

QATAR 2021 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution states Islam is the state religion and sharia shall be “a main source” of legislation. According to the constitution, the Amir must be Muslim. The constitution guarantees the freedom to practice religious rites in accordance with “the maintenance of public order and morality.” The law punishes “offending” Islam or any of its rites or beliefs or committing blasphemy against Islam, Christianity, or Judaism. Sunni and Shia Muslims and eight Christian denominations constitute the registered religious groups in the country. Unregistered religious groups are illegal, but authorities generally permitted them to practice their faith privately. The government continued to censor or ban print and social media religious material it considered objectionable. In March, the Baha’i International Community (BIC) said it was “extremely concerned” by “systematic attempts over many years” by the government to blacklist and deport Baha’is, in particular a lifelong resident of the country whose residency permit renewal was refused in January on what the community described as “baseless charges.” He left the country in August. A ban on worship outside the Mesaymeer Religious Complex, which is located on government land and provides worship space for the eight registered Christian denominations, and which the government described as temporary when instituted in 2020 as a measure both to limit the spread of COVID-19 and for security reasons, remained in effect. Citizens of the country and other Muslims were not allowed to attend services in the Mesaymeer Complex. The “villa” (or house) church community wrote multiple letters to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and requested multiple meetings but received no reply. In April, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) published a report on antisemitic material in textbooks of government schools, saying that while some material was removed from textbooks, the updated editions “still contained numerous passages that teach hateful antisemitic misinformation and myths.” In June, the Israeli nongovernmental organization (NGO) Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-se) updated its review of the country’s textbooks, stating that its “review determined that the Qatari curriculum does not yet meet ... international standards” and “was influenced by elements of Salafism and the Muslim Brotherhood.” In December, in an updated report, IMPACT-se said, “...Since then [June], Qatar’s books have somewhat improved. They still have a long way to go when it comes to removing hateful content and consistently teaching tolerance, and yet the improvements that have occurred over the last two academic years...are still a pleasant surprise.” In December, the press reported that the Ministry of Commerce and Industry issued a

directive regarding the need for suppliers, traders, and shopkeepers to refrain from selling goods bearing logos and symbols that do not comply with Islamic values.

On October 18, the privately owned newspaper *Al-Sharq* published a column by author Ahmad al-Mohannadi warning against what he considered attempts by Christian organizations to penetrate Muslim Persian Gulf societies via animated Bible-based missionary cartoons dubbed in Gulf dialects. In its *2021 World Watch List* report, the Christian NGO Open Doors USA stated, “There are two general categories [of Christians in country]: Christian foreigners, most of whom are migrant workers, and Christians who have converted from Islam. Foreign workers who are Christian are much freer to worship. Muslims who convert to Christianity face much more significant persecution. Converts from both indigenous and migrant backgrounds bear the brunt of persecution, and Qatari converts face very high pressure from their families.”

U.S. embassy leadership and other embassy officials continued to meet with senior government officials, relevant government bodies, as well as with quasigovernmental religious institutions, concerning the rights of religious minorities, Sunni-Shia relations, and antisemitism. The Charge d’Affaires raised the reopening of worship space for the Christian community and freedom of worship for the Baha’i community with senior government officials. Throughout the year, embassy officers met with various faith communities, including the Hindu, Shia Muslim, Baha’i, and evangelical Christian communities, and they also met with the Christian Church Steering Committee (CCSC), which oversees a variety of Christian denominations, to discuss issues of mutual concern.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 2.5 million (midyear 2021). Citizens make up approximately 12 percent of the population, while noncitizens account for approximately 88 percent. Most citizens are Sunni Muslims, and almost all others are Shia Muslims. Reliable figures are unavailable, but estimates based solely on the religious composition of expatriates suggest Muslims, while they are the largest religious group, likely make up less than half of the total population. The breakdown of the noncitizen population between Sunni, Shia, and other Muslim groups is not available.

Other religious groups, which are composed exclusively of expatriates, include (in descending order of size) Hindus, almost exclusively from India and Nepal; Roman Catholics, primarily from the Philippines, Europe, and India; and

Buddhists, largely from South, Southeast, and East Asia. Smaller groups include Anglicans and Protestant denominations, Egyptian Copts, Baha'is, and Greek and other Eastern Orthodox.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution declares Islam to be the state religion and states sharia shall be “a main source” of legislation. According to the constitution, the Amir must be Muslim. The constitution provides for hereditary rule by men in the Amir’s branch of the al-Thani family. The Amir exercises full executive power. The constitution guarantees the “freedom to practice religious rites” to all persons “in accordance with the law and the requirements of the maintenance of public order and morality.” It prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion.

Conversion to another religion from Islam is defined by the law as apostasy and is illegal, although there have been no recorded punishments for apostasy since the country’s independence in 1971.

The law provides for a prison sentence of up to seven years for offending or misinterpreting the Quran, “offending” Islam or any of its rites or beliefs, insulting any of the prophets, or defaming, desecrating, or committing blasphemy against Islam, Christianity, or Judaism. The law stipulates a seven-year prison term for producing or circulating material containing slogans, images, or symbols defaming these three religions. The law also prohibits publication of texts provoking social discord or religious strife, with punishment of up to six months in prison.

To obtain an official presence in the country, expatriate non-Muslim religious groups must register with the MFA. The only registered religious groups are Sunni and Shia Muslims and eight Christian denominations, which are the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Coptic, Maronite, evangelical Protestant, and the Interdenominational Christian Churches. Protestant denominations other than the registered eight denominations, including nondenominational house churches, may register with the MFA with the support of the CCSC.

Non-Christian groups must also register with the MFA. Registered groups may hold bank accounts in the organization’s name, apply for property to build worship space (or have already built structures, such as private villas, recognized as

worship spaces to avoid problems with authorities), import religious texts, and publish religious newsletters or flyers for internal distribution. Unregistered entities are unable to open accounts, solicit funds, worship in private spaces legally, acquire religious texts from outside the country, publish religiously-themed newsletters or pamphlets, or legally hire staff.

According to the law, unregistered religious groups (i.e., those not registered or under the patronage of one of the registered groups) that engage in worship activities are illegal, and members of those groups are subject to deportation.

The law restricts public worship for non-Islamic faiths. It prohibits non-Muslim religious groups from displaying religious symbols, which includes banning Christian congregations from advertising religious services or placing crosses outdoors where they are visible to the public. The law criminalizes proselytizing on behalf of an organization, society, or foundation of any religion other than Islam and provides for punishment of up to 10 years in prison. Proselytizing on one's own accord for any religion other than Islam may result in a sentence of up to seven years' imprisonment. The law calls for two years' imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 riyals (\$2,700) for possession of written or recorded materials or items that support or promote missionary activity.

The government regulates the publication, importation, and distribution of all religious books and materials. The government reviews, censors, or bans foreign newspapers, magazines, films, and books for objectionable sexual, religious, and political content. Religious groups may publish newsletters without government censorship but may only distribute them internally within their respective communities. The law allows importation of religious holy books, such as Bibles. To import religious materials, groups must submit one copy to the Ministry of Culture and receive written approval before making large orders or risk having the entire shipment confiscated.

The only religions registered to have their own places of worship are Islam and Christianity. All mosques and Islamic institutions in the country must be registered with the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs (MEIA). The law designates the MEIA Minister as the final authority for approving Islamic religious centers. The MFA approves non-Islamic houses of worship in coordination with the private office of the Amir.

The Office of the Secretary General of the MFA, working in coordination with the director of the MFA's Human Rights Department, is responsible for handling church affairs.

A non-Muslim woman is not required by law to convert to Islam when marrying a Muslim; however, the law considers offspring of such a marriage to be Muslim. The law dictates that a non-Muslim man marrying a Muslim woman must convert to Islam.

Islamic instruction is compulsory for Muslim and non-Muslim students attending state-sponsored schools. Non-Muslims may provide private religious instruction for their children at home or in their faith services. All children may attend secular and coeducational private schools. According to instructions from the Ministry of Education, these schools must offer Islamic instruction; non-Islamic formal religious education is prohibited.

A unified civil court system, incorporating sharia and secular law, has jurisdiction over both Muslims and non-Muslims. The unified court system applies sharia in family law cases, including those related to inheritance, marriage, divorce, and child custody. For Shia Muslims, a judicial panel decides cases regarding marriage, divorce, inheritance, and other family matters using Shia interpretations of religious law. In other religious matters, family law applies across all branches of Islam. Non-Muslims are subject to sharia in cases of child custody, but civil law covers other personal status cases, including those related to divorce and inheritance.

A non-Muslim wife does not have the automatic right to inherit from her Muslim husband. She receives an inheritance only if her husband wills her a portion of his estate, and even then, she is eligible to receive only one-third of the total estate. A female heir generally receives one-half the amount of a male heir; a sister would inherit one-half as much as her brother. In cases of divorce, children generally remain with the mother until age 13 for boys and 15 for girls, at which time custody reverts to the husband's family, regardless of the mother's religion.

Criminal law is based on the principles of sharia. The type of crime determines whether those convicted receive a sharia-based sentence. There are certain criminal charges, such as alcohol consumption and extramarital sex, for which Muslims are subject to punishment according to sharia principles, including court-ordered flogging. Sharia-based punishments may also apply to non-Muslims in these cases. Muslim convicts may earn a sentence reduction of a few months by

memorizing the Quran while imprisoned. Secular law covers dispute resolution for financial service companies. The law approves implementing the Shia interpretation of sharia upon the agreement and request of the parties involved in the dispute.

The penal code stipulates that individuals seen eating or drinking during daylight hours during Ramadan are subject to a fine of 3,000 riyals (\$820), three months' imprisonment, or both.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The government submitted documents to the United Nations in 2018, and made a formal statement in its treaty accession document, that the government shall interpret Article 18, paragraph 2, of the ICCPR ("No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice") "based on the understanding that it does not contravene the Islamic sharia" and that the government would reserve the right to implement paragraph 2 in accordance with its understanding of sharia. The government also formally stated in its accession document that it would interpret several other provisions of the ICCPR in line with sharia, including Article 27 (regarding the rights of minorities "to profess and practice their own religion"). The government made a formal reservation against being bound by gender equality provisions in Article 3 and Article 23.4 regarding family law and inheritance.

Government Practices

In March, BIC said it was "extremely concerned" by "systematic attempts over many years" by the government to blacklist and deport Baha'is. The BIC press release cited the case of Omid Seioshansian, described as a Baha'i born in Qatar and whose family has lived there for generations, saying that authorities' actions in not renewing his lifelong residency permit were attributed to "baseless charges" of unspecified criminal and national security violations. The BIC release stated that once so identified, Baha'is are "blacklisted and expelled" and then permanently refused reentry, even in cases where they have lived their entire lives in the country. In the case of Seioshansian, who departed the country for India in August, the government said its refusal to renew his residency permit was based on immigration law and age, since the country does not allow persons over age 60 to obtain residency. The local Baha'i community and BIC raised these concerns with the government, including the National Human Rights Committee. According to BIC, the government told UN and foreign diplomats that cases involving members of the Baha'i community were unrelated to each other and each involved national

security concerns. BIC raised these issues with the UN Human Rights Council on two occasions during the year. Writing for the Religion News Service, Seioshansian's brother Baher said, "The anti-Baha'i momentum has been building and has resulted in a dismissiveness toward Baha'is and their families that would have been unthinkable in the past," and he stated deportations affecting the Baha'i community involved a wide range of nationalities, including Jordanian, British, American, Malaysian, Indian, and Canadian.

"Villa" churches were open during the year, with pandemic regulations in place. The church villas did not receive approval to reopen, but they did so anyway. Early in the year, the "villa" church community had written several letters to authorities asking to reopen their 150 (later consolidated to 61 at government orders) house churches under the umbrella of the Evangelical Church Alliance in Qatar (ECAQ) that had been closed under COVID-19 mitigation regulations. Not receiving an official government response to these inquiries, many of these informal churches reopened in September. At year's end, they had faced no repercussions for reopening.

The government continued to state it would consider requests from nonregistered religious groups to acquire a place of worship if they applied to register but, as in previous years, said none had done so.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, representatives of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions were again unable to follow up on their 2019 visit. During the 2019 visit, the UN representatives said there were approximately 26 cases of expatriate women serving prison terms for adultery and five cases of individuals serving time for "sodomy," behaviors prohibited by sharia. The government often commutes harsher punishments mandated by sharia; there were no statistics available regarding rates of corporal punishment during the year.

The CCSC continued to meet regularly with the MFA to discuss issues related to its congregants and to advocate for increased space for the large number of parishioners. The MFA also met with unregistered congregations to discuss their interests and needs.

The MEIA continued to hire clerics and assign them to specific mosques. The ministry continued to provide, on an ad hoc basis, thematic guidance for Friday sermons, focusing mainly on Islamic rituals and social values, with clear restrictions against using pulpits to express political views or attack other faiths. The ministry reviewed content but did not require clerics to obtain prior approval

of their sermons. The government reserved the right to take judicial action against individuals who did not follow the guidance.

The MEIA estimated that there are approximately 2,300 mosques in the country. Government officials estimated that as many as 10 of these were Shia mosques, although online sources stated the number was closer to 15. Government officials stated the MEIA did not allow foreign funding for the building or upkeep of Shia mosques or other community facilities.

The MEIA continued to remind the public during Ramadan of its view of the correct way for Muslims to perform their religious duties. There were no reports of arrests or fines during the year for violation of the penal code's ban on eating or drinking in public during daylight hours in Ramadan. All restaurants not located in hotels were required to close in daylight hours during Ramadan.

The government of Saudi Arabia restricted pilgrims allowed to make the Hajj in 2021 to residents of Saudi Arabia due to concerns regarding COVID-19. In October, the MEIA announced that Umrah tour operators had resumed arranging Umrah tours from Qatar to Saudi Arabia for pilgrims, including expatriates. In November, the MEIA launched a new online registration system allowing individuals to upload their personal data and tour contracts, thereby permitting greater government oversight of the process and compilation of more accurate statistics.

The national organizing body of the 2022 FIFA World Cup encouraged local residents to host visiting soccer fans at their private residences during the upcoming tournament, touting the initiative as “a chance to demonstrate to fans our culture and hospitality.” Some comments on social media criticized the suggestion, saying that it was a violation of the country's religious values, Islamic principles, and conservative culture.

In April, the ADL published a report on antisemitic material in textbooks of government schools, saying that while some material was removed from textbooks, the updated editions “still contain numerous passages that teach hateful antisemitic misinformation and myths.” One text, for the seventh-grade textbooks for Islamic studies, said, “Treachery and treason are among the traits of the Jews.” According to the ADL, the eleventh-grade Islamic studies text “accuses Judaism of idolatry, deifying the Prophet Ezra, subordinating the Torah to the Talmud, and believing in amoral hedonism and supremacy.” An eleventh-grade history text stated that

among the principles of the Nazis was “enmity toward the Jews, because they were the reason for Germany’s defeat” in World War I.

In June, IMPACT-se updated its review of the country’s textbooks in conjunction with a London-based NGO, the Henry Jackson Society. The study assessed more than 314 textbooks, building upon previous IMPACT-se research that used UN and other international standards as benchmarks. According to IMPACT-se, the “review determined that the Qatari curriculum does not yet meet those international standards. The curriculum reflects in many ways the same overall tension facing Qatar’s leadership between Qatar’s Islamist affinities and its desire to be seen as an open, neutral, and progressive leader in the Arabian Gulf. Textbooks teach Qatari children to accept others different than themselves and advocate for peace at the same time echoing antisemitic canards.... While the curriculum emphasizes nationalist identities over tribal affiliations, it is also influenced by pan-Islamic and pan-Arab nationalism, as well as elements of Salafism and the Muslim Brotherhood.” In December, in an updated report, IMPACT-se said, “...Since then [June], Qatar’s books have somewhat improved. They still have a long way to go when it comes to removing hateful content and consistently teaching tolerance, and yet the improvements that have occurred over the last two academic years in Qatar are still a pleasant surprise. For example, it has removed a passage which taught that Zionism ‘strives to rule the world and control it.’ And it has reduced problematic passages with regard to martyrdom and violent jihad – such as removing a passage that referred to jihad as ‘the peak of Islam.’ However, such progress remains incomplete at best.” The government stated it was seeking NGOs and outside experts that could assist it in a review of current school textbooks.

Although the law prohibits Christian groups from advertising religious services, Christian churches continued to post hours of services and other information on publicly accessible websites; however, the government continued to prohibit them from publishing such information in local newspapers or on public bulletin boards. Church leaders and religious groups said individuals practiced self-censorship when expressing religious views online and relied mostly on word of mouth, church websites, social media platforms, and email newsletters to distribute information about religious groups’ activities.

The government maintained its policy of reviewing, censoring, or banning newspapers, magazines, books, and social media for “objectionable” religious content, such as an attack on Islamic values or depictions of the Prophet

Muhammad. Journalists and publishers at times said they practiced self-censorship regarding material the government might consider contrary to Islam.

In December, press reported that the Ministry of Commerce and Industry had issued a directive regarding the need for suppliers, traders, and shopkeepers to refrain from selling goods bearing logos and symbols that do not comply with Islamic values. The circular said its intent was to protect consumer rights, preserve Islamic values, and respect the country's customs, traditions, and cultural heritage. Several observers stated their belief that the government's actions in this regard were directed at items, including children's toys, bearing rainbow colors of the LGBTQI+ pride flag.

The Mesaymeer Religious Complex, also known as "Church City" and located on government-owned land, 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 a number of other smaller denominations and offered space to 88 congregations of different denominations and languages.

According to church leaders, approximately 75,000 to 100,000 expatriate Christians continued to attend weekly services at the Mesaymeer Religious Complex. Citizens of the country and other Muslims were not allowed to attend these services. Representatives of the CCSC stated there was overcrowding in seven buildings in the complex, and noted difficulties with parking, access, and time-sharing. In addition to the permanent buildings, the government allowed the churches to erect tents during Easter and Christmas outside the primary complex to accommodate the extra congregants wanting to attend services during these observances. The government continued to enforce strict security measures at the complex, including closing parking lots, setting a curfew on church access, and using metal detectors. Ministry of Interior security personnel asked churchgoers to show identification at the gates because non-Christians, either expatriates or citizens, were prohibited access to the complex.

Representatives of the Hindu community continued to express concern that the government had not granted Hindus permission to open new places of worship.

The CCSC reported that Christian clergy were allowed to visit members of their congregations when they were hospitalized and to conduct monthly trips to both male and female prisons to meet with incarcerated Christians.

The government prohibited the slaughter of animals outside of licensed facilities, a measure it said was intended to ensure hygienic conditions. In practice, individuals were able to conduct ritual slaughter in private.

Church leaders stated their ability to collect and distribute funds for charity continued to be limited by the government's restrictions on the number and type of bank accounts churches could hold, as well as reporting requirements on donors and on contractors doing business with churches. Some smaller unregistered churches used the personal accounts of religious leaders for church activities.

The country continued to host the headquarters of the International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS), a group widely viewed in the press and academia as being affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, a Sunni transnational organization that promotes political Islam. Although IUMS stated it was an independent association of scholars, observers said its close relationship with the government helped it to serve as an instrument of the country's soft power. Following the 2020 recognition of Israel by some Arab states, the IUMS in a November 27 statement said any normalization of ties with Israel was religiously forbidden and called for concerted efforts to "liberate" all Israeli-occupied lands, especially the al-Aqsa Mosque compound and Jerusalem.

According to an analysis published in February by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), the government provided support for the IUMS, which the WINEP report described as "the clerical arm of the Muslim Brotherhood." In November, a report by the Carnegie Endowment said diminishing regional support for political Islamist groups was a factor in the recent rapprochement between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UAE, and Bahrain.

In June, the Ministry of Public Health issued a guide on halal food that authorities described as a "historic milestone." According to a statement by the ministry, the importance of the guide "lies in clarifying the requirements of halal and verifying the validity, accuracy, and credibility of halal certificates" issued by licensed providers in the country.

On March 29, Human Rights Watch issued a report on the country's male guardianship system that inhibits women's freedom of travel, marriage choices, employment, and health decisions. According to the report, entitled "Everything I Do is Tied to a Man," the country's Family Law, as in many majority-Muslim countries, is based on sharia, which treats marriages as contracts concluded by two mutually consenting parties" – although the report also states that "male

guardianship is not unique to Islamic law and history.” The government issued a statement calling the report inaccurate, and social media users criticized the report, saying it contained neocolonialist overtones, assaults on Islam, and attacks on the country’s values and heritage.

According to the NGO Humanists International, the government funded, managed, and used the website *Islam Web* to “promote the Salafi literalist school of Sunni-Islam, a radical interpretation of Islam considered incompatible with the promotion of co-existence.” The NGO said that between its establishment by MEIA in 1998 and 2019, the site provided 245,000 fatwas and addressed 191,000 inquiries on topics related to culture, family, and the youth. “The website preaches in six languages: Arabic, English, French, Spanish, German, and soon, Indonesian. In January, a MEIA official said the website received two million visits every day.”

In May, the government organized an official visit to Doha of the leadership of the U.S. NGO Multi-Faith Neighbors Network, during which delegation members met with government officials, church leaders, and foreign missions to discuss the situation of religious freedom in the country.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

On October 18, the Qatari newspaper *Al-Sharq* published a column by author Ahmad al-Mohannadi warning against what he said were attempts by Christian organizations to penetrate Muslim-majority Persian Gulf societies via animated Bible-based missionary cartoons that are dubbed in Gulf dialects. He called for combating such attempts to save Muslim children from the expected impact of these videos.

In its 2021 *World Watch List* report, the Christian NGO Open Doors USA stated, “There are two general categories [of Christians in country]: Christian foreigners, most of whom are migrant workers, and Christians who have converted from Islam. Foreign workers who are Christian are much freer to worship. Muslims who convert to Christianity face much more significant persecution. Converts from both indigenous and migrant backgrounds bear the brunt of persecution, and Qatari converts face very high pressure from their families.”

The NGO Middle East Concern stated on its website, “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.”

During an outbreak of Israeli-Palestinian violence in May that coincided with the end of Ramadan, *Al-Araby al-Jadeed*, a London-based newspaper owned by Fedaat Media and based in Doha, published antisemitic editorial cartoons. One image showed “Israeli forces” shaped to resemble the COVID-19 virus in the courtyard of the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, while another showed an Israeli soldier portrayed as some type of insect or monster dropping ordnance on buildings below, next to a sign saying, “escalation on the days of Eid.”

In September, press reported that the Ministry of Education said a private school in the country was facing legal action after it was found to be using an educational resource that included content contrary to Islam. The ministry said a parent of a student at the school alerted it on September 14 to the problematic curriculum. Government representatives visited the school and found it had not followed a ministry circular requiring schools to review new educational resources and submit them for ministry approval.

On July 20, a high profile Qatari social media figure who hosts a YouTube channel with more than 90,000 subscribers posted a video criticizing a Saudi government decision to allow a Saudi woman to compete against an Israeli in judo in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics (which were postponed to 2021 due to COVID-19), adding, “The Saudis made ‘a mockery of Islam and Muslims.’” On August 26, he posted another video in which he stated Arab secularists dislike sharia punishments for certain offenses because they (secularists) are guilty of those offenses.

In his November 11 column in the newspaper *Al-Sharq*, Abdallah al-Amadi, former media advisor to the education minister, discussed at length a story in which God transformed the Jews into apes and pigs as punishment for violating their Sabbath. According to a Doha-based business group, Khalid Thani al-Thani, a member of the country’s royal family, owns the newspaper

On its website, Middle East Concern stated, “Qatari nationals or other Muslims who choose to leave Islam are likely to face strong family and societal pressure.”

A paper published by WINEP in January, based on an opinion survey in late 2020, stated that the “majority of Qataris express at least a ‘somewhat’ negative view of MB [Muslim Brotherhood],” although approval for the group in country (36 percent) was higher than in any other Arab state. Members of the small Shia community, whose members originated from Arab and Persian families who immigrated to the country in the twentieth century, reported that unlike previous generations, they faced no anti-Shia prejudice. Some community members said

they attributed the currently warm relations with the Sunni majority to the country's widespread prosperity, the high degree of societal integration, and to enlightened national leadership. Shia citizens included prominent wealthy members of the business community, among them the owner of one of the country's larger conglomerates. The Shia community maintained *husseiniyas* (Shia prayer halls), in addition to mosques overseen by the government.

In December, social media campaigns criticized hotels for displaying Christmas decorations in their lobbies. Some Qatari citizens on social media condemned marking non-Islamic festivities and warned against the impacts of such displays on young generations. Some social media influencers posted messages discouraging congratulating non-Muslims on Christmas. Imams of a few mosques reportedly disseminated similar warnings in their Friday sermons.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Embassy leadership met with the Prime Minister, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the officials of the government's Communication Office to discuss the reopening of worship space for the Christian community; the free practice of faith by the Baha'i community as well as issues related to the residence status of the community; and other issues concerning religious tolerance and belief. U.S. government representatives raised concerns about antisemitism during the bilateral Strategic Dialogue in November.

Throughout the year, embassy leadership met with representatives of the Baha'i community to discuss ongoing concerns including the expulsion of lifelong members of the Baha'i community, allegations of unfair arrests, and lack of freedom to worship. Embassy representatives also met with the CCSC, which oversees a variety of Christian denominations, to discuss issues of mutual concern.

In August, embassy officials met with members of ECAQ to discuss the effects of the continuing lack of approval over the reopening of "villa" churches since March 2020. Embassy representatives attended Christmas services at an array of "villas" to show support for their activities.