Qatar's ongoing [labor reforms](#), domestic workers – the majority of whom are female – remain vulnerable to serious labor abuses, including delayed or unpaid wages, substandard living conditions, and forced labor (International Labour Organization, 21 June 2022).

Social and cultural landscape

According to the [World Factbook Qatar](#), accessed 30 August 2024:

- **Main ethnic groups:** The majority of the Qatari population are from Arab descent. A wide variety of ethnicities can be found among the expatriate community.
- **Main languages:** The official language is Arabic, with English being widely spoken as well.
- **Urban population:** 99.4% of the population lives in urban areas with an annual rate of urbanization of 1.66% (2023 est.).
- **Population/age:** The total population is around 2.5 million (2023 est.), with immigrants making up 88,4% of the total population (2015 est.). The younger generation - up to 14 years of age - makes up 13% of the population.
- **Fertility rate:** 1.9 children born per woman (2024 est.)
- **Literacy rate:** 93.5% of the population can read and write; with more women (94.7%) than men (92.4%) being able to read and write (2017)
- **IDPs/Refugees:** Around 1200 stateless people reside in the country.
- **Life expectancy:** 80.3 years on average; women (82.4 years), men (78.2 years).

According to the [UNDP Human Development Report Qatar](#) (data updates as of 13 March 2024):

- **HDI score and ranking:** Qatar ranks #40 out 193 countries. The combined ratio of life expectancy, education and per capita income gives a very high score of 0.875 on the Human Development Index (HDI 2022).
- **Gender inequality:** with a GDI (Gender Development Index 2022) score of 1.027, men are slightly disadvantaged in comparison to women. The GDI measures the differences in life expectancy,

years of education and GNI per capita per gender.

- **Education:** On average, Qataris are expected to have 13 years of schooling. Bucking the regional trend, girls typically spend more time in education than boys; the mean years of schooling for boys was 9.7 years compared to 11.8 years for girls (2022).

Despite this slight gender inequality, men enjoy greater freedom in Qatari society than women. Due to the male guardianship system, men remain the key decision-makers in the lives of women and their children ([HRW News, 29 March 2021](#)). This level of control makes it extremely challenging for female converts to escape abusive situations or to flee the country. Male converts on the other hand, may find that - due to the greater prominence of men in the public sphere - they face higher levels of scrutiny from the authorities about their faith and church activities.

An estimated 88% of the country's population are expatriate migrant workers (according to Middle East Concern's [Qatar profile](#), accessed 30 August 2024), 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" (Amnesty International, 31 March 2016). [Legal improvements](#) were made in 2018 (The Guardian, 6 September 2018) and the *kafala* system was officially abolished in 2020. However, Amnesty International still states ([International Report 2022/2023, Qatar, pp.304-305](#)):

- "Despite the government's ongoing efforts to reform its labor system, thousands of migrant workers continued to face labor abuses ... Domestic workers, most of whom are women, continued to face some of the harshest working conditions and abuses, including verbal, physical and sexual assault. The authorities failed to implement measures introduced in 2017 to protect them from labor abuses. Women domestic workers who managed to flee abusive employers lacked access to safe shelter."

Hence, the question remains how much will change in practice, especially now that the eyes of the world have left again after the 2022 World Cup.

Although not primarily faith-related, it is very likely that many Christian expatriates experience (sexual) abuse, especially female domestic workers. The treatment of Christians in Qatar is not so much based on their faith, as on their skin color and ethnic background. Western (white) Christian expatriates are far less likely to experience harassment than African or Asian Christian expatriates. In addition, high-skilled workers will face less difficulties than low-skilled ones. Hence, a low-skilled Christian migrant from an African background will be most vulnerable in Qatar.

Qataris are a homogeneous group with strong family ties actively trying to uphold their Islamic norms by protecting themselves against modernization and Westernization. Conversion from Islam to Christianity is seen as betrayal and can lead to high levels of family and societal pressure, including ostracization, forced marriage and physical violence.

Technological landscape

According to [DataReportal Digital 2024: Qatar](#) (23 February 2024) / Survey date - January 2024:

- **Internet usage:** 99.0% penetration
- **Social media usage:** 95.2% of the total population. As of January 2024, 35.0% of Qatar's social media users were female, while 65.0% were male.
- **Active cellular mobile connections:** 174.2% of the total population

The high level of Internet usage is an indication of the advanced technical development of the country. But Internet users have to be careful and refrain from questioning government policies or criticizing Islam or Islamic practices. According to [Freedom House's Global Freedom Index 2024 Qatar](#):

- Qatar is listed as "not free".
- "Both print and broadcast media are influenced by leading families and subject to state censorship. The international television network Al Jazeera is privately held, but the government has reportedly paid to support its operating costs since its inception in 1996. All journalists in Qatar practice a degree of self-censorship and face possible jail sentences for defamation and other press offenses. In 2020, an amendment to the penal code made the sharing or publication of "false news" punishable with up to five years in prison or a maximum fine of 100,000 riyals (\$27,500)."
- "While residents enjoy some freedom of private discussion, security forces reportedly monitor personal communications, and noncitizens often self-censor to avoid jeopardizing their work and residency status. Social media users can face criminal penalties for posting politically sensitive content. However, in recent years citizens and residents have more actively debated current affairs and regional developments without apparent retribution."

A report from [Amnesty International \(20 January 2020\)](#) adds:

- A new repressive law "issued by Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, amends the Penal Code by adding a new provision ... which authorizes the imprisonment of 'anyone who broadcasts, publishes, or republishes false or biased rumours, statements, or news, or inflammatory propaganda, domestically or abroad, with the intent to harm national interests, stir up public opinion, or infringe on the social system or the public system of the state'."

Reporters without Borders ([World Press Freedom 2024 Qatar](#)) reports:

- "Despite an easing of restrictions during the FIFA World Cup in 2022, journalists are left little leeway by the oppressive legislative arsenal and draconian system of censorship. A cybercrime law adopted in late 2014 and reinforced in 2020 imposes restrictions on journalists and criminalises spreading "fake news" online. ... The state-funded *Al Jazeera* TV news broadcaster has considerable resources and a pool of presenters who are paid well enough to ignore subjects that could embarrass their employer. ... Qatar has a majority immigrant population, which is reflected in the diversity of journalists working for Qatari media outlets. But the conditions of immigrant workers, in particular those employed at the 2022 FIFA World Cup construction sites, is completely off limits in Qatar. *Al Jazeera English* has devoted some reports to this subject, but the same cannot be said for the parent company, the Arabic-language section. Religion, the emir's

personal life, women's rights and LGBT rights are also all off limits."

Christians in Qatar have to be careful in their social media postings as proselytizing remains strictly forbidden. Nonetheless, churches can announce church activities online.

Gender perspective

As reflected in the statistics above, women have equal access to the Internet compared to men. Male guardians can monitor their activity however, restricting the freedom with which they can utilize technology. Guardians may also use mobile apps (such as Metrash) to both grant and cancel exit permits to leave Qatar; this reflects how technology can be used to control women, especially unmarried women under 25 ([Human Rights Watch, 29 March 2021](#)).

Security situation

Although trust between Qatar and its neighbors remains low after the Saudi-led boycott, there is no risk of any kind of military confrontation. The only threat seems to be on the cyber level, as the countries are [allegedly spying on one another](#) (Reuters, 1 April 2019). Both Qatar and its neighbors are allies of the USA, with Qatar hosting 10,000 American troops at the al-Udeid air base. In January 2024, a deal was reached by both countries to extend the cooperation for another ten years ([Reuters, 3 January 2024](#)).

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, supported radical Islamic groups abroad, including in Syria and Libya ([AP News, 13 May 2022](#), [Refworld, 14 July 2017](#)).

Christians are in general safe from violence and crime, as the country is well policed and violent religious groups or others who might endanger public safety are severely oppressed.

Gender perspective

Greater pressure and violence is typically experienced within the domestic sphere; there was an increase in domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly against women who had not experienced domestic violence previously. The US State Department has indicated that police response is often poor, as domestic violence is seen as a family, rather than criminal, matter ([2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Qatar](#)).

Christian origins

Remnants of a structure believed to be a Nestorian church have been found on the south-east coast of Qatar, near al-Warkah. It is certain that the site was occupied from the early 7th to the mid to late 8th century. Besides this, a Nestorian cross was found in Umm al-Maradim in central Qatar. This is the only material proof of the presence of early Christianity in Qatar. However, there is much documental evidence for Christianity in what in Nestorian antiquity was called 'Bet Qatraye', the northern parts of the Persian Gulf with Qatar as an important part of it. Isaac of Nineveh, a 7th century bishop regarded as a saint in some churches, was born in Qatar.

Nestorian Christians from Iraq and Persia and Arab Christians from the Peninsula may have moved to Qatar in the 4th-5th centuries to establish a Christian presence, as happened in Kuwait, Bahrain and

elsewhere. There is scholarly reason to believe that in the whole region, in spite of the traditional dating for the emergence of Islam, Nestorian Christianity flourished in the late 7th-9th century AD. This, assumedly, also happened in Qatar. Yet within a few centuries after Islam became established, Christianity disappeared.

As Qatar was part of the important sea routes between Iraq and India, Qatar must have had contact with Christians even after it no longer had any native Christians. This contact may have increased when in 1871, the Ottoman Empire extended its rule over Qatar. This lasted until 1915, when Great Britain defeated the Ottomans and took over Qatar. In 1916, Qatar became a British protectorate. In 1949 the export of oil began in earnest, bringing many expatriates to Qatar. Qatar became independent in 1971. After the boom in oil prices in 1973, the number of expatriates increased fast, as did the presence of churches serving those foreigners.

Presently, the vast majority of migrant Christians are Roman Catholic Asians. Until 2008, they were not allowed to build churches and had to meet in homes, schools, or other private buildings. From 2008 onwards, Qatar began to allow the opening of a number of large churches, located together in the Mesaimmer Religious Complex outside the capital city, Doha.

(For further details, see: Ross R K, Tadros M and Johnson T M (eds.), Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity. Christianity in North Africa and West Africa, Edinburgh University Press, 2018, pp.177-189)

Church spectrum today

Qatar: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	7,200	1.9
Catholic	334,000	87.7
Protestant	17,900	4.7
Independent	12,400	3.3
Unaffiliated	10,100	2.7
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
Total	381,600	100.2
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	5,600	1.5
Pentecostal-Charismatic	99,900	26.2

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who

identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Pentecostal-Charismatic:** Church members involved in renewal in the Holy Spirit, sometimes known collectively as "Renewalists".

Qatar's first official Christian house of worship in modern times was built in 2008; the second was opened in 2009.

According to the [US State Department's IRFR 2023](#):

- There are 8 officially recognized denominations with church facilities built within the official Mesaymeer Religious Complex: Roman Catholic, Anglican, Greek Orthodox; Syrian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Maronite, Evangelical Protestant and Inter-Denominational Christian churches.
- "The Mesaymeer Religious Complex continued to provide worship space for the eight registered Christian denominations, with clear government instructions that Christian symbols such as crosses, steeples, and statues were not permitted on the exterior of church buildings. The Anglican Center within the Mesaymeer Religious Complex housed several other smaller denominations and offered space to 88 congregations of different denominations and languages."
- "According to church leaders, approximately 100,000 expatriate Christians continued to attend weekly services at the Mesaymeer Religious Complex. Representatives of the CCSC reported overcrowding in seven buildings in the complex, and they noted difficulties with parking, access, and time-sharing of worship space. In addition to the permanent buildings, the government allowed the churches to erect tents during Easter and Christmas outside the primary complex to accommodate additional congregants."
- "Ministry of Interior security personnel asked churchgoers to show identification at the gates because non-Christians, whether expatriates or citizens, were prohibited access to the complex."
- "In November [2023], the government gave permission to the Evangelical Church Alliance in Qatar (ECAQ) to build a church at the Mesaymeer Religious Complex, also known as 'Church City' and located on government-owned land, allocating a plot of land for construction of the church. Sixty villa churches were registered with the Ministry of Interior as worshipping under ECAQ's umbrella."

As indicated above, various Christian groups can operate under the patronage of the recognized churches. In 2015, the Filipino Evangelical Church obtained recognition and was promised land for a place of worship alongside other churches within the religious complex, and approval has also been given for a Maronite church, for which the Lebanese Maronite patriarch laid the cornerstone in April 2018 ([Naharnet, 19 April 2018](#)). The Maronite church is expected to be completed in 2024, while the Filipino church will need to wait longer.

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

These are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Qatar>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>.

External Links

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