

World
Watch
Research

Yemen: Full Country Dossier

December 2021



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Family in Sana'a, Yemen (c) Open Doors International

Introduction

World Watch List 2022

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018
1	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	15.0	98	94	93	94	93
2	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	13.1	96	94	94	94	94
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.5	91	92	92	91	91
4	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.2	16.3	11.5	91	92	90	87	86
5	Yemen	16.7	16.6	16.5	16.7	16.7	5.2	88	87	85	86	85
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.6	11.1	88	88	87	86	86
7	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.3	14.5	14.4	16.7	87	85	80	80	77
8	Pakistan	13.6	14.0	15.1	14.9	13.1	16.7	87	88	88	87	86
9	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.6	15.8	16.5	10.4	85	86	85	85	85
10	India	12.7	12.7	12.9	14.7	13.3	15.6	82	83	83	83	81
11	Saudi Arabia	15.1	15.1	15.0	15.9	16.7	3.1	81	78	79	77	79
12	Myanmar	12.4	11.5	13.8	13.4	13.1	14.8	79	74	73	71	65
13	Sudan	13.4	13.4	14.3	13.6	15.7	8.5	79	79	85	87	87
14	Iraq	14.0	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	6.9	78	82	76	79	86
15	Syria	12.9	13.8	13.5	14.3	13.9	9.3	78	81	82	82	76
16	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.4	77	77	78	78	78
17	China	12.6	9.8	12.2	14.4	15.5	11.1	76	74	70	65	57
18	Qatar	14.2	14.1	11.1	13.0	14.3	7.2	74	67	66	62	63
19	Vietnam	11.3	9.7	12.7	14.1	14.5	8.7	71	72	72	70	69
20	Egypt	12.7	13.2	11.5	12.7	10.8	10.0	71	75	76	76	70
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	14.1	11.8	15.6	1.7	71	71	73	74	73
22	Algeria	14.0	14.0	11.1	13.4	14.1	4.1	71	70	73	70	58
23	Mauritania	14.3	13.9	13.1	14.0	14.1	0.9	70	71	68	67	57
24	Mali	9.4	8.2	13.9	10.3	12.8	15.0	70	67	66	68	59
25	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	13.3	15.7	0.6	69	70	70	69	68
26	Laos	12.0	10.3	13.2	13.3	14.1	5.9	69	71	72	71	67
27	Morocco	13.1	13.8	10.8	12.8	14.2	3.9	69	67	66	63	51
28	Indonesia	11.3	11.5	11.5	11.0	9.6	13.5	68	63	60	65	59
29	Bangladesh	11.8	10.7	12.9	11.3	10.2	11.3	68	67	63	58	58
30	Colombia	11.5	8.8	13.1	11.0	9.9	13.3	68	67	62	58	56
31	CAR	9.0	8.6	13.6	9.6	11.4	15.6	68	66	68	70	61
32	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.0	9.6	12.1	14.8	68	67	66	48	-
33	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.9	7.2	12.8	14.8	68	62	60	52	45
34	Bhutan	13.4	12.4	11.7	13.7	13.8	1.7	67	64	61	64	62
35	Tunisia	11.9	12.7	10.6	11.3	13.4	6.5	66	67	64	63	62
36	Oman	13.8	14.0	10.3	13.2	13.4	1.5	66	63	62	59	57
37	Cuba	12.3	8.1	12.6	13.2	14.0	5.9	66	62	52	49	49
38	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.3	12.3	9.8	66	65	63	65	62
39	Jordan	12.9	14.0	11.0	12.3	12.5	3.0	66	64	64	65	66
40	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	12.0	15.6	66	64	56	55	33
41	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	11.3	7.9	12.5	15.6	65	63	43	43	-
42	Turkey	12.6	11.5	11.4	13.2	11.6	4.6	65	69	63	66	62
43	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	10.8	10.3	12.6	65	64	60	61	59
44	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.4	65	64	60	54	38
45	Tajikistan	13.8	12.3	12.0	12.6	13.2	0.7	65	66	65	65	65
46	Brunei	14.8	14.5	10.3	11.0	13.2	0.6	64	64	63	63	64
47	Kazakhstan	13.4	11.6	11.1	12.6	13.5	1.7	64	64	64	63	63
48	Nepal	12.4	9.8	9.9	13.6	12.7	5.2	64	66	64	64	64
49	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	63	62	60	61
50	Malaysia	12.5	14.3	11.5	11.6	10.2	3.3	63	63	62	60	65

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018
51	Kenya	11.7	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	11.1	63	62	61	61	62
52	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.9	11.4	11.3	9.4	7.8	63	62	65	58	57
53	Comoros	12.7	11.1	11.2	12.4	14.2	0.9	63	62	57	56	56
54	UAE	13.4	13.6	10.1	11.8	12.2	1.3	62	62	60	58	58
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	13.7	61	58	55	52	53
56	Azerbaijan	13.1	9.9	9.3	11.0	13.4	3.3	60	56	57	57	57
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.4	9.8	10.2	12.0	0.9	59	58	60	57	60
58	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	11.1	10.0	12.2	0.7	59	56	56	56	56
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.1	11.1	10.4	12.0	1.5	58	58	57	56	54
60	Bahrain	12.5	13.2	9.1	11.1	10.2	0.9	57	56	55	55	57
61	Nicaragua	9.1	5.6	11.1	11.8	11.3	7.6	56	51	41	41	-
62	Russian Federation	12.3	8.0	10.2	10.6	12.3	2.2	56	57	60	60	51
63	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	5.6	55	53	56	48	40
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.1	52	48	48	43	-
65	Venezuela	5.6	4.5	11.2	9.4	11.1	9.6	51	39	42	41	34
66	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	10.1	11.4	7.8	51	46	43	42	-
67	Rwanda	8.1	5.5	6.7	10.3	10.1	9.3	50	42	42	41	-
68	Honduras	7.2	5.1	10.5	7.7	9.2	8.7	48	46	39	38	-
69	Uganda	8.1	4.6	7.4	6.7	9.1	11.7	48	47	48	47	46
70	El Salvador	7.7	4.6	10.7	5.7	9.1	7.2	45	42	38	30	-
71	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	9.8	2.4	44	43	41	42	-
72	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	1.7	44	43	43	43	-
73	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	2.0	43	47	45	46	-
74	South Sudan	5.7	0.9	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.0	43	43	44	44	-
75	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	7.9	2.0	42	42	42	43	-
76	Israel	9.8	8.4	5.6	6.6	6.6	4.3	41	40	38	39	40

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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 2022 reporting period was 01 October 2020 - 30 September 2021.
- 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 including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic

In the WWL 2022 reporting period, travel restrictions and other measures introduced by the governments of various countries to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic did cause delays and create the need for restructuring grass-roots research in some cases. Through the agile cooperation of In-country networks, Open Doors country researchers, External experts, WWR analysts and an increased use of technological options, Open Doors is confident that – as in the previous reporting period – WWL 2022 scoring, analysis and documentation has maintained required levels of quality and reliability.

External Links - Introduction

- Sources and definitions: World Watch List Documentation - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>

WWL 2022 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 2021)	Christians	Chr%
30,911,000	a few thousand	OD estimate

Map of country



Yemen: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	88	5
WWL 2021	87	7
WWL 2020	85	8
WWL 2019	86	8
WWL 2018	85	9

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2018-2022 reporting periods

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Yemen: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
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
Clan oppression	Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders, One's own (extended) family, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs
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

The Church in Yemen is composed mostly of Yemeni 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). Action against known converts includes more than just detention and interrogation; radical Islamic groups 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. 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 Muslims and local 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

- Various Christians were (or continued to be) detained for faith-related reasons during the WWL 2022 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

While there had for some time been anecdotal reports of indigenous Christian communities growing slowly, this progress seems uncertain in the WWL 2022 reporting period. Unfortunately, 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. Before the war, the total Christian community numbered around 40,000 and was mainly composed of expatriate/migrant workers.

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>

WWL 2022: Keys to understanding / Yemen

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International country report	AI 2021	https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/yemen/	5 July 2021
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14704852	5 July 2021
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2020	BTI 2020	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard-YEM.html	5 July 2021
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/yemen/	5 July 2021
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2020	EIU 2020	https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/democracy-index-2020.pdf	5 July 2021
FFP's Fragile States Index 2021	FSI 2021	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	5 July 2021
Freedom House's 2021 Democracy index	Freedom House/Democracy 2021	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2021 Global Freedom index	Freedom House/Global Freedom 2021	https://freedomhouse.org/country/yemen/freedom-world/2021	5 July 2021
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2020 report	Freedom House/Internet Freedom 2020	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores	
Garda World country report	Garda World	https://www.garda.com/crisis24/country-reports/yemen	5 July 2021
Human Rights Watch World Report 2021	HRW 2021	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/yemen	5 July 2021
Internet World Stats 2021	IWS 2021	https://www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm#ye	5 July 2021
Middle East Concern country profile	MEC Yemen	https://www.meconcern.org/countries/yemen/	5 July 2021
RSF's 2021 World Press Freedom Index	World Press Freedom 2021	https://rsf.org/en/yemen	5 July 2021
Transparency International's 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index	CPI 2020	https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/yemen	5 July 2021
UNDP Human Development Report 2020	HDR 2020	http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/YEM.pdf	5 July 2021
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators	HDI	http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/YEM	5 July 2021
US State Department's 2020 International Religious Freedom country reports	IRFR 2020	https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/yemen/	5 July 2021
USCIRF 2021 country reports	USCIRF 2021	https://www.uscifr.gov/countries	5 July 2021
World Bank country report	World Bank	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/yemen	5 July 2021

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.

In September 2014, protests by Houthis degenerated into fighting against rival forces such as 'Islah', Yemen's main Sunni radical Islamic party. In March 2015, after taking over Yemen's capital airport in Sana'a, crucial government ministries and northern areas of the country, the Shiite Houthis forced President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi and his government into exile in Saudi Arabia. In July 2015, forces loyal to the government and southern militias regained control of Aden, backed by the troops and airpower of the Sunni Saudi-led coalition, which started in March 2015. Saudi Arabia started this military operation against the Houthis, partly in an attempt to counter Iran's influence in its 'backyard'. In September 2015 President Hadi returned to Aden. Throughout 2016, fighting on the ground continued between Houthi-aligned forces and groups backed by the Saudi-led coalition.

"In 2016, the UN brokered a months-long cessation of hostilities that reduced airstrikes and fighting, and initiated peace talks in Kuwait. However, the talks ended without agreement. The Houthis and Saleh's political party announced a Supreme Political Council in August 2016 and, in November 2016, a National Salvation Government (including a prime minister and several dozen cabinet members, in November 2016, to govern in Sanaa and further challenge the legitimacy of Hadi's government. However, amid rising tensions between the Houthis and Saleh, sporadic clashes erupted in mid-2017, and escalated into open fighting that ended when Houthi forces killed Saleh in early December 2017. In 2018, anti-Houthi forces made the most battlefield progress in Yemen since early 2016, most notably in Al-Hudaydah Governorate. In December 2018, the Houthis and Yemeni Government participated in the first UN-brokered peace talks since 2016. In April 2019, Yemen's parliament convened in Seiyoun for the first time since the conflict broke out in 2014 and elected a speaker and vice speakers." (Source: CIA Factbook)

"On 14 September [2019], the Houthis claimed responsibility for an attack on Saudi oil facilities that temporarily cut off nearly 50 per cent of the country's oil production capacity. Riyadh, Washington and several European governments accused Iran of the attack, and the Houthis' claim has tied the group more closely to Tehran in the eyes of its opponents." ([International Crisis Group](#), 16 October 2019)

In August 2019, southern separatist forces (Southern Transitional Council, STC) aligned with the United Arab Emirates took over the UN-recognized government's temporary capital of Aden, risking infighting with the Saudi-aligned coalition. However in a hopeful move, separatists and the government signed a power-sharing agreement in Riyadh in November 2019 to end the conflict in southern Yemen. Nevertheless, peace is still far off. The South is currently experiencing a regional civil war within the countrywide civil war. The southern separatist forces are fighting the troops of the Hadi-government and even declared independence in May 2020. While most of the southern governorates did not follow the STC's call, the majority (even those that are technically still aligned with the Hadi-government) are not under the control of the government anymore. Attempts to unify the South under the 'Riyadh Agreement' in November 2019 were unsuccessful. The agreement was intended to unify the South before starting negotiations in earnest with the Houthis to find an overall peace-process for the whole country. At the same time, the Houthis have made significant territorial advances in numerous governorates. There have been heavy battles, including massive air strikes from the Saudi air force. This situation did not change much in 2021: The Houthis continued attacks in the North, ceasefire talks stalled and tensions between the government and the southern separatists persisted and sometimes escalated in the South, regardless of the formation of a unity government in December 2020 made up of Hadi loyalists, members of the STC and the Islamist Islah party. However, the unity government does not exercise effective control over much of the country. 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 top of these developments, the COVID-19 virus spread throughout the country. In addition, Yemen has been plagued by locusts, cholera and flooding. Due to lack of funds, international NGOs have not been able to supply the country with the humanitarian assistance needed. There is no common policy concerning anti-COVID measures and restrictions, little communication between the South and North, and sometimes there are even diverging policies within the same city (Aden). At the same time, access issues in the North have led to a cut-back in the distribution of humanitarian aid there. The Houthi government at first denied the existence of COVID-19 and later downplayed its impact but blamed Westerners (Christians) or other foreigners for importing a disease alien to Yemen. This blame game and the general situation have added to an already dangerously polarized and hostile environment for Christians.

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 2020).

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2020): "The government did not exercise effective control over much of the country's territory and had limited opportunities to address abuses of religious freedom. The government publicly condemned the religious persecution by the Houthi movement."

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."

Some Yemeni Christians have been accused of blasphemy and arrested. Also in the WWL 2022 reporting period, Christians were detained for both religious and non-religious reasons. In this time frame, 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. MEC continues: "[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." Due to the civil war, most expatriates, including Christians, have left Yemen.

The legal landscaping facing women and girls is additionally restrictive. There is an almost non-existent female representation in parliament, with just [0.3%](#) of parliamentary positions being filled by women in 2019 (Index Mundi, accessed 24 November 2020). 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, 2018](#)). 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, 2021](#)). Neither marital rape nor domestic violence are specifically criminalized in Yemeni law ([OECD, 2019](#)).

Religious landscape

Yemen: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	a few thousand	-

According to OD-estimate

The Open Doors estimate for the number of Christians in Yemen is "a few thousand". The number of Christians was much higher (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 non-Muslims has continued to decline. According to WCD statistics, 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 considered 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. Converts may face the death penalty (though generally not implemented by the government but rather by radical Muslims, with the government turning a blind eye) if their new faith is discovered. 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.

MEC states (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 the UNDP Human Development Report (HDR 2020, p.343 onwards):

- "Yemen's HDI value for 2019 is 0.470— which put the country in the low human development category— positioning it at 179 out of 189 countries and territories. Between 1990 and 2019, Yemen's HDI value increased from 0.401 to 0.470, an increase of 17.2 percent. ... Between 1990 and 2019, Yemen's life expectancy at birth increased by 8.8 years, mean years of schooling increased by 2.9 years and expected years of schooling increased by 1.2 years. Yemen's GNI per capita decreased by about 46.1 percent between 1990 and 2019."

According to [UNDP's 2019 report](#):

- "Before the escalation of conflict in Yemen in 2015, the country ranked 153 [out of 189] in human development, 138 in extreme poverty, 147 in life expectancy and 172 in education attainment. The conflict has reversed the pace of development—with nearly a quarter of a million people killed directly by fighting and indirectly through lack of food, infrastructure and health services. Some 60 percent of those killed are children under age 5. The long-term impacts make it among the most destructive conflicts since the end of the Cold War ... and have already set back human development in the country by 21 years."

According to World Bank (country overview):

- **Poverty:** "Poverty is worsening: whereas before the crisis it affected almost half Yemen's total population of about 29 million, now it affects an estimated three-quarters of it—71% to 78% of Yemenis. Women are more severely affected than men." (World Bank, Yemen Overview) The percentage of population living below income poverty line, national poverty line is 48.6 (HDI 2020).
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 66.1
- **Gross national income (GNI) per capita:** \$1,594

According to World Bank's [April 2021 update](#):

- The Yemeni economy is listed in the category 'low income';
- "An unprecedented protracted humanitarian crisis, aggravated by COVID-19, leaves many Yemenis mostly dependent on relief and remittances. Socio-economic conditions are deteriorating rapidly, driven by a currency depreciation, trade disruptions, rising food prices, severe fuel supply shortages, disruption and downsizing of humanitarian operations. Intensifying violence and fragmentation of macroeconomic policies add further strains on the fragile economic conditions, and the population is at risk of famine in 2021.

- The economy contracted sharply from an already low base. The oil sector — the only large export earner — was hard-hit by low global oil prices. Non-oil economic activity suffered significantly from COVID-19-related trade slowdown and exceptionally heavy rainfalls, which caused intense flooding, damage and loss of life. Foreign exchange shortages deepened further with the near depletion of Saudi Arabia's basic import finance facility, reduced oil revenues, and downsizing of humanitarian assistance.

Inflation has accelerated quickly in 2020. The weakening of the rial played a major role; other factors such as COVID-19 related disruptions, insecurity, trade restrictions and associated fuel shortages have also influenced price dynamics. The national average cost of the Minimum/Survivable Food Basket increased by 4% in December 2020 (m-o-m) and by 30% (yoy)."

According to the [UN World Food Programme](#) (last accessed 24 June 2021):

- "Even before fighting broke out in early 2015, Yemen was one of the poorest countries in the Arab world. ... Over five years of conflict have left thousands of civilians dead and 3.65 million internally displaced. Its impact on the country's infrastructure has been devastating, with major overland routes and airports severely damaged. Despite ongoing humanitarian assistance, 16.2 million Yemenis are food insecure. The coordinated response of the humanitarian community has prevented catastrophe in Yemen. But if these interventions stop or are severely hampered, the situation is likely to deteriorate quickly. Malnutrition rates among women and children in Yemen remain among the highest in the world, with 1.2 million women and 2.3 million children requiring treatment for acute malnutrition. Of these children, 400.000 are at risk of dying without treatment. ... The COVID-19 pandemic now poses a new threat to the people of Yemen. The economic impact of COVID-19 on countries like Yemen – struggling with poverty and devastated by conflict – may be more devastating than the disease itself. In numbers: 20.7 million people in need of humanitarian assistance; 4 million people internally displaced; 16.2 million people are food insecure (IPC 3+)."

The ongoing heavy depreciation of the Rial will lead to further deterioration of the financial situation for all Yemenis, including Christians. The country is heavily import dependent with more than 90% of its goods coming from abroad.

Women are typically the most economically vulnerable in Yemen due to low education and employment rates, and poor financial inclusion ([Georgetown](#), 2019/20, p.34; HDI 2020). Making it additionally challenging for women to gain economic independence, Yemeni women do not have equal inheritance rights to men; under Islamic law, daughters receive half the share that sons receive. Considering these economic vulnerabilities, Christian women depend heavily on their husbands and families. Should this support be lost, they will likely fall into destitution.

Beyond this formal inequality, women have been reportedly denied their due inheritance. Widows are sometimes forcibly married to another male within the family of the deceased, in order to ensure that property and wealth is kept within the family ([OECD, 2019](#)).

Social and cultural landscape

According to the UNDP Human Development Report (HDR 2020, p.343 onwards) and CIA Factbook:

- **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:** 38.5% of total population (2021)
- **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 HDI 2020:

- **Median age:** 20.2 years
- **Education:** The expected years of schooling were 8.8 for 2019 (more recent data is not available). 7.4 for girls, compared to 10.2 for boys. (Whilst the gender gap in education rates has been closely narrowing, a 2019 UNDP report indicates that the conflict has set back progress, causing a 20% increase in children not enrolled in school since violence escalated in 2015 ([UNDP, “Assessing the Impact of War on Development in Yemen”](#), 2019).
- **Unemployment rate:** 12.9% (24% for youth)
- **Youth not in school or employment (% ages 15-24):** 44.8
- **IDPs/Refugees:** 4 million Yemenis have been forced to flee their homes because of the crisis – 79% of them are women and children ([UNHCR](#), last accessed 24 June 2021)
- **Gender inequality:** With a score of 0.795, 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
- **Child malnutrition, stunting (moderate or severe) (% under age 5):** 46.4%

In 2021, Yemen topped the FFP Fragile States Index for the third time in a row 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 never 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 is a very rare occasion. The punishment for this would often be death or banishment.

The COVID-19 crisis adds another layer of disaster in a country that has seen more than 50% of its health institutions being left unusable due to the conflict. From mid-April 2020, the World Food Program began to withdraw over half of its staff due to Houthi obstruction, COVID-19 and the lack of personal protection equipment. The resulting reduction in humanitarian aid seems likely to have had a significant impact. The overall result will likely be catastrophic with a higher number of casualties from the war, COVID-19 and the side-effect of a further deteriorating econ-

omy. This was confirmed by UN spokesperson Secretary-General António Guterres' warning on 20 November 2020 that "Yemen is now in imminent danger of the worst famine the world has seen for decades. In the absence of immediate action, millions of lives may be lost" ([United Nations Press Release](#), 20 November 2020).

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 all contribute to the challenge they experience 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.

Yemen is a deeply patriarchal country and has long been viewed as one of the worst countries to live in as a woman ([Amnesty International, 16 December 2019](#)). Marrying girls off early has become a financial coping strategy for families affected by poverty and the conflict ([UNFPA, 2018, p.15](#)). In addition to the escalating conflict, economic collapse and natural disasters, the crisis surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic has placed further challenges on Yemeni society, particularly women. Domestic violence levels have increased and women have been forced to take on additional care responsibilities ([SaferWorld, 27 October 2020](#)). Also, increasing poverty as well as educational interruptions have led to increased levels of illiteracy.

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2021):

- **Internet usage:** 25.9% penetration - survey date: March 2021
- **Facebook usage:** 11% penetration – survey date: March 2021
According to [2019 stats by Napoleon Cat](#), 86.1% of Facebook users were male.

According to the World Bank (Country profile 2018):

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 53.7 per 100 people

In the past, the government controlled most local television and radio except for some privately owned radio stations. The Freedom in the World report states that since the start of the war in March 2015, "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. The Houthis, the Saudi-led coalition, and Hadi government forces have also harassed and detained reporters" (Freedom House/Global Freedom 2021).

The technological landscape in Yemen is affected by the civil war and is currently disrupted. As the CIA World Factbook puts it: "[M]obile towers are often deliberately targeted; maintenance is dangerous to staff; aid organizations rely on satellite and radio communications" and telecommunications equipment in rural areas are scarce. Furthermore, there is a fuel crisis, which means that generators are no longer a good alternative for supplying the electricity re-

quired to run the Internet.

Not all factions in the civil war have the capabilities to monitor Internet traffic. The Houthis, in particular, 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.

The gender gap in mobile Internet usage in the South Asia region averages at 23% ([GSMA, 2020, “The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2020”, p.9](#)). This gap shows how restricted women’s access is to both information and community networks. [Georgetown research](#) (2019) indicates that Yemen is one of the worst performing countries in the region, with just 48% of women in Yemen using a mobile phone. 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.

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 as well as 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. More recently, in the WWL 2022 reporting period, there are reports that violent Islamist 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 freed areas, Christians were often targeted by radical Sunni groups. There is a gendered component to this backdrop of extreme violence. Men are more likely to be targeted by radical Muslims and may be forced to spend lengthy periods in hiding to escape being killed, and both men and boys are vulnerable to forced militia recruitment. Women and girls primarily experience violence behind closed doors within the context of their family. Women are also vulnerable within the context of displacement: An

estimated 73% of the 4 million displaced people in Yemen are women and children ([UNFPA, February 2021](#)).

Trends analysis

1) Peace negotiations keep stalling and re-starting

In its seventh year of civil war, Yemen is a country on 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 has remained elusive. The fact that the process came to a standstill in August 2019 with the collapse of the anti-Houthi coalition has further complicated the situation. Former allies United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have parted ways, together with the different militias they were supporting. A positive step towards ending 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. Since then there has been no significant progress in the peace process.

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, the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU 2020) stresses the fact that even if a peace deal is agreed, "the ongoing presence of al-Qaida 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.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: International Crisis Group - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/yemens-multiplying-conflicts>
- Political and legal landscape: 0.3% - <https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/indicators/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS/rankings>
- Political and legal landscape: CEDAW, 2018 - <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/720493>
- Political and legal landscape: Girls Not Brides/Yemen, 2021 - <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/yemen/>

- Political and legal landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/SD.pdf>
- Economic landscape: UNDP's 2019 report: - <http://www.hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2019.pdf>
- Economic landscape: April 2021 update - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/yemen/publication/economic-update-april-2021>
- Economic landscape: UN World Food Programme - <https://www.wfp.org/countries/yemen>
- Economic landscape: Georgetown, 2019/20, p.34 - <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WPS-Index-2019-20-Report.pdf>
- Economic landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/SD.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNDP, "Assessing the Impact of War on Development in Yemen", 2019 - <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbas/doc/Crisis>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR - <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/yemen/>
- Social and cultural landscape: United Nations Press Release - <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sgsm20432.doc.htm>
- 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: UNFPA, 2018, p.15 - https://arabstates.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Yemen%20Country%20Assessment%20-%20English_0.pdf
- 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>
- Technological landscape: 2019 stats by Napoleon Cat - <https://napoleoncat.com/stats/facebook-users-in-yemen/2019/02#:~:text=There%20were%20%202019%20300,men%20lead%20by%20720%20000.>
- Technological landscape: GSMA, 2020, "The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2020", p.9). - <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/GSMA-The-Mobile-Gender-Gap-Report-2020.pdf>
- Technological landscape: Georgetown research - <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WPS-Index-2019-20-Report.pdf>
- 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
- Security situation: UNFPA, February 2021 - <https://arabstates.unfpa.org/en/publications/unfpa-humanitarian-response-yemen-2021-0>
- Trends analysis: Yemen Country Risk Report - <https://www.marketresearch.com/Business-Monitor-International-v304/Yemen-Country-Risk-Q1-13882571/>

WWL 2022: 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 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.

Before the current civil war in Yemen (which began in 2015), there were thousands of expatriates, often working in development, 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 dangerous situation. Some of the churches have been ransacked.

Church spectrum today

Due to the state of war, mostly indigenous Christians - converts - are left in the country. In the interests of security, no details can be published.

External Links - Church information

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

WWL 2022: Persecution Dynamics / Yemen

Reporting period

01 October 2020 - 30 September 2021

Position on the World Watch List

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

WWL 2019	86	8
WWL 2018	85	9

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2018-2022 reporting periods

Yemen's score increased by one point compared to WWL 2021. The main reason is a higher number of reported violent incidents against Christians, such as Christians sentenced to prison terms and an increased number of people forced to flee the country for religious reasons. House churches are very much aware of the risks of meeting together. There are many instances where neighbors and family have betrayed the gatherings. Houthis are known to have vilified Christians and actively stopped Christian activities. Many converts want to leave areas that are under Houthi control. Pressure on the converts is at extreme levels in all spheres of life. Christians in Yemen are faced with physical and mental abuse, sexual harassment and rape as well as forced marriages. 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.

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.

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 AP 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.

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 and anti-Christian. One country analyst sums 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."

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 a 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.)	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 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 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 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 above mentioned reason, violent religious and revolutionary groups have abducted Christians in exchange for money.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

The situation in general is dangerous for Christians in Yemen. In all areas of Yemen, even in more comparatively 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 and Yemeni Christian converts are at great risk of being killed, 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. Converts from Islam to Christianity have also 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 - 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 coming together 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 and only controls 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 them 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 migrant Christians, particularly from Africa and also from Asia, remain in the country but their

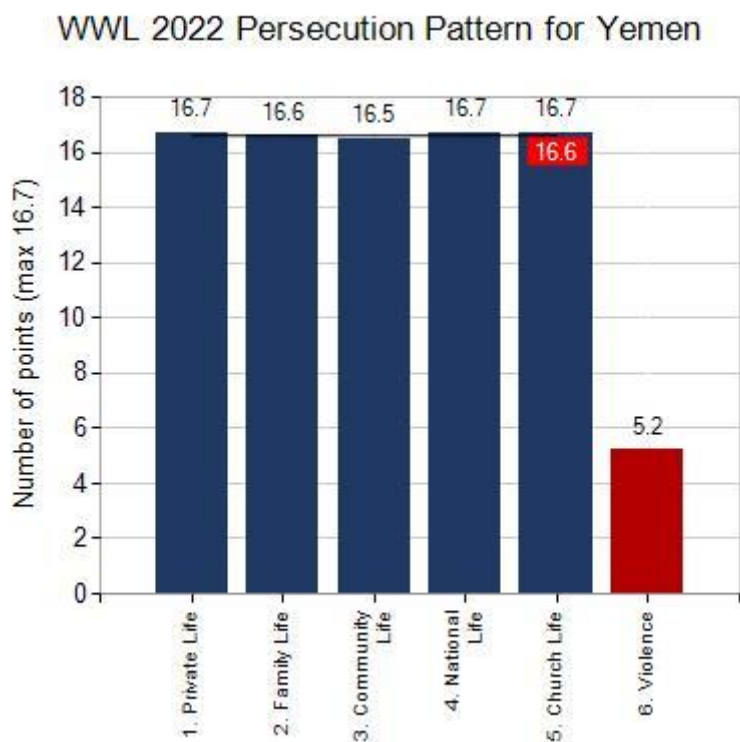
numbers are very low. In what is most likely a combination of racial discrimination and religious freedom violations, migrant Christians face harassment and discrimination from society at a community and national level, and even outright violence from radical Islamic movements. However, since their numbers have decreased considerably and the Church is now composed mainly of indigenous Christians, 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: At least 95% of 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.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2022 persecution pattern for Yemen shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Yemen continues to be at an extreme level (16.6 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 an extreme level. The *Private, National and Church spheres* both scored the maximum possible (16.7), directly followed by the *Family sphere* with 16.6 points and *Community sphere* with 16.5 points. 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 saw an increase from 3.9 in WWL 2021 to 5.2 points in WWL 2022. 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 violence score is higher.

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 2021 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 IS control large parts of the country.

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, provoking hostile reactions and possibly jeopardizing the safety of other converts.

Block 1 - additional information

The above is just a selection; it is also dangerous for Christians in Yemen (i.e. full score of 4 points)

to reveal their faith in 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 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (4.00 points)

For Yemeni Christians from a Muslim background with children, there is strong family and societal pressure to ensure that children are brought up according to Islamic norms. There is a great risk of the children being taken away if the new faith of their parents is discovered.

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 - 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. 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 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

Christians seldom meet together because of the increasing fear that neighbors will report them to the local authorities. A climate of suspicion has developed: Citizens have become so dependent on the authorities that many families are desperate to find ways of getting in a positive relationship with them, for instance by reporting illegal activities such as Christian worship or gathering for Bible study.

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 as what matters in Yemeni society is "who you know". If those in management suspect that an employee is 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 receive 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 will greatly disadvantage converts from Islam. Even those who executed four nuns in Aden and 12 staff members of a Christian nursing home in 2016 were not investigated.

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. The official government have little control over the entirety of the country, but in the past, even personal requests for church permits by the 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. In the WWL2022 reporting period it has been increasingly difficult for Christians to meet, especially in Houthi controlled areas due to the involved risk.

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 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 the care home for the elderly in Aden experienced in 2016.

Violence

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.

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 2022 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.

In March 2021, a fire broke out in an Ethiopian refugee camp after a Saudi bombing. At least 60 people were killed, with indications that many of them were Christians. It is unclear to what extent this was a targeted attack with anti-Christian motives. In April 2021, the Houthis reportedly began to expel Ethiopians and are said to have killed many of them, including Christians. As in both cases it is unclear whether anti-Christian motives played a role, these incidents have not been included in the WWL 2022 scoring for Yemen. The US State Department's IRFR 2020 also mentions forced detentions of Christians, including Ethiopians on the basis of religious beliefs, but could not publish details of these cases for reasons of security.

5 Year trends

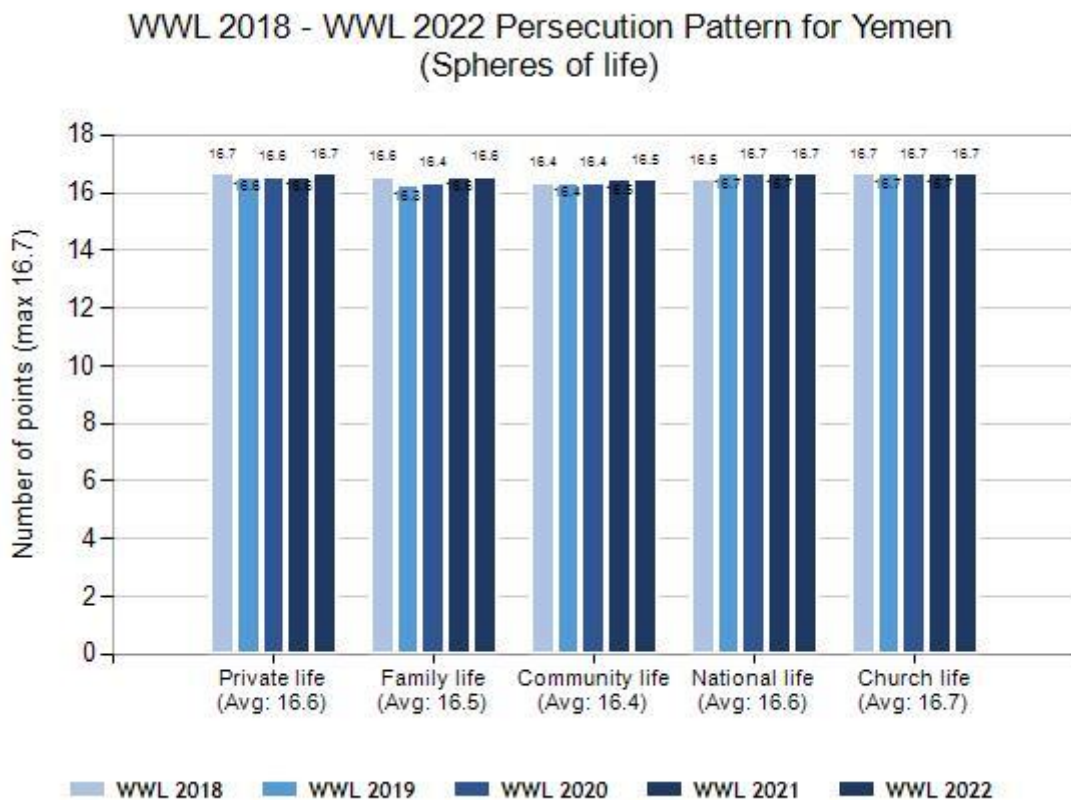
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

Yemen: WWL 2018 - WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2022	16.6
2021	16.6
2020	16.5
2019	16.5
2018	16.6

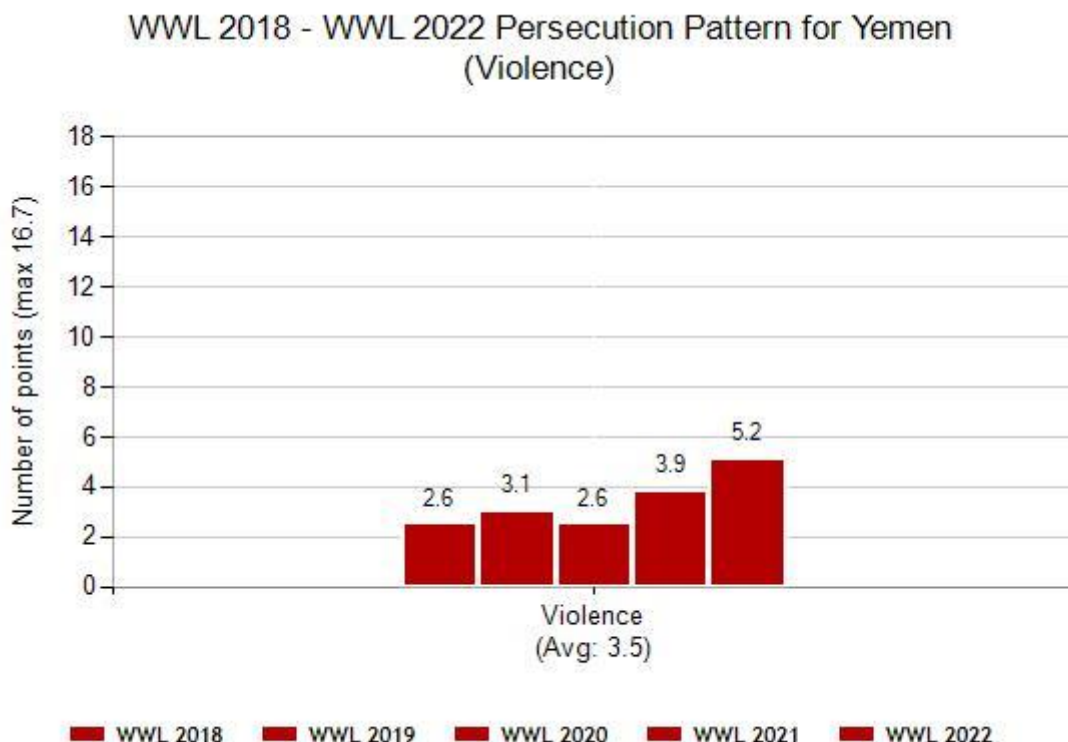
Average pressure has been extremely high at 16.5 to 16.6 points over the past five reporting periods. This is very nearly the maximum score possible.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



Pressure in all *spheres of life* has more or less levelled off at an extreme (or maximum) 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



Over the past five WWL reporting periods, the violence score has risen (with interruptions) from 'low' to 'fairly high' to finally 'high' in WWL 2022. The relatively lower scores for WWL 2018-2020 do not necessarily mean that the violence situation was much better then 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	-
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Trafficking; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Yemen is a strongly patriarchal society in which women enjoy few rights; women 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 (HRW 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.

Women and girls have more limited access than men to information about the Christian faith and participation in a church group. Because families closely monitor the activities of female members of the household, their coming and going from the household and their telephones come under greater scrutiny (particularly as cell 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. The family control of girls is the cultural norm in much of the country, although much less so in major countries such as Sana'a and Aden.

Christian women and girls are also at the risk of 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, Sura 8](#)). Although no specific instances have been recorded, this is a source of fear for Christian women. According to country experts these groups are running prostitution rings in the country; both Christian migrants in Yemen, as well as Yemeni female Muslim converts to Christianity risk being exploited. There is no clear data currently available to indicate what extent Christians may have been raped while in detention, although this is believed to occur, particularly in Houthi-controlled areas.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; 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 no 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 recruited into militias (Human Rights Council, 2020). When boys are dragged into the army and war, 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. Within detention facilities, Christian detainees have reportedly experienced physical and mental torture. Pastors and church leaders are also in danger of imprisonment.

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 a 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. Ismaili Muslims complain 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. [Adherents of Bahai](#) in Yemen are occasionally imprisoned and mistreated, mostly by Houthi authorities. They also face pressure to recant their faith.

On 30 July 2020, six adherents of Bahai were released from prison after four years of incarceration. One of them had been sentenced to death for apostasy and alleged links to Israel, where the Bahai World Center is located. After their release, they were immediately flown out of Yemen into exile ([Al-Monitor](#), 10 August 2020). However, the Houthis are still taking legal action against them and other members of the Baha'i community (USCIRF 2021).

According to Bahai leader Hamed bin Haydara, at least 20 members of the group were prosecuted by the Houthi-controlled Specialized Criminal Court. Bin Haydara himself was sentenced to death by the Houthis in 2018 for "apostasy, espionage and seeking to establish the religion in Yemen" and was later pardoned ([Arab News](#), 21 November 2020).

The tiny Jewish community is another indigenous non-Muslim religious minority group. Most Jews live in the capital, Sana'a, which is controlled by Houthi rebels, whose flag displays wording which curses Jews. According to Yemen's information minister, [Moammer al-Iryani](#), Houthi rebels view the small remaining Jewish community as an enemy and are "engaged in ethnic cleansing which includes seeking to rid Yemen of all Jews" (The Times of Israel, 16 April 2017). Sectarian messages and anti-semitic statements continue to be uttered and printed, including in school textbooks issued by Houthi authorities, which also contained radical Islamic ideology (Review of Houthi Educational Materials in Yemen, 2015-2019, IMPACT-SE, March 2021). Leading international and regional experts also say that the Supreme Houthi leader, Abdulmalik

al-Houthi, is inciting violence against Jews, who are facing "Houthi-imposed restrictions on their freedom of movement and constant threats to their lives and security" (IRFR 2020).

"In 2020, Jewish prisoner of conscience Libi Salem Musa Marhabi remained in prison, even though a court ordered his release" in 2019. Marhabi has been detained since 2016 for allegedly helping to remove an old Torah scroll from the country. The US Secretary of State at that time, Michael R. Pompeo, called on the Houthis in November 2020 to release him. Despite his health problems and the release order, he remains detained (USCIRF 2021).

In August 2020, it was reported that approximately [100 Jews would be transferred to the UAE](#) after this Gulf state signed a peace deal with Israel (Jerusalem Post, 16 August 2020). According to IRFR 2020, "approximately 20 to 40 Jews remain, concentrated in Sana'a and Raydah, in Amran Governorate north of Sana'a."

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Islamic oppression

Violent Islamic 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 the weak central security. They will also benefit from divisions among the anti-Houthi coalition as they will easily be able to fill the void left by the former coalition forces, unless the latter will be able to find a political solution to settle their differences. This expectation is confirmed by a November 2021 assessment by think-tank [Garda World](#) (last accessed on 30 November 2021): "The persisting security vacuum in Yemen, the erosion of central authority, and the fragmentation of the Yemeni army are likely to continue to benefit Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)". The situation for Christians is likely to become worse because these developments allow for a stronger polarization of society and the 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.

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.

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](#), last accessed on 30 November 2021) expects the conflict "will persist in Yemen in 2021-25, undermining political stability. Fighting between the Houthis (the de facto authority in the north) and the internationally recognized government (which is backed by a Saudi Arabian-led coalition) will remain particularly severe in Marib province, an oil-rich region in northern Yemen. With more than 70% of Yemenis already dependent on humanitarian assistance, socioeconomic conditions continue to deteriorate, and widespread famine is expected in 2021."

Given the deep mistrust and uncompromising attitude of the warring parties and the deadlock in the UN-led peace process, there is no prospect of a negotiated end to the war in Yemen any time soon. 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 measure of persecution from the engine "Organized Corruption and Crime" 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 high 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. As stated in an October 2021 assessment by think tank [Garda World](#) (last accessed on 30 November 2021), crime could further worsen with "with the deterioration of the situation and international sanctions accompanying the war as food stores are depleted and increasing numbers of people are forced to do without basic necessities".

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Quran, Sura 8 - <https://www.quraneasyguide.com/spoils-war/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Bahai believers - <http://http/www.worldatlas.com/articles/religious-beliefs-in-yemen.html>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Al Monitor - <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/08/yemen-houthis-release-exile-bahai-minority.html#ixzz6WJpkHM9v>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Arab News - <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1766391/middle-east>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Moammer al-Iryani - <https://www.timesofisrael.com/yemeni-minister-says-fate-of-countrys-remaining-jews-unknown/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: 100 Jews would be transferred to the UAE - <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/yemens-remaining-jews-to-be-transferred-to-uae-report-638831>
- Future outlook: Garda World - <https://www.garda.com/crisis24/country-reports/yemen>

- Future outlook: EIU - <https://country.eiu.com/yemen>
- Future outlook: Garda World - <https://www.garda.com/crisis24/country-reports/yemen>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on World Watch Research's Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) and on the World Watch Monitor website:

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