

WORLD WATCH LIST 2025

SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

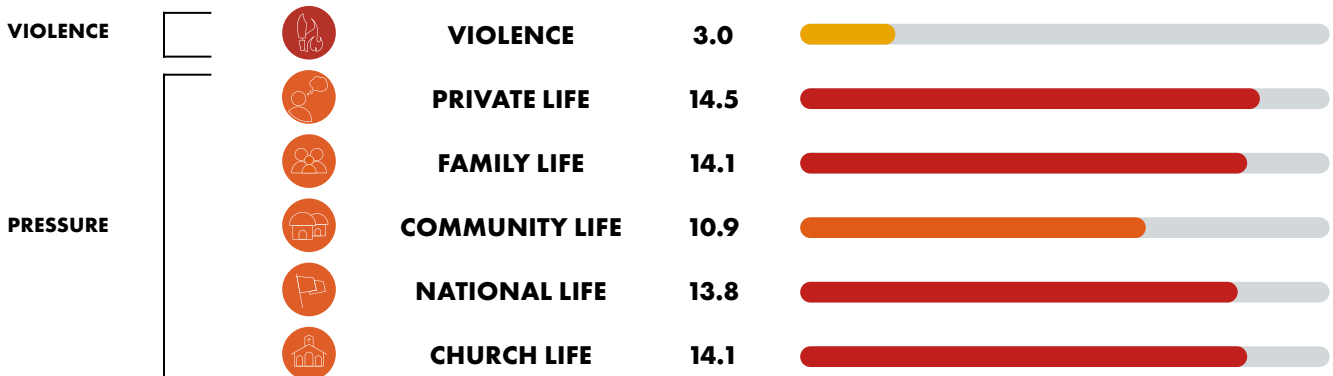
OMAN

WORLD WATCH LIST NO.
32



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LEVELS OF VIOLENCE AND PRESSURE



Each of the six categories is scored out of a maximum of 16.7 points. The categories added together total 100 points (6 x 16.7 = 100).

Key findings

There are two categories of Christians in Oman: expatriate Christians and converts from Islam to Christianity. Converts are put under pressure from both the government as well as family and society to recant their faith. They can be expelled from their jobs and homes and face problems with child custody and inheritance. Expatriate Muslims converting to Christianity experience similar pressures as in their home countries, as they are often living within their own national or ethnic communities. Expatriate Christian communities are tolerated, but their facilities are restricted and meetings are monitored to record any political statements and the attendance of any Omani nationals. All religious organizations must be registered with the authorities.

Quick facts

LEADER

Sultan and Prime Haitham bin Tarik Al Said

POPULATION

4,714,000

NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

187,000¹

MAIN RELIGION

Islam

GOVERNMENT

Absolute Monarchy



Context

Religious Context	Number of adherents	Percentage
Christians	187,000	4.0
Muslims	4,180,000	88.7
Hindus	254,000	5.4
Buddhists	36,500	0.8

Source²

The country is ruled by a monarch (Sultan Haitham bin Tariq since January 2020) and classed as authoritarian.

According to Middle East Concern (MEC Oman report): “The Basic Law of Oman establishes Islam as the religion of the State and Islamic law as the basis of legislation. The Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs closely regulates and monitors religious activities, including Islamic activities... Only approved messages can be given within mosques... Non-Muslim worship is only permitted on premises officially designated for that purpose, on land donated by the Sultan.” “Expatriate Christians enjoy considerable freedom in Oman, provided their activities are restricted to designated compounds and that they avoid interaction with Muslims that could be construed as proselytism.”

Just like all other Omanis and expatriates in the country, Christians and churches are well aware that their online activities are monitored and that they need to avoid discussing sensitive issues in public.

Most Omanis practice a brand of Islam unique to Oman called Ibadism, which has been characterized as “moderate conservatism”, a mixture of austerity and tolerance. According to [experts](#), Ibadis do not believe in violence against those who leave Islam and tend to tolerate Christians, leading to Oman being internationally presented as a model of tolerance and diplomacy. However, pressure on Omani converts from Islam to Christianity (and on expatriate Christians involved in proselytizing) remains very high.

Most Christians are expatriates, concentrated in urban areas and come from the Philippines, India and Western countries.

How the situation varies by region

Omani society is still very tribal with an outspoken Islamic character and levels of pressure on Christians tend to be high throughout the country. Pressure from the government has been increasing in recent years, affecting all of the country.

¹ Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

² Data source: Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Who is affected?

COMMUNITIES OF EXPATRIATE CHRISTIANS

There are a number of expatriate communities (including Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Protestant), located mainly in urban areas such as Muscat and Sohar in the north and Salalah in the south. Their facilities are restricted in order not to offend nationals.

HISTORICAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

This category is not included in the WWL scoring and analysis.

CONVERTS TO CHRISTIANITY

Converts to Christianity from Islam risk isolation and pressure to renounce their faith from family and society. They can lose citizenship. They can also lose child custody, as the law prohibits a father who leaves Islam from retaining paternal rights over his children.

NON-TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

This category is not included in the WWL scoring and analysis.



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Main sources of persecution and discrimination

ISLAMIC OPPRESSION

Converts to Christianity from an Omani Muslim background face the highest levels of pressure from family, who see conversion as a betrayal of family honor and will likely expel converts from their home. For converts from Islam originating from elsewhere (e.g., Pakistan or the Levant), much depends on the response within their surrounding community in Oman. As long as they do not create unrest, they have less to fear from the Omani government, although their Omani employers can fire them, which would result in deportation if they could not find another job. Conversion is not recognized by the government and suspected Omani converts have been interrogated by officials, commanded to stop meeting, and have faced legal problems and threats of losing their jobs and homes. 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.

CLAN OPPRESSION

Tribal values are blended with Islamic values: to be Omani is to be Muslim, and to leave the faith is a dishonor and shame to family and society. Converts face the risk of being ostracized or subjected to immense pressure to return to Islam.

DICTATORIAL PARANOIA

Freedom House rates the country as “not free” (Freedom House/Global Freedom 2024) and states: “The regime restricts virtually all political rights and civil liberties, imposing criminal penalties for criticism and dissent.” The media also faces harassment and intimidation. Pressure on Christians in this regard has further increased under the new Sultan, with most Christians applying strict self-censorship to avoid accusations of proselytizing or criticizing the government.

How are men and women differently affected?

WOMEN

Women are in a vulnerable position in Oman’s conservative society, where fathers, husbands and male guardians exert significant control over their lives. Women have no voice in society, so are not expected to have their own religious opinions. It is extremely difficult for women to convert to Christianity, facing house arrest and being isolated from other Christians. Unmarried converts may also be pressured to marry a Muslim to force them to return to Islam. Housemaids, many of whom are Christian domestic migrant workers, experience sexual abuse and slave-like treatment.

Female typical pressure points:

- Denied access to social community/networks
- Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse
- Enforced religious dress code
- Forced marriage
- Incarceration by family (house arrest)
- Violence – physical
- Violence – sexual
- Violence – verbal

MEN

It is very difficult for Muslim men to convert to Christianity in Oman. Converts risk social ostracism from families and communities. They are likely to lose the financial support of their families and the necessary connections to find or maintain a job in Oman’s network-based society. This impacts dependent family members, as men are traditionally their family’s breadwinners. If married, he will lose custody of his children, and he might be divorced.

Male typical pressure points:

- Denied access to social community/networks
- Denied custody of children
- Economic harassment via business/job/work access
- Violence – verbal



WWL 5 year trend

WWL Year	Position on Open Doors World Watch List	Persecution rounded score out of 100
2025	32	70
2024	31	69
2023	47	65
2022	36	66
2021	44	63

The rise of 1 point in WWL 2025 was mainly due to increases in the pressure score, above all in the Community and National spheres. This was caused by several incidents involving the community of converts from Islam to Christianity. Average pressure remained at a very high level for Christians, especially for converts from Islam to Christianity. All Christians continue to be closely monitored by the government, with government pressure increasingly limiting the Freedom of Religion and Belief.



Examples of violence in the reporting period

Christians in Oman, especially suspected converts from a Muslim background, are strictly monitored by the security services, forcing them into self-censorship. Most Omani converts from Islam to Christianity keep their new faith hidden and are forced to practice privately, and individually. They are highly aware of the volatile consequences of breaking family norms and have seen and heard of the consequences for those converts in Oman and other Gulf countries who have revealed their new faith or attempted to gather with other Christians; severe physical, mental and emotional abuse by family members and local authorities. The expatriate Christian community remains monitored and is frequently obliged to self-censor. No further details can be shared due to security concerns.

PRIVATE LIFE

Expatriate Christians whom the government suspects of evangelizing to Muslims can be accused of proselytism, which can lead to deportation. Oman is one of the few countries where Islam is the state religion, but conversion is not a crime as long as it is not done publicly. Given the tribal culture, however, a convert will be ostracized and lose all social security normally provided by the family.

FAMILY LIFE

All children born to Omani parents, including converts to Christianity, are considered Muslim. Non-Muslim children cannot be exempted from compulsory Islamic classes in state schools. A convert husband will lose his right to custody upon divorce (this would not be different for a convert wife, but women, in general, do have custody rights).

COMMUNITY LIFE

Christians, especially suspected converts and expatriates suspected of evangelism, are monitored by the government and society, who will inform the security services if they are aware of any “suspicious circumstances” or disruptions to societal norms. They can be harassed or interrogated by the police. In a tribal society like Oman, employment

is usually obtained through (family) relationships. Suspected Omani converts face significant challenges in obtaining employment. Christian expatriate workers may experience discrimination. Their Christian faith is an extra vulnerability in this regard, although racism is a prevailing factor.

NATIONAL LIFE

The Omani Constitution (Article 28) only guarantees the “freedom to practice religious rites” under the condition that they “do not ... contradict morals”. Hence, there is no freedom to convert from Islam to Christianity. Christians will try to keep a low political profile in order to avoid provoking a hostile reaction from the government. Only Christian organizations offering a clear benefit to Omani society (e.g., a hospital) are welcomed.

CHURCH LIFE

Churches apply self-censorship and are careful not to organize public activities or print large quantities of Christian material that would be interpreted as proselytism. The government acts against any church that integrates converts. The publication, import and distribution of religious materials are heavily regulated; churches are no longer allowed to use their own channels for importing Bibles.



International obligations & rights violated

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

1. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)
2. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
3. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

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

- Children of Christian converts are forced to receive Muslim religious education and to participate in religious ceremonies and festivals that are not in line with their religious beliefs (CRC Art. 14)
- Female converts to Christianity do not have the option of marrying a Christian spouse, as women registered as Muslims are legally restricted from marrying a non-Muslim (CEDAW Article 16)

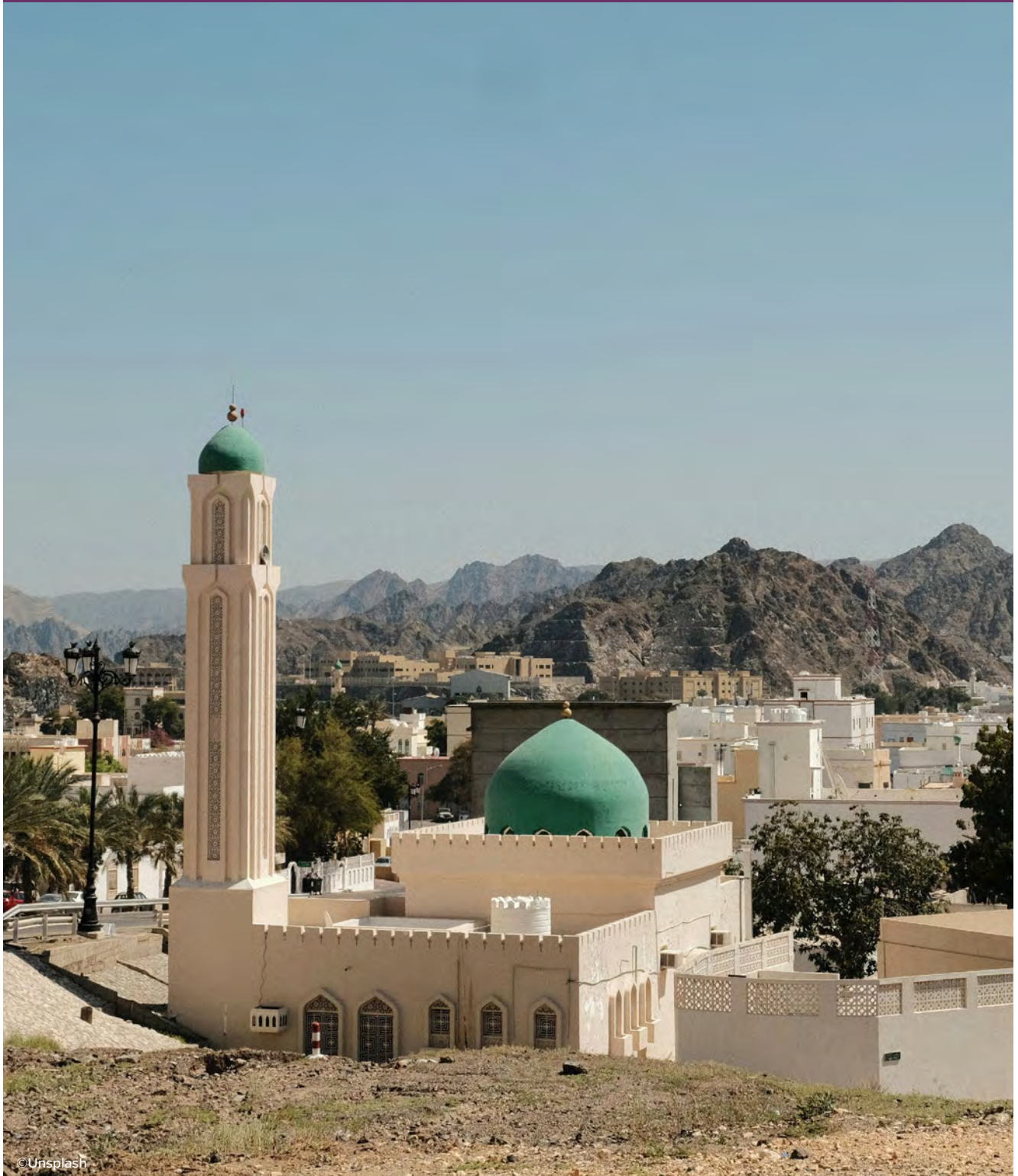
Situation of other religious minorities

Hindus, Buddhists and non-Ibadi Muslims are relatively free to practice their own beliefs. Atheism is viewed with suspicion in Oman.



Open Doors in Oman

Open Doors raises prayer support for the believers and church in the Arabian Peninsula.



ABOUT THIS BRIEF

- The content of this document is based on the more detailed WWL Persecution Dynamics per country published annually by World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. It may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © 2025 Open Doors International.
- All brief country profiles can be accessed under 'Advocacy resources' on the research pages of the Open Doors International website, along with the WWL Persecution Dynamics per country, accompanying Background Information per country and the latest update of WWL Methodology. These are also available at the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).
- The WWL 2025 reporting period was 01 October 2023 – 30 September 2024.

All photos in this dossier are for illustrative purposes.

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