

USCIRF-RECOMMENDED FOR SPECIAL WATCH LIST (SWL)

KEY FINDINGS

In 2025, ongoing religious freedom restrictions in Qatar became systematic. The only registered religious groups in Qatar are Sunni and Shi'a Muslims and eight Christian denominations. The law severely limits religious freedom for unregistered groups, such as Baha'is, Hindus, and Buddhists. Additionally, in 2025, several members of the Dawoodi Bohra Shi'a community faced arbitrary arrests, interrogation, and increased surveillance for their religious identity. 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.

Qatar's 2002 Community Protection Law allows the Ministry of Interior to provisionally detain individuals without trial for up to six months for violating public morality. Article 256 of the Qatari Penal Code [imposes](#) a prison sentence of up to seven years for insulting religion.

While Qatar's constitution guarantees freedom of religion, authorities continue to deny official recognition to the Baha'i community. The government has denied residency permits to Baha'is, prosecuted community members on financial charges for unclear reasons, delayed attempts to reestablish a Baha'i cemetery, and refused to register marriage certificates issued by Baha'i institutions in Qatar. In 2025, a high-ranking Qatari religious figure told a now-deported Baha'i individual that if he announced his conversion to Sunni Islam, he could "make the deportation go away." These practices and coercive measures cultivate fear among Baha'is of family separation, job loss, and blacklisting and therefore systematically undermine their right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). In August, a court sentenced Baha'i leader Remy Rowhani to five years in prison on the explicitly religious charge of casting "doubt on the foundations and teachings of Islam." An appeals court overturned Rowhani's conviction in September. The

month prior, a group of United Nations (UN) special rapporteurs raised [concerns](#) over the "broader and disturbing pattern of disparate treatment of the Baha'i minority in Qatar."

Converts to Christianity from Islam experience FoRB restrictions, including harassment and surveillance. Conversion is a *hudud* crime punishable by law according to Law 11 of the Qatar Penal Code. Both Qatari and migrant converts experience discrimination, harassment, and police monitoring. Conversion from Islam is not officially recognized. Although non-Qatari Christian residents of Qatar are relatively free to practice their faith, the government monitors worship activities.

Qatar's official curriculum promotes and endorses discriminatory claims about Christians, Jews, Shi'a Muslims, and nonbelievers. Government textbooks in Qatar used during 2025 reflect little if any improvement from previous years. Textbooks call polytheism "the greatest sin" that "follows with the worst punishments." It disparages "polytheists" as people who should be grouped alongside "the ignorant." State textbooks also misstate basic factual information about Judaism to portray it in a negative light (e.g., a claim that the Talmud occupies a more important place in Judaism than the Torah). Furthermore, history textbooks discussing Adolph Hitler's ideology omit antisemitism and references to the Holocaust.

Qatar has projected an international image of economic progress, [religious tolerance](#), and multicultural engagement. The government has hosted international conferences to promote religious tolerance, including a regular meeting hosted by the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue (DICID). Nonetheless, as part of the 2025 UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR), several UN member states [recommended](#) that Qatar make substantive improvements to its legal protections on FoRB and safeguard against discrimination on the basis of religion.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

- Include Qatar on the Special Watch List for engaging in or tolerating severe violations of religious freedom pursuant to the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA);
 - Request updates and offer assistance through the U.S. Department of State to Qatar's Ministry of Education to facilitate the removal of religiously intolerant material, including antisemitic portrayal of Jews and inflammatory rhetoric to describe non-Muslims and nonbelievers; and
 - Direct the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor at the State Department to work with the National Human Rights Committee of Qatar (NHRC) to incorporate religious freedom protections into the framework of its Human Rights Strategic Plan.
- The U.S. Congress should:
- Hold hearings, aligned with bilateral U.S.-Qatar strategic dialogues, to raise religious freedom conditions, including the detention of FoRB prisoners, discrimination against Shi'a Muslims and Baha'is, continued enforcement of blasphemy laws, and remaining religiously intolerant content in textbooks; and
 - Conduct bipartisan congressional delegations to Qatar in 2026 to raise key religious freedom issues, including discrimination against Baha'is, use of blasphemy laws, and FoRB prisoners.

KEY USCIRF RESOURCES & ACTIVITIES

- **Press Statement:** [USCIRF Calls on Trump Administration to Secure FoRB Commitments from Qatar](#)
- **Press Statement:** [Sentencing of Baha'i Leader in Qatar – A Systematic Pattern](#)
- **Frank R. Wolf Freedom of Religion or Belief** [Victims List](#) and [Appendix 2](#)

Background

Of Qatar's population of more than 2.55 million people, Muslims comprise roughly 65 percent and are mostly Sunni. Other religious communities include Hindus (15.9 percent) and Buddhists (3.8 percent). Folk religions, Jews, and other minority faith communities comprise less than one percent of the population.

Qatar's constitution stipulates that Islam is the official religion and that Shari'a is "a main source" of legislation. Article 35 bans discrimination based on religion, and Article 50 guarantees freedom of worship but subjects it to the maintenance of "public order and morality." The Penal Code and press laws, both guided by Shari'a, criminalize blasphemy, specifically "insulting the Supreme Being" and "offending, misinterpreting, or violating the Holy Qur'an." Article 256 of Qatar's constitution [imposes](#) a prison sentence of up to seven years for "offending the Islamic religion" or "insulting any of the prophets." The government reviews, censors, and bans media containing or disseminating what it [deems](#) objectionable religious content.

Limitations on Non-Muslim Worship

Government authorities continued to limit freedom of worship for non-Muslim religious minorities. In early 2025, Qatar security authorities detained several members of the Dawoodi Bohra Shi'a Muslim community for peaceful religious activity, including gathering for prayer without a permit. The individuals were detained without due process and subject to irregular judicial proceedings for their religious identity.

The government allows some Christian denominations—such as Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Maronite, Anglican, and Evangelical Protestant communities—to worship publicly but only within the Mesaymeer Religious Complex in Doha. The complex is a single, government-approved compound that operates under heavy state supervision. Non-Muslim faith communities that lack state recognition, including Hindus, Buddhists, and Baha'is, face severe obstacles to worship. The government prohibits these groups from publicly displaying their faith and distributing religious materials. It also requires permits for private worship. Unregistered faith groups face severe financial restrictions that hamper their organizational ability. The government prohibits these groups from opening bank accounts, legally hiring staff, and soliciting funds. The Christian Churches Steering Committee (CCSC) reports overcrowding and limited resources to accommodate worshippers because of the restricted worship within the compound. However, using residential spaces for worship puts worshippers in a precarious situation. Because unrecognized faith groups lack legal protection, the government may punish unauthorized religious gatherings by terminating visas and work contracts, detaining worshippers, or subjecting them to fines or deportations.

Systematic Discrimination against Baha'is

In April 2025, Qatari authorities detained Baha'i community leader Remy Rowhani after having previously arrested him at Doha

International Airport in January. Following that arrest, Rowhani served a one-month prison sentence before being released. A Qatari court previously tried Rowhani in 2021 when he was the chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Qatar for purported violations of finance laws. In April 2025, prosecutors charged Rowhani with "promoting an ideology or belief raising doubts about the fundamentals of Islam." In the course of his detention, prison officials repeatedly interrogated him about his involvement with the Baha'i community. Furthermore, court authorities repeatedly denied his defense team full access to the evidence or legal documents.

Baha'i groups are concerned that given the small Baha'i population in Qatar, many of whom are foreign nationals, non-renewal of visas could lead to the eradication of the Baha'i community. Between 2003 and 2025, Qatar authorities have deported at least 14 Baha'is on account of their religious identity. Government discrimination extends into employment and administrative life as well. Activists reported in 2025 that authorities terminated one Baha'i person's employment and denied a certificate of good conduct, which is a prerequisite for employment, to several others.

Legal and Administrative Challenges

Qatar's government uses the [male guardianship system](#) to coercively impose restrictions on FoRB. Individuals in Qatar are legally bound to the system even when it contradicts their religious beliefs. Sunni religious rulings and Shari'a jurisprudence govern the 2006 Family Law, which requires a wife to obey her husband, imposes legal consequences for working outside the home without his permission, and mandates that a couple divorce if one engages in apostasy. Qatari women have reported needing a male guardian's permission to work in government schools, government ministries, and some governmental or quasi-governmental institutions. Furthermore, the Ministry of Interior requires unmarried Qatari adult women under 25 to show proof of a male guardian's permission to travel abroad. Male guardians can apply to issue travel bans on their female relatives or wives.

Key U.S. Policy

Qatar is a major non-North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) ally of the United States. The two countries have had bilateral relations since 1972. In May, U.S. President Donald J. Trump visited Qatar, announcing \$243.5 billion in [economic deals](#) between the United States and Qatar. In June 2025, then U.S. Ambassador to Qatar Timmy T. Davis concluded his tenure. A new ambassador was not appointed by the end of the reporting period. Throughout 2025, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Special Envoy to the Middle East Steven C. Witkoff [met with Qatari government officials](#), including Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, to discuss opportunities for economic cooperation, as well as regional peace and security.