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Watch  
Research

# Yemen: Full Country Dossier

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**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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## Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
World Watch List 2024.....	3
Copyright note.....	4
Sources and definitions.....	4
<b>WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Yemen.....</b>	<b>5</b>
Brief country details.....	5
Map of country.....	5
Dominant persecution engines and drivers.....	6
Brief description of the persecution situation.....	6
Summary of international obligations and rights violations.....	6
Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period.....	7
Specific examples of positive developments.....	7
External Links - Situation in brief.....	7
<b>WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Yemen.....</b>	<b>8</b>
Links for general background information.....	8
Recent history.....	9
Political and legal landscape.....	10
Religious landscape.....	11
Economic landscape.....	12
Social and cultural landscape.....	13
Technological landscape.....	15
Security situation.....	16

Trends analysis .....	17
External Links - Keys to understanding .....	18
<b>WWL 2024: Church information / Yemen .....</b>	<b>20</b>
Christian origins.....	20
Church spectrum today .....	21
Areas where Christians face most difficulties .....	21
Christian communities and how they are affected .....	22
External Links - Church information.....	22
<b>WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Yemen.....</b>	<b>23</b>
Reporting period .....	23
Position on the World Watch List .....	23
Persecution engines .....	23
Drivers of persecution .....	25
The Persecution pattern.....	27
Pressure in the 5 spheres of life .....	28
Violence.....	32
5 Year trends .....	34
Gender-specific religious persecution / Female .....	36
Gender-specific religious persecution / Male .....	37
Persecution of other religious minorities.....	38
Future outlook.....	39
External Links - Persecution Dynamics.....	40
<b>Further useful reports.....</b>	<b>41</b>

# Introduction

## World Watch List 2024

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	12.8	96	98	96	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	10.6	93	92	91	92	92
3	Libya	15.9	16.0	15.9	16.1	16.4	10.2	91	88	91	92	90
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.8	89	89	88	88	87
5	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	89	88	87	85
6	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.5	14.9	14.4	16.7	88	88	87	85	80
7	Pakistan	13.2	13.9	15.0	15.1	13.1	16.7	87	86	87	88	88
8	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	13.3	87	83	79	79	85
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.8	16.5	10.9	86	86	85	86	85
10	Afghanistan	15.7	15.9	15.2	16.3	16.6	4.6	84	84	98	94	93
11	India	12.2	12.6	13.3	14.8	13.2	16.5	83	82	82	83	83
12	Syria	13.4	14.3	13.9	14.3	14.2	11.1	81	80	78	81	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.7	16.6	3.3	81	80	81	78	79
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	12.8	15.1	15.6	79	76	70	67	66
15	Algeria	14.4	14.1	11.5	14.0	15.6	9.8	79	73	71	70	73
16	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.0	14.8	13.9	7.8	79	76	78	82	76
17	Myanmar	12.2	10.6	13.4	13.7	13.0	16.1	79	80	79	74	73
18	Maldives	15.6	15.5	13.6	16.0	16.4	0.9	78	77	77	77	78
19	China	13.0	10.0	12.8	14.6	16.0	11.1	78	77	76	74	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	13.8	15.6	75	71	68	67	66
21	Laos	11.6	10.6	13.2	14.3	14.0	11.3	75	68	69	71	72
22	Cuba	13.2	8.7	13.8	13.3	15.1	8.7	73	70	66	62	52
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	1.3	72	72	70	71	68
24	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.7	12.8	14.4	5.4	71	69	69	67	66
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.9	12.6	15.5	1.7	71	71	71	71	73
26	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.5	10.8	10.4	14.1	71	69	68	67	63
27	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.9	70	70	68	62	60
28	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	70	68	66	68
29	Turkmenistan	14.2	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.5	0.6	70	70	69	70	70
30	Nicaragua	12.1	7.6	13.2	13.2	14.1	9.6	70	65	56	51	41
31	Oman	14.3	14.0	10.6	13.3	14.0	3.1	69	65	66	63	62
32	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	14.4	69	66	66	65	63
33	Tunisia	12.3	13.2	10.2	12.4	13.8	6.9	69	67	66	67	64
34	Colombia	11.1	8.6	12.9	11.3	10.4	14.1	68	71	68	67	62
35	Vietnam	11.3	9.4	12.4	13.8	14.2	7.2	68	70	71	72	72
36	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	12.4	14.1	14.3	2.2	68	66	67	64	61
37	Mexico	11.5	8.5	12.5	11.1	10.6	14.1	68	67	65	64	60
38	Egypt	12.5	13.7	11.4	11.9	10.9	7.8	68	68	71	75	76
39	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.0	68	68	65	63	43
40	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.6	67	68	74	67	66
41	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.9	67	67	66	64	56
42	Indonesia	10.9	12.3	11.5	10.2	9.7	11.5	66	68	68	63	60
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.0	13.1	15.9	66	65	65	64	60
44	Brunei	15.0	14.7	10.0	10.8	14.1	1.3	66	65	64	64	63
45	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.1	66	66	63	62	57
46	Tajikistan	13.8	12.6	12.3	12.9	13.4	0.6	66	66	65	66	65
47	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.8	12.1	12.8	14.3	1.1	65	65	64	64	64
48	Jordan	12.9	14.2	10.5	12.4	12.8	2.2	65	65	66	64	64
49	Malaysia	13.0	14.1	11.5	12.2	11.1	2.4	64	66	63	63	62
50	Turkey	13.0	11.5	11.6	13.2	11.4	3.1	64	66	65	69	63

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	12.4	63	64	63	62	61
52	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	14.4	62	63	61	58	55
53	Nepal	12.1	10.4	9.5	13.2	12.3	4.4	62	61	64	66	64
54	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	64	64	63	62
55	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	1.1	61	60	59	56	56
56	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	10.6	61	58	55	53	56
57	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.7	61	62	62	62	60
58	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.2	10.8	11.5	9.7	5.9	60	57	63	62	65
59	Azerbaijan	13.2	9.9	9.6	11.9	13.6	1.7	60	59	60	56	57
60	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	9.7	10.7	12.1	0.9	60	60	59	58	60
61	Kyrgyzstan	13.2	10.3	11.3	10.5	12.2	1.3	59	59	58	58	57
62	Russian Federation	12.7	7.7	10.6	12.8	12.9	1.7	58	57	56	57	60
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	9.4	58	57	50	42	42
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	12.8	57	55	52	48	48
65	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	1.1	55	55	57	56	55
66	Honduras	7.9	4.7	12.2	7.3	9.9	12.6	55	53	48	46	39
67	Venezuela	6.0	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	10.7	53	56	51	39	42
68	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	8.9	52	49	44	43	41
69	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	7.2	52	48	43	47	45
70	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	15.9	52	51	48	47	48
71	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	52	51	46	43
72	Lebanon	11.0	10.2	7.0	6.1	6.6	7.2	48	40	11	-	35
73	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	3.7	47	44	44	43	43
74	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.6	46	46	43	43	44
75	Belarus	9.6	3.8	5.8	9.7	13.3	3.3	46	43	33	30	28
76	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	44	42	42	42
77	Ukraine	5.5	4.8	8.0	11.6	11.6	2.8	44	37	37	34	33
78	Israel	9.8	8.6	5.8	6.3	6.9	6.7	44	38	41	40	38

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## Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2024 reporting period was 1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/> and on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom): <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>.

# WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Yemen

## Brief country details

In the table below, the number of Christians shown is an Open Doors (OD) estimate.

Yemen: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
31,818,000	a small number	OD estimate

## Map of country



Yemen: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	89	5
WWL 2023	89	3
WWL 2022	88	5
WWL 2021	87	7
WWL 2020	85	8

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Yemen: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Clan oppression	Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders, One's own (extended) family, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs
Islamic oppression	Non-Christian religious leaders, Violent religious groups, One's own (extended) family, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Government officials, Ethnic group leaders
Dictatorial paranoia	Violent religious groups, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups, Government officials
Organized corruption and crime	Government officials

*Engines and Drivers are listed in order of strength. Only Very strong / Strong / Medium are shown here.*

### Brief description of the persecution situation

Informal churches in the country have faced intensifying persecution over the last decades; both Yemenis and international partners have been assassinated for sharing their Christian faith. The indigenous Church in Yemen is composed mostly of Christians with a Muslim background and their children who need to live their faith in secret. They face violations of religious freedom from their family and the authorities (both from the official authorities and from Houthi rebels acting as local authorities in certain areas) as well as from radical Islamic groups.

Action against known converts includes more than just detention and interrogation; radical Muslims threaten apostates with death if they do not re-convert. By birth, one belongs to a tribe and its internal norms: The tribal punishment for denouncing Islam can be death or banishment. Both male and female converts to Christianity married to Muslims risk divorce including losing custody of their children. The civil war exacerbates their already difficult situation. Christians are suffering from the general humanitarian crisis in the country, but Yemeni Christians are additionally vulnerable since emergency relief is mostly distributed through local Muslim groups and mosques, which are allegedly discriminating against all who are not considered to be devout Muslims.

### Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Yemen has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights in the following international treaties:

1. [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR)
2. [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR)
3. [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) (CAT)

4. [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW)
5. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

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

- Christians converts are pressured by the state and society to recant their conversion (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christians suffer from biased distribution of emergency relief because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 26)
- Christian converts, male and female, face divorce and lose custody of their children because of their conversion (ICCPR Art. 23 and CEDAW Art. 16)
- Distribution of non-Islamic religious material is forbidden by law (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)
- Female Christian converts are forced to house imprisonment and held as a hostage because of their faith (ICCPR Arts. 9 and 12 and CEDAW Art. 15)

### Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- At least one Christian was killed for faith-related reasons.
- Informal fellowships are forced to meet in secret and experienced opposition and limitations due to a crackdown on Christians.
- Various Christians were (or continued to be) detained for faith-related reasons during the WWL 2024 reporting period. According to sources, both religious and non-religious factors are often involved in these cases.
- Dozens of Christians were mentally or physically abused as a result of their faith and the war situation, the threat mostly coming from families and communities.
- Several Christians had to leave their homes and relocate in or outside of the country due to fear of assassination because of their faith or for war-related reasons.
- Dozens of Christians faced sexual harassment, abduction, rape or forced marriage.

### Specific examples of positive developments

There are few positive developments to observe and it is hard to believe that the situation could become any worse for the Yemeni population in general and for Christians (and other minority groups) in particular.

In November 2022, the [National Council for Minorities](#) in Yemen published a report on the situation of religious and ethnic minorities in the country (Asharq Al-Awsat, 5 November 2022). The publication of this report by the council (founded in March 2022), would seem to indicate an increase in contact and cooperation between the various religious and ethnic groups.

### External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>



- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of positive developments: National Council for Minorities - <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/3970696/yemeni-book-documents-houthi-violations-against-minorities>

## WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Yemen

### Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/23 Yemen country report (156 countries covered)	AI Yemen 2022	<a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/yemen/report-yemen/">https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/yemen/report-yemen/</a>	23 June 2023
BBC News Yemen country profile - updated 17 April 2023	BBC Yemen profile	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14704852">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14704852</a>	23 June 2023
Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 - 137 countries	BTI Yemen Report 2022	<a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/YEM">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/YEM</a>	23 June 2023
CIA World Factbook Yemen - updated 21 June 2023	World Factbook Yemen	<a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/yemen/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/yemen/</a>	23 June 2023
Crisis24 Yemen country report (Garda World) - 193 countries	Crisis24 Yemen report	<a href="https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/yemen">https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/yemen</a>	23 June 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit Yemen profile 2023	EIU Yemen profile. 2023	<a href="https://country.eiu.com/yemen">https://country.eiu.com/yemen</a>	23 June 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 Yemen - 179 countries covered	FSI 2023 Yemen	<a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>	23 June 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index - 29 countries, Yemen not included	Democracy Index 2023	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores</a>	
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom Index Yemen - 210 countries covered	Global Freedom Index 2023 Yemen	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/yemen/freedom-world/2023">https://freedomhouse.org/country/yemen/freedom-world/2023</a>	23 June 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report - 70 countries, Yemen not included	Freedom on the Net 2023 Yemen	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores</a>	
Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 – covering 170 countries	GIWPS 2021 Yemen profile	<a href="https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/yemen/">https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/yemen/</a>	23 June 2023
Girls Not Brides Yemen report	Girls not Brides Yemen	<a href="https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/yemen/">https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/yemen/</a>	23 June 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 Yemen country chapter	HRW 2023 country chapter Yemen	<a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/yemen">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/yemen</a>	23 June 2023
Internet World Stats available in 2023 - Yemen	IWS 2023 Yemen	<a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm#ye">https://www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm#ye</a>	23 June 2023
Middle East Concern country profile	MEC Yemen profile	<a href="https://www.meconcern.org/countries/yemen/">https://www.meconcern.org/countries/yemen/</a>	23 June 2023
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index - Yemen -180 countries covered	World Press Freedom 2023 Yemen	<a href="https://rsf.org/en/country/yemen">https://rsf.org/en/country/yemen</a>	23 June 2023
Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index - 180 countries	CPI 2022 Yemen	<a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/yemen">https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/yemen</a>	23 June 2023
UNDP: Human Development Report Yemen – 189 countries covered - update 8 September 2022	UNDP HDR 2022 Yemen	<a href="https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#/countries/YEM">https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#/countries/YEM</a>	23 June 2023

US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report Yemen	IRFR 2022 Yemen	<a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/yemen/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/yemen/</a>	23 June 2023
USCIRF 2023 country reports 15 CPC / 11 SWL, Yemen not included	USCIRF 2023	<a href="https://www.uscifr.gov/countries">https://www.uscifr.gov/countries</a>	23 June 2023
World Bank country profile data - covering 222 countries	World Bank data 2021 Yemen	<a href="https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&amp;id=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=YEM">https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&amp;id=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=YEM</a>	23 June 2023
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 - 147 countries	Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Yemen	<a href="https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/65cf93926fdb3ea23b72f277fc249a72-0500042021/related/mpo-yem.pdf">https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/65cf93926fdb3ea23b72f277fc249a72-0500042021/related/mpo-yem.pdf</a>	23 June 2023
World Bank Yemen overview - updated 21 March 2023	World Bank Yemen overview	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/yemen/overview">https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/yemen/overview</a>	23 June 2023

## Recent history

In 1990 clan-based North Yemen and Communist South Yemen merged after years of armed conflict. In the North, tribal violence has persisted and the prominent Houthi clan is fighting for the restoration of Shia rule and for action against government corruption. Since the ousting of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh in 2012, Yemen has seen political turmoil and sporadic violence. In the power vacuum, militants and rebels - including groups affiliated with al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group (IS) - are fighting to gain control of territory.

As reported by Freedom House (Global Freedom Index 2023):

- "Yemen ... has been devastated by a civil war involving regional powers since 2015. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and their allies intervened that year to support the government of President Abd Rabbu Mansur Hadi against Ansar Allah (Supporters of God), also known as the Houthis—an armed rebel movement that is rooted in the Zaidi Shiite community, which forms a large minority concentrated in northwestern Yemen. The civilian population has suffered from direct violence by both sides, as well as from hunger and disease caused by the interruption of trade and aid. Elections are long overdue, normal political activity has halted, and many state institutions have ceased to function."

Since mid-September 2021, there have been many public demonstrations in the south, often leading to street violence. This civil unrest is mainly driven by the deterioration of living conditions due to rising prices, which have made basic necessities such as food virtually unaffordable for many. On 1 April 2022, a two month truce came into effect between the two main warring parties - the Iran-aligned Houthi rebels on one side, and the Saudi-led coalition forces (including the Yemeni government) on the other. This truce has made it possible for President Hadi to officially hand over his duties to an eight-member presidential council at a ceremony on 19 April 2022 in Aden. The truce was extended twice but was broken multiple times by both sides and finally came to an end in early October 2022 when the warring parties rejected a UN proposal to once again extend and expand the agreement. Meanwhile, Houthi representatives and Saudi Arabia have been holding "[back-channel negotiations](#)" in Oman, independent of the UN peace process, thus undermining the presidential council (International Crisis Group, November 2022).

In April 2023, the first Saudi diplomatic visit to Yemen in eight years accelerated peace talks and both parties exchanged hundreds of prisoners, raising hopes for a comprehensive agreement to end hostilities. In the months that followed, negotiations continued to stall, with rising hopes for a breakthrough in new talks in the second half of 2023. During the relative calm, the Houthi

rebels have reportedly stepped up their military capabilities, recruited children and strengthened ties with Iran. It has also given them more bandwidth to enforce limits on freedom of speech, expression and mobility while simultaneously imposing their sectarian ideas on society. Meanwhile, tensions continued, leading to renewed calls for a separate southern state by the Southern Transitional Council (STC) in September 2023. Finally, the Houthis launched long-range missiles and drones targeting Israel in October 2023 and threatened with further attacks, possibly intending to expand the war between Israel and Hamas as well as potentially jeopardizing Yemen's peace process.

## Political and legal landscape

Yemen is an Islamic republic and Sharia (Islamic law) is the principal source of law. The government has one legislative chamber, which is - in theory - elected every six years. The last parliamentary elections were in 2003 and a presidential election was held in 2012 in which the outgoing president was the only candidate. Due to the civil war, fresh elections are not expected to be held in the short-term. The Economist Intelligence Unit classifies the Yemeni government as 'authoritarian' (EIU 2022).

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022):

- "The government exercised limited legal or administrative control in much of the country's territory throughout the year, which constrained its ability to enforce laws or address abuses of religious liberty committed in the country, including those committed by security personnel, tribal leaders, or local military commanders in areas under its nominal control."
- "At year's end [2022], the Houthis continued to control approximately one-third of the country's territory, containing 70 to 80 percent of the population. Media sources reported that in areas they controlled, the Houthis enforced a strict interpretation of Zaydism, that is not shared by other Zaydi Shia in the country, and discriminated against individuals who did not follow their interpretation of those practices and doctrines, particularly religious minorities and women."

Advocacy organization Middle East Concern reported (MEC Yemen):

- "The rule of law is weak in Yemen, with some variations in practice according to tribal traditions and differing interpretations of Islamic law. Yemen's constitution of 1994 establishes Islam as the state religion and Islamic law as the sole source of all legislation. The constitution upholds the principle of non-discrimination, protects freedom of thought and expression of opinion, and establishes the inviolability of places of worship, all within the limits of the law. Blasphemy, defamation of religions and non-Islamic proselytising are prohibited. Apostasy is a criminal offence, punishable by death for apostates who refuse to recant. Islamic personal status laws apply, including a prohibition on marriage between a Muslim and an apostate and between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man."
- "[T]here is no formal registration process for non-Islamic religious groups and the government has not authorized construction of non-Islamic places of worship for many years."

Some Yemeni Christians have been accused of blasphemy and arrested. Also in the WWL 2024 reporting period, Christians were detained for both religious and non-religious reasons. The power of the Houthis has expanded further in their quest to restore rule according to the Shiite Zaydi Imamate - which existed in the country until 1962. With the growing Houthi influence, the situation for the Christians has deteriorated further. The few migrant Christians who are left are legally free to conduct non-Islamic worship in private, but due to the civil war this has not happened for years. On account of the fighting, most expatriates, including Christians, have left Yemen.

### **Gender perspective**

The legal landscaping facing women and girls is additionally restrictive. Female representation in parliament is currently non-existent, with no seats being held by women as of 2022, down from 0.3% of seats in 2020 ([Index Mundi, accessed 12 June 2023](#)). Yemen acceded to the CEDAW Convention in 1984 and unlike other countries following Sharia law, made no reservations to any articles concerning gender equality. However, the CEDAW committee has consistently challenged Yemen's lack of compliance with its provisions, particularly in relation to marriage ([CEDAW, 2021](#)). While Article 23 of the 1992 Personal Status code indicates that a bride must give consent to marry, she is not allowed to sign her own wedding contract. Silence is deemed sufficient consent, making women and girls vulnerable to forced marriages. Yemen's Personal Status Code also fails to specify a minimum age of marriage; an estimated 32% of girls are married before the age of 18 (Girls Not Brides Yemen). Neither marital rape nor domestic violence are specifically criminalized in Yemeni law ([HRW, 7 February 2020](#)).

### **Religious landscape**

The Open Doors estimate for the number of Christians in Yemen is "a small number". The pre-civil war number of Christians was approximately 40,000 when there was still a significant Christian expatriate community. After most of them left the country as a result of the war, tolerance of dissenters decreased. According to WCD statistics (accessed March 2023), over 99% of the population are Muslim. There is also a significant Hindu minority of over 200,000 adherents, most of them immigrants from India and Nepal. At present Christians are a tiny minority, most of whom are from a Muslim background. Proselytism of Muslims and conversion are both officially illegal; if a convert is discovered, he/she will be forced by the local Islamic community to report their conversion to the authorities. This naturally deters converts to Christianity from making their religion known in public in any way.

Muslim citizens have more rights than the followers of other religions. The country abides by the strictest interpretations of Islam. Leaving Islam to convert to another religion is forbidden both by Islamic and state law. If their new faith is discovered, converts may face the death penalty, although this is generally not implemented by the government but rather by radical Muslims, with the government turning a blind eye. Though focusing most of their attention on political events, government officials continue to intimidate Christians even amid the chaotic war situation. Oppression has mostly been felt coming from Islamic militants who have considerable freedom to operate.

Middle East Concern reported (MEC Yemen):

- "The ongoing conflict, political instability and humanitarian crisis profoundly affects all in Yemen. Additional pressures faced by Christians come principally from non-state actors, given the weak application of the rule of law in many parts of the country. Those who choose to leave Islam are likely to face strong family and societal pressure, which in extreme cases can include violent responses from family members. While apostates face the possible death penalty under the Criminal Code, there have been no known examples of judicial executions for apostasy in recent years. However, there are occasional verified reports of extra-judicial murders for apostasy by community or extremist groups."
- "The threat from violent Islamic militants is significant in parts of Yemen where groups such as al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Islamic State group are strong, especially for nationals who have left Islam." This applies even more to Houthi militants, as one country expert explained: 'Their version of Islam has even more impact on Christians than the aforementioned groups'."

## Economic landscape

According to UNDP's Human Development Report (UNDP HDR Yemen):

- "Yemen's HDI value for 2021 is 0.455— which put the country in the Low human development category—positioning it at 183 out of 191 countries and territories. Between 1990 and 2021, Yemen's HDI value changed from 0.383 to 0.455, an change of 18.8 percent. Between 1990 and 2021, Yemen's life expectancy at birth changed by 5.1 years, mean years of schooling changed by 2.9 years and expected years of schooling changed by 2.6 years. Yemen's GNI per capita changed by about -51.9 percent between 1990 and 2021."

According to the [UN September 2019 report](#) "Assessing the Impact of War on Development in Yemen" (page 6):

- "Prior to the escalation of conflict in 2015, development in Yemen was strained. A country of 30 million people, Yemen ranked: (a) 153rd on the Human Development Index (HDI); (b) 138th in extreme poverty; (c) 147th in life expectancy; (d) 172nd in educational attainment; and, (e) was in the World Bank low-middle income category."
- The impacts of conflict in Yemen are devastating—with nearly a quarter of a million people killed directly by fighting and indirectly through lack of access to food, health services, and infrastructure. Of the dead, 60 per cent are children under the age of five. The long-term impacts of conflict are vast and place it among the most destructive conflicts since the end of the Cold War. The conflict has already set back human development by 21 years".

According to the World Bank Yemen overview and data:

- **Poverty:** "Poverty worsened even before the crisis, affecting almost half of Yemen's population of about 29 million. Now it affects 71% to 78% of Yemenis, with women being the most vulnerable."
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 63.8

According to World Bank Yemen overview and [April 2022 Economic update](#):

- The Yemeni economy is listed in the category 'low income'
- "The UN estimated that 24.1 million people in 2023 were at risk of hunger and disease, and roughly 14 million were in acute need of assistance."
- "Despite government reforms aimed at stabilizing the Yemeni rial, in 2022, the exchange rate continued to depreciate to historic lows, driving significant increases in food prices and pushing more people into extreme poverty."
- "Socioeconomic conditions have deteriorated rapidly, affected by trade disruptions, severe fuel supply shortages, and reduced humanitarian operations. Growing violence and fragmented macroeconomic policies have further strained fragile economic conditions."
- "Prospects for economic improvements in 2023 and beyond will depend on rapid advancements in the political and security situation and on a cessation of hostilities and political reconciliation allowing for a rebuilding of Yemen's economy and social fabric."

In a [September 2023 report](#), Relief Web International mentioned that the real prices of a minimum food basket (MFB) "witnessed an annual decline by five percent in IRG-controlled [International Recognized Government] area and by 21 percent in areas under Sana'a-based authorities [i.e., Houthis]."

The ongoing heavy depreciation of the rial currency will lead to further deterioration of the financial situation for all Yemenis, including Christians, pushing them to desperate survival tactics. Reports indicate that the majority of the Yemeni Church find themselves either unemployed or otherwise without regular salaries, further exacerbating their vulnerability.

### Gender perspective

Women are typically more economically vulnerable in Yemen due to low education and employment rates, and poor financial inclusion (GIWPS 2021 Yemen profile). Making it additionally challenging for women to gain economic independence, Yemeni women do not have equal [inheritance rights](#) to men (World Bank, Women, Business and The Law, 2022). Beyond this formal inequality – under Islamic law, daughters receive half the share that sons receive – widows have been reportedly denied their due inheritance and are sometimes forcibly married to another male within the family of the deceased, in order to ensure that property and wealth are kept within the family. Recent studies suggest that while women are largely underrepresented in the formal labor market ([World Bank Gender Data 2023](#)), their economic security is heavily linked to their financial utility of gold, which they typically receive at their wedding ([ACAPS, 11 April 2023](#)). Marrying girls off early is another financial strategy families affected by poverty and the conflict employ to survive ([UNICEF, 26 June 2020](#)).

## Social and cultural landscape

According to the World Factbook Yemen:

- **Main ethnic groups:** predominantly Arab; but also Afro-Arab, South Asian, European.
- **Main languages:** Arabic (official); a distinct Socotri language is widely used on Socotra Island and Archipelago; Mahri is still fairly widely spoken in eastern Yemen.
- **Urban population:** 39.8% of total population (2023)

- **Literacy rate:** 70.1% for the total population. For women the literacy rate is 55%, for men 85.1% (2015, more recent data is not available).

According to UNDP HDR Yemen:

- **Median age:** 20.2 years. In comparison, according to [Datareportal](#), February 2023: 19 years);
- **Education:** Mean years of schooling: 3.2 (2021). The mean years of schooling for girls is 2.9, while for boys this is 5.1 (2021). Whilst the gender gap in education rates has been closely narrowing, the conflict has disrupted education severely, with over 2 million children out of school ([UNICEF, "Education disrupted", 2021](#)).
- **Youth not in school or employment (% ages 15-24):** 44.8
- **IDPs/Refugees:** 4.3 million Yemenis have been forced to flee their homes because of the crisis – an estimated 74% of them are women and children ([UNHCR](#), last accessed 9 May 2023). In addition, there are almost 62,000 refugees and asylum-seekers (2023).
- **Gender inequality:** With a score of 0.820, Yemen ranks highest on the Gender Inequality Index of 162 listed countries.
- **Child marriage:** 32% of women aged 20–24 who were first married or in union by age 18

Further information:

- **Unemployment rate:** 13.9%, according to [Global Economy](#), last accessed 9 May 2023)
- **Youth unemployment:** 25.5%, according to [Global Economy](#), last accessed 9 May 2023)
- **Malnutrition:** Yemen ranks first on the [Global Hunger Index 2022](#) with a score of 45.1 (last accessed 9 May 2023)
- **Child malnutrition, stunting (moderate or severe) (% under age 5):** 46.4%

Yemen ranks second in the FFP Fragile States Index 2023 because of its continuing civil war and humanitarian disaster. The COVID-19 outbreak contributed to the massive disruption of Yemen's healthcare system and has further complicated getting humanitarian aid into the country. Tribal chaos continues and expansion of the conflict remains high, but the situation for Christians is already extremely difficult. Society in Yemen is conservative, Muslim and tribal. Tribal society remains very strong, and (also before the civil war) the central government has always been a secondary institution to the traditional ways of tribal governance. The government has also not been likely to intervene in intertribal conflicts, even if tribes were physically harming or imprisoning rival members. Tribal law and custom prohibit members of the tribe from leaving the tribe, which only occurs very rarely. The punishment for this would often be death or banishment.

Christians in the country attest that the increase in anarchy, the humanitarian crisis caused by war, natural disasters and diseases like cholera and COVID-19 as well as its aftermath all contribute to the challenges they experience in trying to care for each other and contribute to society. The fact that Westerners (Christians) or other foreigners were blamed for importing the COVID-19 virus has added to an already dangerously polarized and hostile environment for Christians. In addition, there were several smear campaigns through news agencies, social media and radio, to 'warn' the population against Christians in the country. Also, Christian organizations that provide humanitarian aid were accused of doing so in order to lure people to

their faith.

### Gender perspective

Decades of fighting in Yemen have contributed to a higher number of female-led households ([The New Humanitarian, 5 January 2023](#)). Yemen has, however, long been viewed as one of the worst countries to live in as a woman in terms of political empowerment, economic participation, educational attainment, and entrenched social inequalities as pertain to gender ([Amnesty International, 16 December 2019](#)). In addition to the ongoing civil war, economic collapse and natural disasters, the crisis surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic placed further challenges on Yemeni society, particularly women. Domestic violence levels increased, as did

the additional care responsibilities amidst the pandemic-induced lockdowns ([SaferWorld, 27 October 2020](#)). The expansion of the [male guardianship requirement](#) (Mahram) in the Houthi-controlled region in late 2022, including new specifications for the tailoring and selling of women's clothing, further reflects the intensifying social restrictions women face in Yemen (HRW Dispatches, 6 February 2023). These cultural restrictions make it virtually impossible for female converts to attend church meetings as they require both the permission and escort of a male relative.

### Technological landscape

Yemen has the lowest internet and Facebook penetration rate in the Middle East. According to IWS 2023 Yemen:

- **Internet usage:** 26.6% penetration - survey date: January 2022. In comparison, survey date early 2023: 26.7% ([Datareportal](#))
- **Facebook usage:** 11.5% penetration - survey date: January 2022. In comparison, survey date: April 2023: 13.3 % ([Datareportal](#)). According to [Napoleon Cat](#) (June 2023) 83.5% of Facebook users were male and 16.5% women. The largest user group consisted of people aged 18 to 24.
- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 51 per 100 people

The technological landscape in Yemen is affected by the civil war and is currently disrupted. As World Factbook Yemen puts it:

- "[Yemen] continues to provide an exceptionally challenging market for telcos; civil unrest has caused havoc and devastation across most parts of the country, while the threat of sanctions has also made it a challenging environment in which to operate; a large proportion of the population requires humanitarian assistance, and there is little disposable income for services upon which telcos can generate revenue; essential telecom infrastructure, such as mobile towers and fiber cabling, has often been targeted, destroyed, or damaged by the opposing sides in the ongoing conflict; these difficulties have proved to be a disincentive to telcos investing in infrastructure, with the result that the country lacks basic fixed-line infrastructure, and mobile services are based on outdated GSM; this has prevented the development of a mobile broadband sector, or the evolution of mobile data



services; the ownership of telecommunication services, and the scrutiny of associated revenues and taxes, have become a political issue in Yemen; until telecom infrastructure can be improved across Yemen, and until civil unrest eases, there will be little progress for the sector (2022)".

Not all factions in the civil war have the capability to monitor Internet traffic. The Houthis, however, have a sophisticated system of surveillance, actively seek out Christians and exert direct control over accessing the Internet. However, it is unclear how closely the Houthis monitor specific Internet activities and people have been continuing to risk accessing Christian websites online.

According to Freedom House's Global Freedom Index 2023:

- "The state has historically controlled most terrestrial television and radio, though there have been several privately owned radio stations. Since the outbreak of the war, the belligerents have either taken over or enforced self-censorship at any surviving media outlets in the country. Houthi-backed authorities reportedly block certain news websites, online messaging and social media platforms, and satellite broadcasts."
- "All sides in the conflict have subjected journalists to harassment, arbitrary arrests and detentions, violent attacks, and enforced disappearances. At least one journalist was killed in Yemen during 2022, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, for a total of at least 29 killed since 2015."

### **Gender perspective**

The gender gap in mobile Internet usage in the South Asia region averages at 41% ([GSMA, "The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2022", p.15](#)). This gap suggests digital restrictions persist with respect to women's access to both information sources and community networks. Georgetown's research (GIWPS 2021 Yemen profile) indicates that Yemen is one of the worst performing countries for women overall, with about 53.5% cell phone usage among women. Because families monitor carefully the activities of female members, their telephones come under greater scrutiny, making it more difficult for women to become Christians, or become active in local churches. Also, mobile phones are often shared in the family, limiting privacy for both men and women.

### **Security situation**

The ongoing civil war in Yemen is the result of several internal and national power struggles, aggravated by a regional proxy conflict between Saudi Arabia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Yemen is currently the theater of at least four intertwined political crises, involving a constellation of political actors and armed groups seeking political power, recognition and influence (Source: [The Project on Middle East Political Science](#), January 2018). The Shiite-Sunni divide also plays a role in this conflict as the Saudi-led coalition and Hadi government are majority Sunni, whereas Iran and the Houthi rebels are mostly Shiite.

Assisted by the chaos of civil war, Islamic militant groups have become more influential. Particularly the influence of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has grown further as it expands its territorial control in southern Yemen. Groups affiliated with the Islamic State group

(IS) are also present in the war-torn country and have been attacking both Shiite and government-related targets since March 2015. The insecurity caused by radical Islamic movements makes Yemen very unstable; all citizens, particularly Christians, are suffering from the lawlessness and are believed to be under surveillance by radical Muslims. They can also become a specific target for militant attack. Buildings where Christians (or expatriates from Christian countries) were operating have been targeted in the course of the fighting. For instance, in March 2016, a Catholic care-home for the elderly and disabled was directly targeted by assailants connected to IS. There are also reports that violent Islamic groups (both al-Qaeda and Houthis) have been infiltrating house-churches in order to track down and persecute converts.

Wherever the Saudi-led coalition forces have dominated or liberated areas, Christians were often targeted by violent Sunni groups.

### **Gender perspective**

There is a gendered component to this backdrop of extreme violence. During conflict men and young boys are more likely to be killed or injured. Men are also more likely to be targeted by radical Muslims and may be forced to spend lengthy periods in hiding to escape being killed or forcibly recruited. With fewer mobility restrictions than women, men are more at risk of encountering the millions of landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXOs) scattered across the country; 426 deaths were attributed to these devices between 2019 and 2022 (HRW 2023 Yemen).

Women and girls, on the other hand, primarily experience violence behind closed doors within the context of their family. Women are also vulnerable within the context of displacement: An estimated 79% of the 4 million displaced people in Yemen are women and children ([UNHCR, 14 July 2022](#)).

## **Trends analysis**

### **1) Peace negotiations keep stalling and re-starting**

The years of civil war since 2015 have brought Yemen to the brink of collapse. The Stockholm peace process that was started at the end of 2018 raised hopes that the war might be ended through international mediation. However, a political solution remained elusive for a long time with the collapse of the anti-Houthi coalition in August 2019. A positive step towards an end to the conflict – although unsuccessful – was the signing of a peace agreement between the Southern Transitional Council (STC) and the UN-recognized government in November 2019. The first nationwide truce in six years between the two main warring parties - the Saudi-led coalition and the Houthi rebels - which came into effect on 1 April 2022 - gave new hopes for an end to the conflict, with more fuel flowing through Hudaydah ports, fewer civilian casualties and the first commercial flight since 2016 from Sana'a airport in May 2022. However, the truce came to an end at the beginning of October 2022. In 2023, a Saudi diplomatic visit to Yemen initially boosted peace talks and prisoner exchanges, raising hopes for resolution, but subsequent negotiations stalled and tensions persisted.

## 2) The war in Yemen has led to high levels of violence and lawlessness

High levels of lawlessness increase the likelihood of oppression targeting minorities, including Christians. In its Yemen Country Profile for 2020, the Economist Intelligence Unit stressed the fact that even if a peace deal is agreed, "the ongoing presence of al-Qaeda and growing calls for southern secessionism will mean the conflict continues".

## 3) Yemen is experiencing a major humanitarian crisis

The poorest country of the Middle East finds itself in the middle of a devastating humanitarian catastrophe. The country's humanitarian and economic situation is so severe that it will take years to recover. According to the BMI Research Group's [Yemen Country Risk Report](#) (December 2020), Yemen is highly dependent on foreign aid and thus very vulnerable to external economic factors such as a drop in oil prices that would affect financial support for reconstruction from Gulf state allies.

## 4) Islamic militant groups are expected to remain a threat during the next few years

Since radical Islamic groups are an important driver of the main persecution engine in Yemen - *Islamic oppression* - their continued presence does not bode well for the religious freedom of Yemen's religious minorities, notably its Christians. The situation is particularly delicate as the majority of the Christian community consists of indigenous Christians from a Muslim background. The areas controlled by Islamic militants continue to expand. As the Houthis occupy the most territory, their influence in the country has increased (including their influence on the education system). In addition, other groups related to Islamist movements aiming to take over political power have been building up strength.

## External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: back-channel negotiations - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/december-alerts-and-november-trends-2022#yemen>
- Political and legal landscape: Index Mundi, accessed 12 June 2023 - <https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/yemen/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS>
- Political and legal landscape: CEDAW, 2021 - <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N08/416/48/PDF/N0841648.pdf?OpenElement>
- Political and legal landscape: HRW, 7 February 2020 - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/02/07/human-rights-watch-submission-committee-elimination-discrimination-against-women>
- Economic landscape: UN September 2019 report - <https://yemen.un.org/sites/default/files/2019-09/Assessing%20the%20Impact%20of%20War%20on%20Development%20in%20Yemen.pdf>
- Economic landscape: April 2022 Economic update - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/yemen/publication/economic-update-april-2022>
- Economic landscape: September 2023 report - <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/wfp-yemen-food-security-update-september-2023>
- Economic landscape: inheritance rights - <https://wbl.worldbank.org/content/dam/documents/wbl/2022/snapshots/Yemen-rep.pdf>
- Economic landscape: World Bank Gender Data 2023 - [https://genderdata.worldbank.org/countries/yemen-rep#:~:text=Labor%20force%20participation%20rate%2C%20by%20sex%20\(%25%20of%20population%20age%2015%2B\)%20\(modeled%20ILO%20estimate\)](https://genderdata.worldbank.org/countries/yemen-rep#:~:text=Labor%20force%20participation%20rate%2C%20by%20sex%20(%25%20of%20population%20age%2015%2B)%20(modeled%20ILO%20estimate))
- Economic landscape: ACAPS, 11 April 2023 - [https://www.acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/products/files/20230411\\_acaps\\_thematic\\_report\\_yemen\\_gender\\_dynamics\\_roles\\_and\\_needs.pdf](https://www.acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/products/files/20230411_acaps_thematic_report_yemen_gender_dynamics_roles_and_needs.pdf)

- Economic landscape: UNICEF, 26 June 2020 - <https://www.unicefusa.org/stories/helping-girls-escape-early-marriage-yemen/37409>
- Social and cultural landscape: Datareportal - <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-yemen>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNICEF, "Education disrupted", 2021 - <https://www.unicef.org/yemen/reports/education-disrupted>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR - <https://reporting.unhcr.org/yemen#:~:text=By%20the%20end%20of-2022,expected%20in%20the%20next%20months>.
- Social and cultural landscape: Global Economy - <https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Yemen/>
- Social and cultural landscape: Global Economy - <https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Yemen/>
- Social and cultural landscape: Global Hunger Index 2022 - <https://www.globalhungerindex.org/pdf/en/2022.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: The New Humanitarian, 5 January 2023 - <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2023/01/05/Yemen-women-food-war-humanitarian-crisis>
- Social and cultural landscape: Amnesty International, 16 December 2019 - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2019/12/yemen-one-of-the-worst-places-in-the-world-to-be-a-woman/>
- Social and cultural landscape: SaferWorld, 27 October 2020 - <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/news-and-analysis/post/912-uniting-women-peacebuilders-in-yemen-during-covid-19>
- Social and cultural landscape: male guardianship requirement - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/02/06/houthi-violating-womens-and-girls-rights-yemen#:~:text=For%20instance%2C%20Houthi%20authorities%20have,law%20throughout%20Houthi-controlled%20territory>.
- Technological landscape: Datareportal - [https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-yemen#:~:text=Internet%20use%20in%20Yemen%20in,percent\)%20between%202022%20and%202023](https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-yemen#:~:text=Internet%20use%20in%20Yemen%20in,percent)%20between%202022%20and%202023).
- Technological landscape: Datareportal - [https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-yemen#:~:text=Internet%20use%20in%20Yemen%20in,percent\)%20between%202022%20and%202023](https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-yemen#:~:text=Internet%20use%20in%20Yemen%20in,percent)%20between%202022%20and%202023).
- Technological landscape: Napoleon Cat - <https://napoleoncat.com/stats/social-media-users-in-yemen/2023/#section-facebook>
- Technological landscape: GSMA, "The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2022", p.15 - [https://www.gsma.com/r/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/The-Mobile-Gender-Gap-Report-2023.pdf?utm\\_source=website&utm\\_medium=download-button&utm\\_campaign=gender-gap-2023](https://www.gsma.com/r/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/The-Mobile-Gender-Gap-Report-2023.pdf?utm_source=website&utm_medium=download-button&utm_campaign=gender-gap-2023)
- Security situation: The Project on Middle East Political Science - [https://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/POMEPS\\_Studies\\_29\\_Yemen\\_Web\\_Jan.2018.pdf](https://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/POMEPS_Studies_29_Yemen_Web_Jan.2018.pdf)
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- Trends analysis: Yemen Country Risk Report - <https://www.marketresearch.com/Business-Monitor-International-v304/Yemen-Country-Risk-Q1-13882571/>

## WWL 2024: Church information / Yemen

### Christian origins

Centuries before the advent of Islam, the Arabian Peninsula had considerable numbers of Jews and synagogues, Christians (probably mostly Nestorians) and church buildings. There are at least two traditions about how Christian faith came to the Arabian Peninsula. According to one tradition, Bishop Theophilus Indus was sent as an envoy of the Byzantine Emperor to Yemen's Kingdom of Himyar in 356 AD, and he founded the first known church in Aden and two more to the north. There were also some successful missionary activities from Syria, so that by the sixth century, Yemen had bishops, priests, monks and martyrs, resembling any other Christian land. There was also a large cathedral in Sana'a.

Freedom for Christians was halted when King Dhu Nuwas converted to Judaism. He carried out a major massacre of the Christian population. The survivors requested help from the Byzantine Empire, which sent an army from Aksum (Ethiopia) across the Red Sea to Yemen in 525 AD. This army, helped by Arab Christians, conquered Yemen, killed Dhu Nuwas and conducted a massacre of Jews. A Christian client king was installed on the throne. In 570 AD, the Persian Empire conquered Aden. According to Islamic tradition, Badhan, the fifth and last Persian ruler of Yemen is reported to have converted to Islam in 628 AD and Yemen soon fell under the political dominance of Islam.

According to an article published by Stratfor in April 2016, [for the next centuries](#) the Arabian Peninsula became overwhelmingly Islamic and Christianity lost significance. For 13 centuries the historical role of Christianity in the region was forgotten and it was hard to imagine that any other religion could coexist with Islam in its birthplace. In 1839 Great Britain seized Aden, while the Ottomans occupied North Yemen in 1849. This led to a separation of North and South Yemen that would last over a century. (In 1990, North and South Yemen merged into one republic.) Under the British, churches could return to Aden and South Yemen, to serve British and other expatriates and carry out social work among the Yemenis. At the end of the 19th century, the first Western missionary, a Scot, arrived in Yemen. In the following years, a medical service was set up which also opened the way for communicating Christian faith. In North Yemen, access for the Church was virtually impossible until the 1960s, due to the inaccessible nature of the country.

In the years since then, Yemen has experienced political instability, conflicts and sectarian tension, which have affected religious minorities, including Christians. The rise of conservative interpretations of Islam have made it difficult for Christians to practice their faith openly. The ongoing civil war in Yemen has further exacerbated the challenges faced by Christians and other religious minorities. The civil war has led to widespread displacement, destruction of infrastructure and the growing influence of radical Islamic groups, making the situation even more precarious for Christians.

## Church spectrum today

*For security reasons no table of detailed information can be published.*

Before the current civil war in Yemen (which began in 2015), there were thousands of expatriates, often working for development agencies, who were allowed to worship in registered churches in Aden and Sana'a. Most of these Christians have been forced to leave the country due to the insecurity caused by civil war. All three official church buildings (all located in Aden) which served expatriate Christians or refugees (mainly Ethiopian), have been damaged as a result of the war (including targeted attacks) and are closed. The indigenous Church in Yemen is composed of converts from Islam; additionally, there are currently large numbers of Ethiopian and Eritrean Christian refugees residing in Yemen, together with migrants in transit. The numbers of refugees and migrants fluctuates considerably.

## Areas where Christians face most difficulties

The situation in general is dangerous for Christians in Yemen. In all areas of Yemen, even in the comparatively more liberal areas such as large cities, displaying Christian symbols is dangerous and could lead directly to imprisonment, physical abuse, or even execution. Yemeni culture is majority Arab, tribal and overwhelmingly Muslim. This means that Yemeni Christian converts are at great risk of being killed, and not just ostracized or expelled by their families, clans and tribes. Also, all factions involved in the civil war monitor the population under their control for signs of conversion to Christianity.

Some areas are particularly threatening, such as in the rural areas in the South where there is a strong al-Qaeda presence. Al-Qaeda has become more aggressive in expanding its influence, according to country expert reporting. The area of Taiz and Ibb (in southwest and south Yemen respectively) is controlled by al-Qaeda and attacks in the South in June and September 2022 show that they are growing in power.

Converts from Islam to Christianity have indicated that there is more pressure in the Shiite Houthi-controlled areas in the North than in areas under the control of the Sunni Hadi government. The Houthi-controlled areas - which comprise more than one-third of Yemen's territory and where the overwhelming majority of Yemen's population lives - are heavily policed: Any dissenting opinion is rigorously repressed and is likely to lead to imprisonment, physical abuse and possibly worse. There is a lot of spying in these areas and an atmosphere of fear. Due to the poverty and severe scarcity of resources in the country, the population has become increasingly dependent on the local authorities which has made it important to maintain a good relationship with them. This is done, among other ways, by providing them with information, for example by spying on neighbors. As a result, social control has increased enormously. Christian converts are hindered from meeting for fellowship because of the growing fear that neighbors will report them to the local authorities. Also the possession of Christian materials is particularly dangerous in the Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen. The Houthi's internal security forces operate an intelligence unit that roots out "apostates" (as Christian converts are categorized).

The officially recognized state administration has little grip on the areas under its control, which now cover less than a quarter of the population. However, due to the lack of state power there is also less policing in the South.

According to a source in the region, the few foreign Christians in the North are experiencing a certain amount of tolerance in Houthi-controlled areas. However, it is said to be more difficult for foreign Christians in the South because the local population and leaders there are said to have a more anti-Christian stance.

## Christian communities and how they are affected

### Communities of expatriate Christians

Before civil war erupted in 2015, most Christians in Yemen were expatriate or migrant workers (from North Africa, the West, South and East Asia and Arab countries) and refugees (mainly Ethiopian). The majority were Roman Catholics or Anglicans (with some Orthodox in the case of Ethiopian refugees). Virtually all Western expatriates have left the country for security reasons as a result of the devastating war. Some Christian migrants, particularly from Africa and also from Asia, remain - mostly temporarily - in the country. The US State Department (IRFR 2022) reports: "According to the UN Group of Experts, many Christian economic migrants from Horn of Africa countries transit the country on their way to find work in Saudi Arabia, causing the total number of Christians in the country at any given time to fluctuate." In what is most likely a combination of racial discrimination and religious freedom violations, migrant Christians face harassment and discrimination from society at a community and national level, and even outright violence from radical Islamic movements including Houthis. However, since the number of permanent migrants or expatriates in the country has significantly decreased, the category of expatriate Christians is currently not scored in WWL analysis.

### Historical Christian communities

Indigenous historical Christian communities are not present in Yemen.

### Converts to Christianity

The Yemeni Church is made up of converts from Islam. Vulnerability for converts remains very high throughout the country due to a combination of i) traditional family/community/tribal attitudes; ii) the impunity with which radical Islamic groups are able to operate; and iii) the refusal of state (or de facto state) authorities to tolerate any form of dissent, fearing it could lead to greater destabilization.

### Non-traditional Christian communities

Indigenous non-traditional Christian communities are not present in Yemen.

## External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: for the next centuries - <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/christianitys-claim-birthplace-islam>

# WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Yemen

## Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

## Position on the World Watch List

Yemen: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	89	5
WWL 2023	89	3
WWL 2022	88	5
WWL 2021	87	7
WWL 2020	85	8

Yemen's rounded score remained unchanged at 89 points. All scores for pressure in the 5 spheres of life are at extreme levels and the score for violence remained at the same level of 5.9 points. The indigenous Yemeni Church is composed mostly of Christians with a Muslim background and their children who need to live their faith in secret. Christians in Yemen have been faced with physical and mental abuse, sexual harassment and rape as well as forced marriages. They face violations of religious freedom from their family and the authorities (both from the official authorities and from Houthi rebels acting as local authorities in one third of the country where most of the population live) as well as from radical Islamic groups.

## Persecution engines

Yemen: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Very strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Very strong
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Medium

*The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.*



### **Clan oppression (Very strong - blended with Islamic oppression)**

Yemeni society is strongly tribal and government authority is often secondary to the traditional tribal governance. Islam is intertwined with ethnic identity. There are many areas in Yemen, where tribal elders enforce law and justice according to their Islam-based traditions regardless of what the national Constitution or government says. Moreover, the government is not likely to intervene in inter-tribal conflicts, even if tribes are physically harming or imprisoning people. With the government having currently lost control over large parts of the country, its influence on the tribes has further diminished. Tribal law and custom prohibit members of the tribe from leaving the tribe or, in the case of women, marrying out of the tribe, especially to a Christian; punishment for disobedience can be death or banishment. Some tribal chiefs have their own army whose fighters are radical Muslims and anti-Christian. One country analyst summed up the situation as follows: "Islam is an overarching identity of all of the tribes in Yemen, and it is the tribe that often delivers retributive 'justice' for those who may seek to leave Islam."

### **Islamic oppression (Very strong)**

The Constitution declares that Islam is the state religion and Sharia is the source of all legislation. Proselytization by faiths other than Islam is prohibited and Muslims are forbidden to convert to any other religion. Yemenis who leave Islam may face the death penalty. The ongoing conflict, political instability and weak application of the rule of law in many parts of the country, means that pressure faced by Christians and Christian converts in Yemen comes principally from non-state actors - including family or tribal sources but also radical Islamic groups. In such cases, the application of Islamic values is a principal motivation: Islam is a key part of the identity of Yemeni tribes, and militant organizations such as al-Qaeda (AQAP) and the Islamic State group (IS) seek to implement a puritanical form of Islam. They are the main drivers of this persecution engine and have actively targeted and killed Christians.

### **Dictatorial paranoia (Strong - blended with Islamic oppression)**

This persecution engine is blended with *Islamic oppression*. Yemen has been under dictatorship since the rule of President Saleh, who led North Yemen before the unification of North and South Yemen in 1990 and was president until 2012. While Yemen has not experienced as many atrocities at the hands of the dictatorship as other countries, strong force has been used both publicly and privately to maintain power. Within the context of conflict, the survival instinct of warring parties is inevitably strong. Reports indicate that in Houthi-controlled areas, increasingly harsh measures are being taken by the Houthi administration against individuals or associations deemed to be a threat by the ruling authority. This has continued and has included members of religious minority communities, including Christian converts. This development has grown further with the increased influence of Houthis as they try to install a Zaydi imamate where one clan should rule and all other clans should follow that religious leadership.

### **Organized corruption and crime (Medium)**

While the rule of law in Yemen has never been particularly strong, Christians are especially prone to become victims of crime given the context of conflict and the degree of lawlessness in much of the country. An important factor here is that Christians are often associated with the West

and are therefore believed to be linked to sources of finance. They are more vulnerable since the lack of rule of law provides greater impunity to those who commit crimes against them. This persecution engine has recently grown in strength.

## Drivers of persecution

Yemen: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG	-	-	VERY STRONG	-	-	-	STRONG	MEDIUM
Government officials	Strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	Strong	Medium
Ethnic group leaders	Strong	-	-	Very strong	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	Very strong	-	-	Very strong	-	-	-	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	Very strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	Very strong	Weak
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong	-	-	Strong	-	-	-	-	-
One's own (extended) family	Very strong	-	-	Very strong	-	-	-	-	-
Political parties	Weak	-	-	-	-	-	-	Weak	-
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	Very strong	Weak
Organized crime cartels or networks	Weak	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies	Weak	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. Please note that "-" denotes "not at all". For more information see WWL Methodology.

## Drivers of Clan oppression

- **Ethnic group leaders (Very strong), Islamic leaders (Very strong):** Tribal law and customs are anti-Christian and punishment for disobedience can be death or banishment. The same applies to any tribe member leaving Islam, since religious and ethnic identity are intertwined. Some tribal chiefs have their own fighting units.

- **Extended family (Very strong) and Ordinary citizens (Strong):** The same mechanisms as for *Islamic oppression* apply here: Community and family honor should be respected above anything else. There have been incidents where citizens forced their convert daughters into marriage with Muslims. This often exposes the women to abuse and a lack of freedom to be a part of the general community. Also, there is a caste system in Yemen, in which those who have more tribal roots look down upon and marginalize those that have more ancestry from East Africa and have darker skin (such as the Muhameshen, also referred to as the Akhdam). If a member of this marginalized group is actually a Christian, then he or she faces ostracism and complete exclusion from their community. This entails exclusion from education, health care and other public services.

#### Drivers of Islamic oppression

- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Very strong):** Imams and sheiks who are leading village communities often take advantage of the fact that a high percentage of the villagers are illiterate and can be easily swayed to go against one of the community members in the village. If a villager is found to be a Christian, this could trigger wider societal action leading to banishment or at least pressure to leave the community.
- **Violent religious groups (Very strong):** In some areas of Yemen, militant groups such as AQAP and IS operate with considerable impunity or even with tacit collaboration with the authorities, especially in Hadi-government aligned areas. Local Christians are particularly vulnerable to radical Islamic groups, as are any others perceived to be 'apostates' by these groups.
- **Extended family (Very strong) and Ordinary citizens (Strong):** Community and family hostility (or the fear of it) is a major form of pressure faced by Yemeni Christians. Under widely-held community and family values, any member who brings shame on the community or family (for example, by leaving Islam) has to be dealt with severely in order to restore community/family honor.
- **Government officials (Strong):** Government authorities have imprisoned Yemeni Christians because of their faith, often giving other reasons in public (since they claim to be tolerant towards other religions).
- **Revolutionaries (Strong):** Houthi rebel groups (among others) have detained Christians and adherents of Bahai for questioning about their rejection of Islam. However these groups are mostly pre-occupied with power-related priorities at present.

#### Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

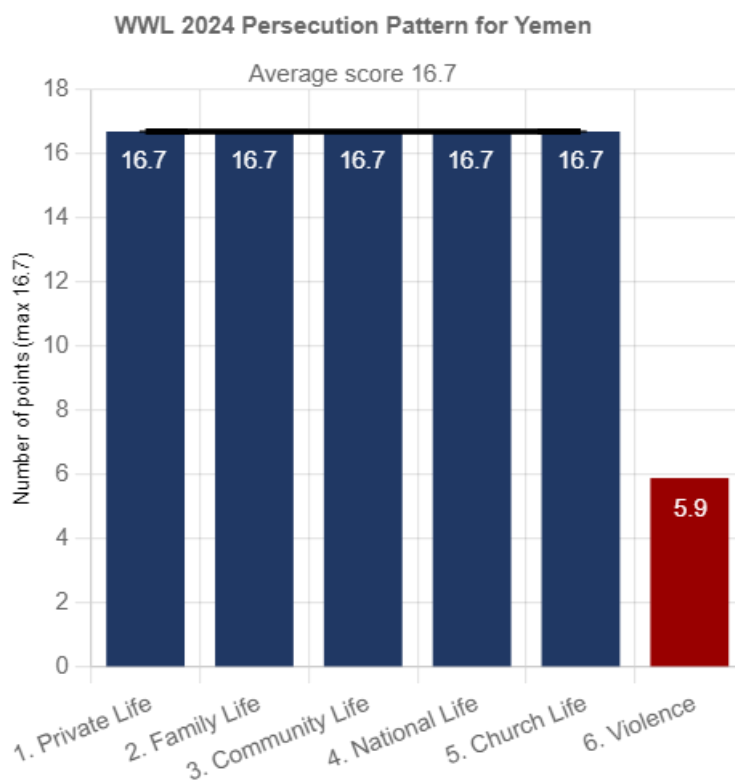
- **Violent religious groups (Very strong) and Revolutionaries (Strong):** In the context of civil war, Houthi rebels, al-Qaeda and IS affiliates will do anything to increase their territorial power. In Houthi-controlled areas, harsh measures have been taken by the Houthi administration against any individual or association deemed to be a threat by the ruling authority. This has included arresting members of religious minority communities, including Christian converts and adherents of Bahai as well as certain Shia splinter groups, who they consider to be hostile to their ideology.

- **Government officials (Strong):** Yemeni authorities use strong force to maintain power. Although state institutions are weak, there have still been reports of state-perpetrated injustice against Christians. Also the state has allowed violence against Christians, which has led to a situation of impunity.

#### Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- **Government officials (Strong):** Christians are generally associated with the West and are therefore expected to have access to funds. For this reason prison guards have sometimes held Christians longer in exchange for money.
- **Violent religious groups and Revolutionaries (both Weak):** For the aforementioned reason, violent religious and revolutionary groups have abducted Christians in exchange for ransom money.

### The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2024 persecution pattern for Yemen shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Yemen continues to be at an extreme level and is scored at the maximum level possible (16.7 points). The extreme pressure is explained by the war and pressure on the indigenous church which is mostly composed of converts from Islam to Christianity.
- Pressure in all *spheres of life* is at the maximum extreme level possible (16.7). This is typical for a situation in which there are mostly Christians with a Muslim background in a country with *Islamic oppression* as the main persecution engine, leaving no room for any open church activities or private worship.

- The level of violence against Christians remained as high as in WWL 2023, scoring 5.9 points. The level of violence is very difficult to research due to a lack of access to accurate and verified information as a result of the war situation. It is likely that in reality the levels of violence are higher than scored in WWL analysis.

## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

*In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2024 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).*

## Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

### **Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (4.00 points)**

All Yemenis are considered Muslims. For a Muslim family, it brings shame when one of its members leaves Islam. Converts to Christianity run the great risk of honor-killing or physical violence if their families or communities discover their faith.

### **Block 1.2: It has been risky for Christians to conduct acts of Christian worship by themselves (e.g. prayer, Bible reading, etc.). (4.00 points)**

Christians with a Muslim background cannot openly practice their faith. Any impression to those around them that they may be Christians can have serious consequences. Private worship has become particularly risky for Christians in areas controlled by radical Muslims, Houthi rebels or areas that were 'liberated' by Sunni forces. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and some branches of IS are particularly active in remote areas and in areas with weak government control.

### **Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (4.00 points)**

The discovery of Christian materials by family members can lead to honor killings. Families can kill their sons and daughters without any legal repercussions as it would be viewed as a restoration of family honor.

### **Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (4.00 points)**

It is very risky for local Christians to meet and great care is needed to avoid arousing suspicion and to prevent any hostile reactions which would possibly jeopardize the safety of other converts.

### **Block 1: Additional information**

In addition to the above, it is also dangerous for Christians in Yemen (i.e. full score of 4 points) to reveal their faith verbally or in writing (including online), display Christian images or symbols, and access Christian materials via different sorts of media.

## Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

### **Block 2.1: Babies and children of Christians have automatically been registered under the state or majority religion. (4.00 points)**

Converts from Islam cannot have their children registered as Christians.

### **Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (4.00 points)**

Any Christian ritual or celebration must be held in secret. However, baptism is seen as the final act of conversion and is therefore viewed as being particularly serious by the family and local community. For this reason it is repressed even harder and could lead to severe repercussions.

### **Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (4.00 points)**

Children of Yemeni Christians from a Muslim background do not have access to Christian education within the state school system but must attend Islamic instruction classes. There have been cases where Muslim community leaders have coerced Christian children to come to the mosque for Islamic lessons. This is more the case in villages, where the houses are close together and the religious leaders are more integrated into the families.

### **Block 2.11: Spouses of converts have been put under pressure (successfully or unsuccessfully) by others to divorce. (4.00 points)**

Yemeni family law prohibits marriage between a Muslim and a person who is an apostate. From the perspective of the local community, therefore, one's conversion to Christianity would be seen as annulling a marriage. Extended families would pressure the husband or wife to divorce the other if he was found to be a Christian. This is believed to be quite common in cases where one spouse is a Christian or both spouses have become Christians and the wider circle of relatives disapprove of such a marriage.

### **Block 2: Additional information**

It is also impossible for Christian weddings to be celebrated openly in Yemen and converts must marry under Islamic rites. In the case of custody of children in divorces, Christians are likely to be excluded if family members are Muslims.

## Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

### **Block 3.3: Christians have been under threat of abduction and/or forced marriage. (4.00 points)**

One routine way in which disapproving families seek to 'correct' a young convert's religious views is through an arranged marriage to a conservative Muslim spouse. This can particularly affect female converts, especially in rural areas.

**Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (4.00 points)**

A Christian whose faith has become known to family or community members is very likely to be put under pressure to renounce the Christian faith. Refusal can lead to killing or at best imprisonment.

**Block 3.8: Christians have had less access to health care because of their faith. (4.00 points)**

Lack of access to adequate health care is a significant challenge for many Yemenis. In the current humanitarian crisis, converts from Islam are additionally vulnerable in their communities as emergency relief is mostly distributed through Muslim employees of secular organizations and local mosques, which are allegedly discriminating against all who are not considered to be devout Muslims. As such, individuals who identify as Christians are reportedly facing significant obstacles in receiving help if they do not conform to the rules of Islam or adhere to cultural expectations. Also, there is a high level of nepotism. This is a serious threat to the survival of Christians and other non-Muslims.

**Block 3.9: Christians have faced disadvantages in their education at any level for faith-related reasons (e.g. restrictions of access to education). (4.00 points)**

Lack of access to adequate education is a significant challenge for many Yemenis. Converts from Islam are additionally vulnerable if their faith is known. Classes on Islam and Islamic culture are part of school curricula in elementary, secondary and higher education. By default, these classes reduce the likelihood of Christians successfully finishing their education.

**Block 3: Additional information**

Due to the increased monitoring by citizens, Christians experience fear of gathering. An atmosphere has developed in which citizens report the behavior of others in the hope of winning the favor of local administrators. Since people are so dependent on the authorities, many families look for a way to build a positive relationship with them, for example by reporting 'misconduct' such as acts of Christian worship, people gathering for Bible study or other suspicious behavior.

## Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

**Block 4.2: Officials have refused to recognize an individual's conversion as recorded in government administration systems, identify cards (etc.). (4.00 points)**

According to Yemen's criminal code, conversion from Islam to another religion is apostasy which is a capital offense. If Yemeni Christians would try to have their religion changed in official documents this would expose them to the authorities and so be extremely dangerous.

**Block 4.6: Christians have been barred from public office, or has promotion been hindered for faith-related reasons. (4.00 points)**

According to the Constitution, non-Muslims are officially prohibited from holding the office of president. However local Christians must anyway live their faith in secret and would not attempt to attain such a post. Promotion is very difficult for Christians, since what matters most in Yemeni society is "who you know". If those in management suspect that an employee is a Christian then it is practically impossible for him to get promotion.

**Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (4.00 points)**

Perpetrators of crimes against Christians including so-called 'honor crimes', are likely to enjoy impunity, given the weak rule-of-law in much of Yemen. Tribal justice systems (which are widely applicable) expect the head of family to carry out punishment. In more official systems, Islamic principles are likely to be applied which greatly disadvantage converts from Islam.

**Block 4.15: Christians accused in court have been deprived of equal treatment. (4.00 points)**

In areas controlled by AQAP and IS, Christian testimony is worth less than that of Muslims. In Houthi areas there are no free and fair trials - although this applies to everyone who is perceived as a threat to the regime and is not necessarily limited to Christians.

## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

**Block 5.3: Christian communities have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings or in claiming historical religious premises and places of worship which had been taken from them earlier. (4.00 points)**

The three official church buildings (all located in Aden) which served expatriate Christians or refugees (mainly Ethiopian), have been damaged as a result of the war (including targeted attacks) and are closed. Building churches (or other buildings) in Yemen requires permits by the official government. Since churches cannot obtain legal status, it is not possible to obtain permission to build a place of worship. At the moment this is mainly not possible due to the war situation, especially since the official government has very little control over the country as a whole. However, in the past, even personal requests for church permits by the Roman Catholic Pope were ignored. Converts from Islam cannot ask for any permits because of their precarious legal situation.

**Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (4.00 points)**

There are no functioning church buildings left. Societal and 'governmental' pressure prevents Christians from organizing activities outside church buildings. As converts are not allowed to have their own gatherings, they only meet at secret locations. If they would meet openly they would be exposing themselves to considerable danger. It has become increasingly difficult for Christians to meet, especially in Houthi controlled areas, due to the risk involved.



**Block 5.13: Churches have been hindered in importing Christian materials from abroad. (4.00 points)**

Considering that the distribution of non-Islamic religious materials is forbidden by law and the punishment is severe, it is virtually impossible for Christians to import materials both logistically as well as due to Islamist pressure and pressure from the authorities controlling regions where Christians reside. Imported goods are also subjected to strict checks and Christian materials (particularly in significant quantities) are likely to be blocked, confiscated and destroyed.

**Block 5.18: Churches have been hindered in establishing, managing, maintaining and conducting schools, or charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural organizations, institutions and associations. (4.00 points)**

Although Yemeni and expatriate Christians may be found working in a range of humanitarian, education, development and other charity-run projects, this cannot ordinarily be done openly with a Christian 'label' as it would most probably be viewed as attempted proselytism.

If churches set up non-profit organizations and charitable work, they risk being attacked, as happened in 2016 in Aden to a care-home for the elderly.

## Violence

*Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible. However:*

**1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced. Possible reasons for this may be:**

- *Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.*
- *In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.*
- *If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives.*
- *In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.*

**2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons:**

- *Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).*
- *In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.*
- *Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion*

*from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.*

In the interests of security, no specific details can be published. The civil war in Yemen causes violent incidents targeting Christians to be highly underreported and difficult to obtain. The current levels of fighting in the country (and the general suspicion of people gathering information) have seriously affected the collection and verification of data. In addition, it is important to mention that due to serious security risks, especially for the Christians involved, researchers only have contact with part of the Christian Church, which necessarily results in an incomplete picture.

Like other civilians, Christians are suffering greatly from the war and the influence of Islamic militants, which adds to the already vulnerable position of indigenous Christians. Several Christians were reported to have been detained during the WWL 2024 reporting period. According to sources, both religious and non-religious factors are often involved in such cases. It is risky for house-churches to gather for worship and there have been many instances where neighbors and family have betrayed the gatherings. Houthis have also been vilifying Christian

converts and actively stopping Christian activities. As a result, many converts want to leave areas that are under Houthi control. Dozens of converts are expected to have suffered physical violence, mental abuse or sexual harassment and rape, forced marriage or abduction while dozens of other Christians had to move to other places in the country - sometimes returning later - and still others reportedly left the country. The motivation for fleeing can vary from fear of assassination (for their faith) to war-related reasons and are often a combination. Most families are so angry and ashamed to discover a family member has left Islam that they are ready to kill, possibly via a radicalized relative or local militant group.

African migrants (including Christians) in transit in Yemen and hoping to find work in one of the Gulf countries, regularly find themselves in the crossfire of the warring factions. They are often detained, and sometimes killed or [forcibly deployed](#) as combatants by Yemeni warring factions. In addition, detained migrants have been tortured, "subjected to forced labor, sexual exploitation, forced to traffic drugs and other forms of abuse", according to [Human Rights Watch](#) (7 December 2022) and [Yemeni activists](#) (Asharq Al-Awsat, 1 September 2023). Migrants from Africa - including hundreds of Christians, many of them Ethiopians - are reportedly seen as a source of income and placed into camps where, apart from the above described human rights violations, they risk forced conversion to Islam and forced marriage as well as financial extortion of their families. Sources working with international organizations in the area indicate that the Africans are being targeted by the Houthis based on both their skin color and the perception that they are spreading Christianity. There is an alleged association between the terms "African" and "Christian" for the Houthi forces, leading to a campaign against Christians with the assumption that they may be foreign agents. Since details are difficult to confirm, these violations have not been included in the WWL 2024 scoring for Yemen.

## 5 Year trends

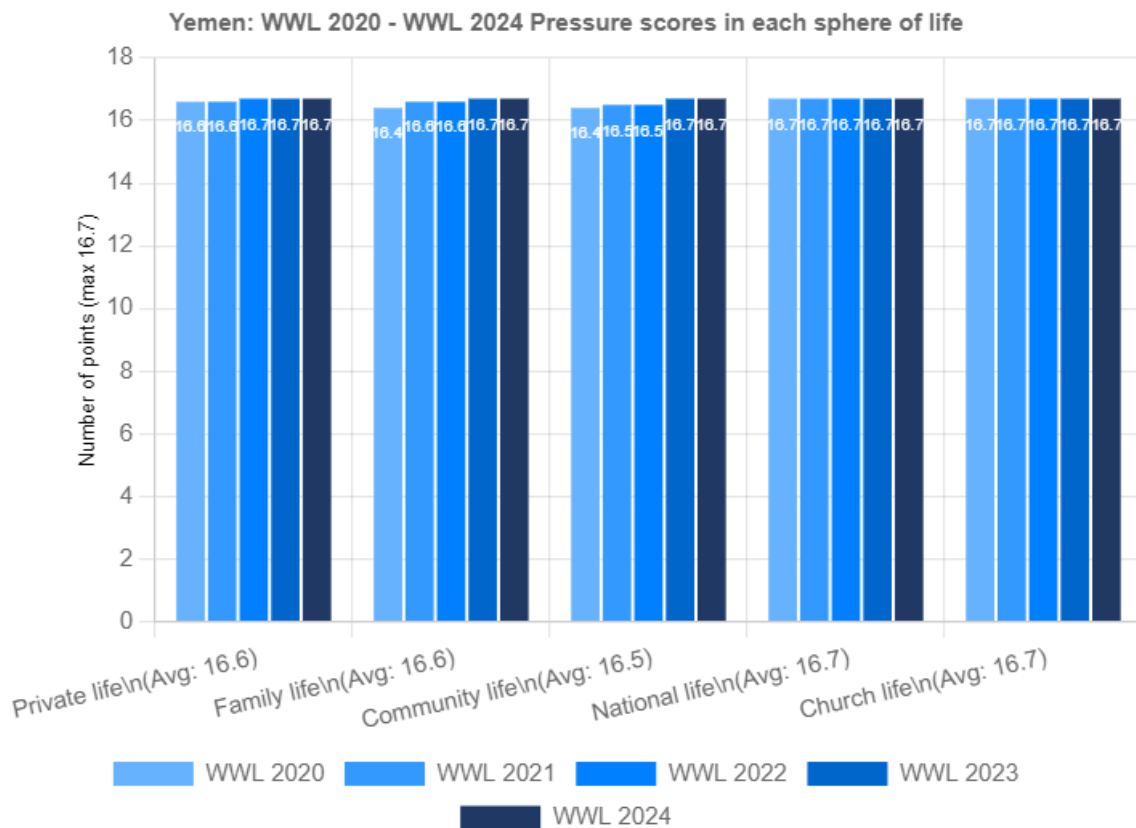
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Yemen: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024	16.7
2023	16.7
2022	16.6
2021	16.6
2020	16.5

Average pressure has been constantly at an extremely high level over the past five WWL reporting periods, reaching the maximum score possible of 16.7 points since WWL 2023.

### 5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



As can be seen in the chart above, pressure in all *spheres of life* has more or less levelled off at the maximum possible level. As a result of the war, large groups of migrant and expatriate Christians left the country, leaving indigenous Christians (i.e. converts) as the main focus for WWL analysis from WWL 2018 onwards. This caused a rise in pressure scores in all *spheres of life* since converts experience the severest violations of religious freedom.

## 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



As can be seen in the chart above, over the past five WWL reporting periods, the violence score has risen from 'low' in WWL 2020 to 'very high' in WWL 2023 and WWL 2024. The relatively lower score for WWL 2020 does not necessarily mean that the violence situation was better than it is now: In the chaos of civil war, it has to be remembered that many incidents go unreported.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Denied access to social community/networks; Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced marriage
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Against the backdrop of protracted conflict, unlawful attacks on civilians, and one of the world's largest humanitarian crises, women in Yemen have been experiencing increasing gender-based repression, especially within Houthi-controlled areas ([SAM report](#), 2023; [Arab News](#), 2023). Women in Yemen are expected to obey their fathers, brothers, uncles, and husbands. Without the permission of their male guardian, they do not have equal rights in relation to divorce, inheritance or child custody and the practice of "*mahram*" is widespread, requiring women to be accompanied when moving around ([HRW, Yemen: Events of 2020](#)).

Conversion from Islam to Christianity is forbidden both in Islam and in Yemeni law. Within this patriarchal, Islamic context, a female converting to Christianity is considered a shameful act for the whole family. According to a country expert: "Under Arab tribal law, women who convert to Christianity from Islam have dishonored their families, clans, and tribes and are subject to the harshest penalties, including honor killings."

Women and girls have more limited access than men to information about the Christian faith and participation in church groups. Because families closely monitor the activities of female members of the household, their coming and going from the household and any telephones come under greater scrutiny (particularly as mobile phones are often shared by family members), and it is often more difficult for a female convert to explore her faith and/or practice it with others. This results in fewer women and girls becoming Christians, being active in local churches and passing on their faith to their children.

Converts from a Muslim background are most vulnerable. In a typical scenario, female converts will have their telephone and other means of communication taken away. Next, she might be isolated in the home, physically and mentally abused, and possibly given in marriage to a devout Muslim, raped or even killed to 'restore the honor' of the tribe or family. A country expert explains: "The family would try to isolate such individuals to prevent the spread of corruptive influence." The family control of girls is the cultural norm in much of the country, although much less so in major governorates such as Sana'a and Aden.

Christian women and girls also risk being sexually abused at the hands of militias due to the concept of “*anfal*,” which permits non-Muslims in some circumstances to be treated as slaves as part of the spoils of war ([Quran, Surah 8: Al-Anfal](#)). There is also a great risk of sexual assault targeting Christian women and girls, especially migrants from Africa in Houthi-controlled areas. They may be exploited in sex trafficking and sexual slavery, with wealthy Yemeni men as clients ([Free the Slaves](#), October 2023).

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Economic harassment via business/job/work access; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

Life in general in Yemen is tremendously difficult in an ongoing war with heavy restrictions on religious freedom. The most common pressure for Yemeni male converts comes from family and community. Pressure varies in intensity according to the family hierarchy; it is most keenly felt by women and girls, followed by younger men, followed by older men (reflecting cultural levels of status and freedom).

All males, including Christians, can be forced to join militias, if they are of military age. Boys as young as seven are also commonly recruited into militias as actual or auxiliary soldiers. Precise estimates of numbers are hard to come by: While the Yemeni government’s Ministry of Human Rights has been reported to claim that 30 million minors have been recruited by the Houthi group since 2014, “a report by the Associated Press revealed that by the end of 2018, the Houthi group had recruited about 18,000 children” ([SAM report](#), 2023, p.10). Whilst this affects all Yemeni men, Christians are additionally vulnerable if their faith is known and they end up in the army or militias. When boys are dragged into the fighting, it affects their education and future - not just because of the amount of time it takes from their lives - but also because of the highly controlled Islamic environment in which training takes place.

Male converts to Christianity face a greater risk of losing their job, being beaten and being imprisoned by the local authorities. Whereas women are most likely to experience pressures in the private sphere, men are more likely to experience challenges in the public sphere and Yemen’s collectivist culture (although some male Christian converts married to Muslim women do report being perceived as unclean by their wives and therefore physically neglected). Pastors and church leaders are also in danger of imprisonment. Within detention facilities, Christian detainees have reportedly experienced physical and mental torture.

If men are imprisoned, killed or lose their job, their families will experience significant financial hardship and become vulnerable to exploitation. Unemployed or imprisoned men may also struggle psychologically due to the loss of status in the community and the risk of being ostracized. Considering these pressures, many Christian men choose to flee their home to another country. They have greater freedom than females to do so.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

Other religious minorities facing rights violations in Yemen are Bahai and Jews, of whom only few are left in the country. In addition, Ismaili Muslims report that they face discrimination too. Radical Muslims consider Bahais to be infidels, others discriminate against them because the sect allegedly has connections with Iran, where the religion was founded in the 19th century. Bahai believers in Yemen are occasionally imprisoned, mistreated and tortured, mostly by Houthi authorities. They also face pressure to recant their faith. In addition, they experience oppression and mistrust because their headquarters is in Haifa, which makes them be regarded by some as agents of Israel. On 25 May 2023, armed Houthi forces detained and subsequently abducted 17 people in a raid on a Bahai meeting in a private residence in Sanaa ([Human Rights Watch](#), 30 May 2023).

Allegedly, the Houthis also impose limitations on the freedom of Sunni Muslims in their areas of control.

According to the United States Department (IRFR 2022):

- "According to the March report of UN Special Rapporteur Shaheed, the Houthis spread 'hateful rhetoric' against religious minorities in the educational curriculum. The Houthis added anti-Israel slogans and rhetoric into the elementary education curriculum and books. Sources reported to the United Nations that leaders in Houthi-held areas amended school curricula to solely reflect the Houthi understanding of Islam."
- "In this same report, the UN Special Rapporteur reported that the Houthis coerced Jewish and Baha'i communities into leaving the country through blackmail and intimidation, while also arbitrarily detaining their religious leaders and community members."
- "Apart from arresting members of the Bahá'í community on the basis of their faith, Houthis engaged in deportations, raids and seizures of their property. Houthi leaders fueled violence against the Baha'is through smear campaigns, accusing them of being foreign agents and Israeli spies. In addition, the Houthis imposed a ban on loans to Bahá'ís, confiscated their businesses and property, and intimidated employers to prevent them from employing Bahá'í individuals."

"According to the media outlet *iMArabic*, in April [2022] during the month of Ramadan, Houthi rebels stormed several Sunni mosques in areas under their control, particularly in Sana'a and Amran, to stop Tarawih prayers and replaced them with recorded speeches by Houthi leader Abdul-Malik Badreddin al-Houthi."

## Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

### Clan oppression

Nationwide, sectarian and tribal divisions are deepening which are an important barrier to peace and stability. Tribal groups were forced to take sides when al-Qaeda and IS started fighting each other in 2019, naturally presenting a risk to Christians in the country. This has created chaos and division amongst the tribal groups in the country. If the country continues to disintegrate, people

are likely to rally round their own tribe even more, which could increase the levels of pressure on converts to Christianity. On the other hand, young people returning from the battlefields are reportedly more driven by religious motivation, defying tribal leadership due to their desire for independence in decision-making and life-and-death matters. They are eager to form militias and challenge traditional leadership structures. Though this creates tensions, with tribal leaders allegedly conceding to keep the youth within tribal boundaries, it is at this point unclear to what extent this may influence the level of *Clan oppression* as a persecution engine affecting Christians.

### Islamic oppression

Along with the Zaydi Shiite Houthi movement, violent Sunni groups such as al-Qaeda and IS are expected to remain a serious threat in the country for a long time to come due to weak central security. Their influence as well as the areas under their control has further increased. This includes the area of education where radical Islamic teaching has infiltrated the education sys-

tem. Related to this, radical Islamic teachers who have been expelled from other countries, such as Saudi Arabia, are finding refuge in Yemen where there is little control. The Houthis' annual summer camps, aimed at [religiously brainwashing and recruiting](#) thousands of children (Deutsche Welle, 7 October 2021), present a dangerous future scenario for dissidents, including Christians. The movement has been criticized by Yemeni journalists, activists and human rights groups for its efforts to sow extremism and hatred in the minds of young participants.

The situation for Christians is likely to become worse because the developments mentioned above allow for a stronger polarization of society and spread of radical views - both of which particularly disadvantage converts from Islam. Since the majority of the Christian community are converts from Islam, they will be facing even more danger in the future especially if they are open about their faith.

### Dictatorial paranoia

Within the context of war, the survival instinct of warring parties is inevitably strong. Thus, increasingly harsh measures have been taken by the Houthi administration against individuals and associations who are deemed by the ruling authority to be a threat. This has included members of religious minority communities, including Christian converts.



The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU 2023 country file) expects the conflict "will continue with varying degrees of intensity in 2024-28 amid deep strategic and ideological divisions between the two main factions, and between government-aligned groups; keeping the economy dysfunctional and undermining Yemen's longer-term growth prospects."

As the war drags on, the (Shiite) Houthi administration in the North has grown increasingly hostile towards Western governments and organizations, due to the West's support for the Saudi-led coalition forces and the (Sunni) government in the South. Also, the length of the war and the economic blockade means the northern government faces increasing challenges in financing its military campaign. Since Christianity is associated with the West, this all leads to increasing pressure being exerted on Christians, who are more likely to be imprisoned in an attempt to extort money or gain bargaining power with Western governments and organizations. In general, the ongoing state of lawlessness, paranoia and sectarianism created by the war can be expected to continue deteriorating, which will increase the lack of protection for Christians.

### **Organized corruption and crime**

The level of persecution from this Persecution engine increases with the level of anarchy. The more the lack of rule of law provides impunity to those committing crimes against Christians, the more the latter will be vulnerable to the effect of this persecution engine. Pressure has already reached a dramatically extreme level and it is not expected to decrease in the short term, especially since corruption and organized crime is a key motivation for keeping the war going in the country, according to a local contact.

## **External Links - Persecution Dynamics**

- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: forcibly deployed - [https://www.arabnews.jp/en/middle-east/article\\_66748/](https://www.arabnews.jp/en/middle-east/article_66748/)
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: Human Rights Watch - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/07/warring-parties-yemen-silent-amid-reports-migrant-abuse>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: Yemeni activists - <https://english.aawsat.com/arab-world/4520476-yemen-insurgents-establish-training-camps-african-migrants>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: (SAM report - <https://samrl.org/l.html?l=a/10/A/c/1/70/72/4736/%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%8A%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%A9-..-%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%B5%D8%AF-%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%88%D8%AF-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Arab News - <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2247476>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: HRW, Yemen: Events of 2020 - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/yemen#351320>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Quran, Surah 8: Al-Anfal - <https://www.quraneasyguide.com/spoils-war/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Free the Slaves - <https://freetheslaves.net/from-illegal-migration-to-human-trafficking-dangerous-journeys-across-the-horn-of-africa-and-the-arabian-peninsula/#:~:text=Migrants%20are%20also%20forced%20into,commonly%20reported%20among%20African%20migrants.>

- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: SAM report - [https://samrl.org/pdf/4840They-are-still-at-the-fight-EN\\_compressed.pdf](https://samrl.org/pdf/4840They-are-still-at-the-fight-EN_compressed.pdf)
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Human Rights Watch - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/30/yemen-houthis-forcibly-disappear-bahais>
- Future outlook: religiously brainwash and recruit - <https://www.dw.com/en/underage-martyrs-recruiting-child-soldiers-in-yemen/a-58203651>

## 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/>.

As in earlier years, these are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

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