

World  
Watch  
Research

## Yemen: Full Country Dossier

December 2022



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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# Introduction

## World Watch List 2023

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	94	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.7	92	91	92	92	91
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	88	87	85	86
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.2	89	88	88	87	86
5	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.1	16.3	9.1	88	91	92	90	87
6	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.6	14.8	14.4	16.7	88	87	85	80	80
7	Pakistan	13.4	13.8	14.8	14.8	12.9	16.7	86	87	88	88	87
8	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.8	15.8	16.5	10.7	86	85	86	85	85
9	Afghanistan	15.4	15.7	15.4	16.1	16.6	4.6	84	98	94	93	94
10	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	9.4	83	79	79	85	87
11	India	12.3	13.1	13.0	14.8	13.3	15.7	82	82	83	83	83
12	Syria	13.2	14.1	13.6	14.1	14.1	11.3	80	78	81	82	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.9	15.8	16.7	2.4	80	81	78	79	77
14	Myanmar	12.5	11.6	13.9	13.9	12.9	15.4	80	79	74	73	71
15	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.8	16.0	16.4	0.2	77	77	77	78	78
16	China	12.9	10.0	12.7	14.5	15.6	11.1	77	76	74	70	65
17	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	10.3	15.1	15.0	76	70	67	66	68
18	Iraq	14.1	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	4.6	76	78	82	76	79
19	Algeria	14.1	14.1	11.5	13.7	15.1	4.8	73	71	70	73	70
20	Mauritania	14.5	14.2	13.3	14.1	14.2	1.3	72	70	71	68	67
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	13.9	12.7	15.6	1.5	71	71	71	73	74
22	Colombia	11.8	8.9	13.1	11.3	10.4	15.4	71	68	67	62	58
23	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.5	9.6	13.8	15.6	71	68	67	66	48
24	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	68	66	68	70
25	Vietnam	11.8	9.6	12.8	14.6	14.4	6.9	70	71	72	72	70
26	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	14.1	15.7	0.6	70	69	70	70	69
27	Cuba	13.1	8.3	13.1	13.2	14.9	7.0	70	66	62	52	49
28	Niger	9.4	9.5	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.4	70	68	62	60	52
29	Morocco	13.2	13.8	10.9	12.2	14.5	4.8	69	69	67	66	63
30	Bangladesh	12.6	10.7	12.8	11.3	10.6	10.7	69	68	67	63	58
31	Laos	11.7	10.2	13.3	14.2	14.0	5.0	68	69	71	72	71
32	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.6	68	65	63	43	43
33	Indonesia	11.3	12.0	11.6	11.1	9.2	12.8	68	68	63	60	65
34	Qatar	14.2	14.1	10.5	13.2	14.4	1.5	68	74	67	66	62
35	Egypt	12.7	13.5	11.6	12.1	10.8	7.0	68	71	75	76	76
36	Tunisia	12.0	12.8	10.4	12.0	13.5	6.5	67	66	67	64	63
37	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.6	67	66	64	56	55
38	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	11.0	10.5	13.9	67	65	64	60	61
39	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.4	12.1	10.6	66	66	65	63	65
40	Bhutan	13.2	12.3	11.6	13.9	14.2	1.1	66	67	64	61	64
41	Turkey	12.8	11.5	11.8	13.0	11.5	5.7	66	65	69	63	66
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.5	66	63	62	57	56
43	Malaysia	12.8	14.3	11.4	12.2	11.1	3.9	66	63	63	62	60
44	Tajikistan	13.8	12.2	12.3	12.8	13.4	1.1	66	65	66	65	65
45	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.9	65	65	64	60	54
46	Brunei	14.8	14.6	10.1	10.9	14.4	0.4	65	64	64	63	63
47	Oman	14.0	14.1	10.3	13.3	12.9	0.6	65	66	63	62	59
48	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.6	11.9	12.7	14.2	1.1	65	64	64	64	63
49	Jordan	13.0	14.0	10.5	12.3	12.7	2.0	65	66	64	64	65
50	Nicaragua	10.8	5.9	11.9	12.8	13.6	9.4	65	56	51	41	41

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.3	64	63	62	61	61
52	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	64	63	62	60
53	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.6	63	61	58	55	52
54	UAE	13.4	13.4	9.9	11.2	12.8	1.1	62	62	62	60	58
55	Nepal	12.0	9.8	9.4	13.0	12.6	4.4	61	64	66	64	64
56	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	0.6	60	59	56	56	56
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.3	9.7	10.3	12.0	2.0	60	59	58	60	57
58	Azerbaijan	13.2	10.0	9.5	12.0	13.6	0.6	59	60	56	57	57
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.2	11.0	10.4	12.0	2.0	59	58	58	57	56
60	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	7.6	58	55	53	56	48
61	Russian Federation	12.3	7.9	10.3	11.8	12.8	2.0	57	56	57	60	60
62	Sri Lanka	12.8	9.1	10.6	11.3	9.5	3.9	57	63	62	65	58
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	8.9	57	50	42	42	41
64	Venezuela	6.0	4.6	11.7	10.2	11.4	11.7	56	51	39	42	41
65	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	11.1	55	52	48	48	43
66	Bahrain	12.7	13.3	8.7	10.7	8.8	0.9	55	57	56	55	55
67	Honduras	7.1	5.0	11.9	7.6	9.8	11.9	53	48	46	39	38
68	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	51	46	43	42
69	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	9.2	14.8	51	48	47	48	47
70	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	5.4	49	44	43	41	42
71	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	3.0	48	43	47	45	46
72	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.0	46	43	43	44	44
73	El Salvador	7.7	4.2	10.6	7.4	9.1	6.7	46	45	42	38	30
74	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	42	42	42	43
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	1.1	44	44	43	43	43
76	Belarus	9.5	3.8	4.8	9.4	12.1	3.3	43	33	30	28	35

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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 2023 reporting period was 01 October 2021 - 30 September 2022.
- 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).

# WWL 2023 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 2022)	Christians	Chr%
31,155,000	A few thousand	OD estimate

## Map of country



Yemen: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	89	3
WWL 2022	88	5
WWL 2021	87	7
WWL 2020	85	8
WWL 2019	86	8

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

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

### Brief description of the persecution situation

Existing Yemeni churches in the country have faced intensifying persecution over the last decades, as both Yemenis and their international partners have been assassinated for sharing Christ in the country. 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) as well as from radical Islamic groups. Action against known converts includes more than just detention and interrogation; radical Muslims threaten apostates with death if they do not re-convert. By birth, one belongs to a tribe and its internal norms: The tribal punishment for denouncing Islam can be death or banishment. Both male and female converts to Christianity married to Muslims risk divorce including losing custody of their children. The civil war exacerbates their already difficult situation. Christians are suffering from the general humanitarian crisis in the country, but Yemeni Christians are additionally vulnerable since emergency relief is mostly distributed through local 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

- Informal fellowships experienced opposition and limitations due to a crackdown on Christians, including arrests.
- Two believers were stripped of all their belongings, such as vehicles, furniture and savings when their faith became known.
- Various Christians were (or continued to be) detained for faith-related reasons during the WWL 2023 reporting period. According to sources, both religious and non-religious factors are often involved in these cases.
- Dozens of Christians were mentally or physically abused as a result of their faith and the war situation, the threat mostly coming from families and communities.
- Several Christians had to leave their homes and relocate in or outside of the country due to fear of assassination because of their faith or for war-related reasons.
- Dozens of Christians faced sexual harassment, abduction, rape or forced marriage.

### Specific examples of positive developments

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

Nevertheless, there are a few bright spots. For instance, safe travel increased during the duration of the ceasefire (April - early October 2022) allowing more Christian training meetings to be held. In addition, it was announced in September 2022 that the eye clinic located on the grounds of Christ Church in Aden will soon be able to expand its activities. The eye clinic takes care of residents' visual needs (whether or not they can afford treatment) and also serves as "a [bridge](#) between the Anglican diocese that runs it and the Muslim region it serves" (Episcopal News Service, 23 September 2022). Finally, in November 2022, the National Council for Minorities in Yemen published a report on the situation of religious and ethnic minorities in the country. The publication of this report by the council founded in March 2022, seems to indicate there is more contact and cooperation between the various religious and ethnic groups.



## External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of positive developments: a bridge - <https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2022/09/23/episcopal-churchs-support-helps-yemen-eye-clinic-to-treat-all-patients-in-need/>

## WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Yemen

### Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2021/22 country report - 154 countries	AI country report 2021/22	<a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/yemen/report-yemen/">https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/yemen/report-yemen/</a>	18 May 2022
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14704852">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14704852</a>	18 May 2022
Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 - 137 countries	BTI report 2021	<a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/YEM">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/YEM</a>	18 May 2022
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	<a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/yemen/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/yemen/</a>	18 May 2022
Crisis24 country report (Garda World) - 193 countries	Crisis24 country report	<a href="https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/yemen">https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/yemen</a>	18 May 2022
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2021 - 167 countries	EIU 2021 - p.16	<a href="https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/Images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf">https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/Images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf</a>	18 May 2022
FFP's Fragile States Index 2022 - 179 countries	FSI 2022	<a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>	3 August 2022
Freedom House's 2022 Democracy index - 29 countries, Yemen not included	Democracy Index 2022	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores</a>	
Freedom House's 2022 Global Freedom index - 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2022	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/yemen/freedom-world/2022">https://freedomhouse.org/country/yemen/freedom-world/2022</a>	18 May 2022
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2021 report - 70 countries, Yemen not included	Freedom on the Net 2021	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores</a>	
Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 - 100+ countries	HRW 2022 country chapter	<a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/yemen">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/yemen</a>	18 May 2022
Internet World Stats 2022	IWS 2022	<a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm#ye">https://www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm#ye</a>	18 May 2022
Middle East Concern country profile	MEC country profile	<a href="https://www.meconcern.org/countries/yemen/">https://www.meconcern.org/countries/yemen/</a>	3 August 2022
RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index - 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2022	<a href="https://rsf.org/en/country/yemen">https://rsf.org/en/country/yemen</a>	18 May 2022
Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index - 180 countries	CPI 2021 Yemen	<a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/yemen">https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/yemen</a>	18 May 2022
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators (country profile) – covering 189 countries	HDI profile	<a href="https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/YEM">https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/YEM</a>	8 June 2022
US State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom country reports	IRFR 2021	<a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/yemen/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/yemen/</a>	6 June 2022
USCIRF 2022 country reports 15 CPC / 12 SWL, Yemen not included	USCIRF 2022	<a href="https://www.uscifr.gov/countries">https://www.uscifr.gov/countries</a>	18 May 2022
World Bank country overview - 178 countries	World Bank October 2022 update	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/yemen">https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/yemen</a>	20 December 2022
World Bank country profile data - 222 countries	World Bank profile 2020	<a href="https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd571bar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=YEM">https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd571bar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=YEM</a>	18 May 2022
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 - 147 countries	Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 MENA	<a href="https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/65cf93926fdb3ea23b72f277fc249a72-0500042021/related/mpo-mena.pdf">https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/65cf93926fdb3ea23b72f277fc249a72-0500042021/related/mpo-mena.pdf</a>	18 May 2022

## Recent history

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

As reported by Freedom House (Global Freedom Index 2022):

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

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

On top of these developments, the country has been weakened by the spread of the COVID-19 virus and 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 was no common policy concerning anti-COVID measures and restrictions, little communication between the South and North, and sometimes there were diverging policies even 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) and 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 2021).

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2021):

- "The government exercised limited legal or administrative control in much of the country's territory throughout the year, which constrained its ability to enforce laws or address abuses of religious liberty committed by government or non-state actors in areas not under its control."
- "During the year [2021], the Houthis continued to control approximately one-third of the country's territory, which contained 70 to 80 percent of the population. According to nongovernmental organization (NGO) and UN sources, the group imposed a strict doctrinal regimen that discriminated against individuals who did not follow those practices."

Advocacy organization Middle East Concern reported (MEC Yemen):

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

Some Yemeni Christians have been accused of blasphemy and arrested. Also in the WWL 2023 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. Due to the civil war, most expatriates, including Christians, have left Yemen.

The legal landscaping facing women and girls is additionally restrictive. Female representation in parliament is currently nonexistent, with no seats being held by women as of 2021, down from 0.3% of seats in 2020 ([Index Mundi, accessed 10 August 2022](#)). Yemen acceded to the CEDAW Convention in 1984 and unlike other countries following Sharia law, made no reservations to any articles concerning gender equality. However, the CEDAW committee has consistently challenged Yemen's lack of compliance with its provisions, particularly in relation to marriage ([CEDAW, 2021](#)). While Article 23 of the 1992 Personal Status code indicates that a bride must give consent to marry, she is not allowed to sign her own wedding contract. Silence is deemed sufficient consent, making women and girls vulnerable to forced marriages. Yemen's Personal Status Code also fails to specify a minimum age of marriage; An estimated 32% of girls

re the age of 18 ([Girls Not Brides/Yemen, 2022](#)). 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 pre-civil war 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 dissenters 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. If their new faith is discovered, converts may face the death penalty, although this is generally not implemented by the government but rather by radical Muslims, with the government turning a blind eye. Though focusing most of their attention on political events, government officials continue to intimidate Christians even amid the chaotic war situation. Oppression has mostly been felt coming from Islamic militants who have considerable freedom to operate.

Middle East Concern reported (MEC Yemen):

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

## Economic landscape

According to UNDP's Human Development Report (HDI profile):

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

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

According to the World Bank profile:

- **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 overview (October 2022 update) and [April 2022 Economic update](#):

- The Yemeni economy is listed in the category 'low income'
- "Socio-economic conditions are deteriorating rapidly, affected by declining remittances, trade disruptions, severe fuel supply shortages, and reduced humanitarian operations. Growing violence and fragmented macroeconomic policies have added additional strain to already fragile economic conditions. An unprecedented humanitarian crisis persists, aggravated by COVID-19, leaving many Yemenis dependent on relief and remittances."
- Fighting "has devastated its economy - leading to serious food insecurity - and destroyed critical infrastructure. The UN has estimated that 24.3 million people in 2021 were 'at risk' of hunger and disease, of whom roughly 14.4 million were in acute need of assistance."

- ["Available information suggests that the Yemeni economy continued to weaken in 2021, affected by macroeconomic instability, escalating hostilities, and heavy rains and flooding, which damaged shelters and infrastructure, destroyed livelihoods, and facilitated the spread of diseases."](#)
- "Inflation is anticipated to continue accelerating rapidly in 2021, to an estimated 45% compared to 35 % in 2020."
- "Prospects for economic improvements in 2022 and beyond depend on rapid improvements in the political and security situation and ultimately on whether a cessation of hostilities and political reconciliation will allow for rebuilding Yemen's economy and social fabric."

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. According to the [OCHA Yemen Situation Report](#) (Reliefweb, 6 August 2021):

- "The depreciation of the Yemeni Rial is a major driver of food insecurity in import-dependent Yemen, where millions of people cannot afford enough food to get them through the day. Food prices have risen by at least one-third in six of Yemen's 22 governorates in the first five months of [2021], and there is a double-digit rise of 10 per cent or more in food prices in 15 out of 22 governorates. Yemen has not experienced such a rapid increase in food prices since late 2018, when the country was last on the brink of famine, with foreign currency injections at the time helping to avert famine by stabilizing the economy."

According to the [UN World Food Programme](#) (WFP, last accessed 9 June 2022):

"Even before fighting broke out in early 2015, Yemen was one of the poorest countries in the Arab world. (...) Seven years of conflict have left thousands of civilians dead and 4.2 million people displaced. Its impact on the country's infrastructure has been devastating, with major overland routes and airports severely damaged. Despite ongoing humanitarian assistance, 17.4 million Yemenis are food insecure. The number of food insecure people is projected to go up to 19 million by December 2022. 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 1.3 million pregnant/breastfeeding women and 2.2 million children under 5 requiring treatment for acute malnutrition. Of these children, 538.483 are at risk of dying without treatment. ... Despite access and security challenges, WFP and its partners manage to deliver assistance to the vast majority of vulnerable people in the country."

### **Gender issues**

Women are typically the most economically vulnerable in Yemen due to low education and employment rates, and poor financial inclusion ([Georgetown, 2021/22](#)). 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 who are often not Christian. 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 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:** 39.2% of total population (2022)
- **Literacy rate:** 70.1% for the total population. For women the literacy rate is 55%, for men 85.1% (2015, more recent data is not available).

According to UNDP's HDI profile:

- **Median age:** 20.2 years (According to [Datareportal](#), February 2022: 20.7 years);
- **Education:** Mean years of schooling: 3.2 (2019). The mean years of schooling for girls is 2.9, while for boys this is 5.1 (2019). (Whilst the gender gap in education rates has been closely narrowing, the conflict has disrupted education severely, with over 2 million children out of school ([UNICEF, "Education disrupted", 2021](#)).
- **Youth not in school or employment (% ages 15-24):** 44.8
- **IDPs/Refugees:** 4 million Yemenis have been forced to flee their homes because of the crisis – 79% of them are women and children ([UNHCR](#), last accessed 13 June 2022). In addition, there are almost 69,000 refugees from Somalia and roughly 18,000 from Ethiopia in Yemen (2022).
- **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

Further information:

- **Unemployment rate:** 13.5% according to the [International Labour Organisation](#) (2014 figure, last accessed 13 June 2022)
- **Youth unemployment:** 25.4%, according to [Global Economy](#), last accessed 13 June 2022)
- **Malnutrition:** Yemen ranks second on the [Global Hunger Index 2021](#) with a score of 45.1 (last accessed 13 June 2022)
- **Child malnutrition, stunting (moderate or severe) (% under age 5):** 46.4%

Yemen topped the FFP Fragile States Index 2021 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 conserva-



tive, 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 added another layer of disaster to a country which 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 economy. 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). Despite this warning, in 2022 the UN's World Food Program [announced further drastic cuts](#) to food aid in Yemen due to a lack of funding. As a result, millions of Yemenis already suffering from war will not be able to get enough food (Al-Jazeera, 27 June 2022).

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.

### **Gender issues**

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 ([UNICEF, 2020](#)). 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 2022):

- **Internet usage:** 26.6% penetration – survey date: January 2022
- **Facebook usage:** 11.5 % penetration – survey date: January 2022. According to Napoleon Cat ([May 2022](#)): 84.5% of Facebook users were male.

According to the World Bank profile:

- Mobile phone subscriptions: 51 per 100 people

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

- "[M]obile towers are often deliberately targeted; maintenance is dangerous to staff; aid organizations rely on satellite and radio communications; scarcity of telecom equipment in rural areas; ownership of telecom services and the related revenues and taxes have become a political issue; Chinese company Huawei helping to rebuild some equipment (2020)".

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

According to Freedom House's Global Freedom Index 2022:

- "The state has historically controlled most terrestrial television and radio, though there have been several privately owned radio stations. Since the outbreak of the war, the belligerents have either taken over or enforced self-censorship at any surviving media outlets in the country. Houthi-backed authorities reportedly block certain news websites, online messaging and social media platforms, and satellite broadcasts."
- "The Houthis, the Saudi-led coalition, and Hadi government forces have harassed and detained journalists, and several new arrests were reported in 2021. In April 2020, the Houthi-controlled Specialized Criminal Court in Sanaa issued death sentences against four journalists accused of espionage; they remained in custody as of December 2021. All sides in the conflict have subjected journalists to violent attacks and enforced disappearances. Among other incidents during the year, STC forces raided the offices of the state news agency in Aden in June 2021."

The gender gap in mobile Internet usage in the South Asia region averages at 41% ([GSMA, "The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2022"](#)). This gap shows how restricted women's access is to both information and community networks. [Georgetown research](#) from 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 and the Houthi rebels are mostly Shiite.

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

Wherever the Saudi-led coalition forces have dominated or liberated areas, Christians were often targeted by violent Sunni groups. 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 eighth 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 remained elusive for a long time with the collapse of the anti-Houthi coalition in August 2019. A positive step towards an end to the conflict – although unsuccessful – was the signing of a peace agreement between the Southern Transitional Council (STC) and the UN-recognized government in November 2019. The first nationwide truce in six years between the two main warring parties - the Saudi-led coalition and the Houthi rebels - which came into effect on 1 April 2022 - gave new hopes for an end to the conflict, with more fuel flowing through Hudaydah ports, fewer civilian casualties and the first

commercial flight since 2016 from Sana'a airport in May 2022. However, the truce came to an end at the beginning of October 2022.

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

High levels of lawlessness increase the likelihood of oppression targeting minorities, including Christians. In its Yemen Country Profile for 2020, the Economist Intelligence Unit stressed the fact that even if a peace deal is agreed, "the ongoing presence of al-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. The areas controlled by Islamic militants continue to expand. As the Houthis occupy the most territory, their influence in the country has increased (including their influence on the education system). In addition, other groups related to Islamist movements aiming to take over political power have been building up strength.

## **External Links - Keys to understanding**

- Recent history: back-channel negotiations - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/december-alerts-and-november-trends-2022#yemen>
- Political and legal landscape: Index Mundi, accessed 10 August 2022 - <https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/yemen/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS>
- Political and legal landscape: CEDAW, 2021 - <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N08/416/48/PDF/N0841648.pdf?OpenElement>
- Political and legal landscape: Girls Not Brides/Yemen, 2022 - <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: UN September 2019 report - <https://yemen.un.org/sites/default/files/2019-09/Assessing%20the%20Impact%20of%20War%20on%20Development%20in%20Yemen.pdf>
- Economic landscape: April 2022 Economic update - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/yemen/publication/economic-update-april-2022>
- Economic landscape: "Available information suggests that the Yemeni economy continued to weaken in 2021, affected by macroeconomic instability, escalating hostilities, and heavy rains and flooding - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/yemen/publication/economic-update-april-2022>
- Economic landscape: OCHA Yemen Situation Report - <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-situation-report-5-aug->

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- Economic landscape: UN World Food Programme - <https://www.wfp.org/countries/yemen>
- Economic landscape: Georgetown, 2021/22 - <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/WPS-Index-2021.pdf>
- Economic landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/SD.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: Datareportal - <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-yemen>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNICEF, "Education disrupted", 2021 - <https://www.unicef.org/yemen/reports/education-disrupted>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR - <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/yemen/>
- Social and cultural landscape: International Labour Organisation - <https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/unemployment-and-labour-underutilization/>
- Social and cultural landscape: Global Economy - [https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Yemen/youth\\_unemployment/](https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Yemen/youth_unemployment/)
- Social and cultural landscape: Global Hunger Index 2021 - <https://www.globalhungerindex.org/pdf/en/2021.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: United Nations Press Release - <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sgsm20432.doc.htm>
- Social and cultural landscape: announced further drastic cuts - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/6/27/millions-of-yemenis-to-go-hungry-as-un-forced-to-slash-food-aid>
- 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: UNICEF, 2020 - <https://www.unicefusa.org/stories/helping-girls-escape-early-marriage-yemen/37409>
- 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: May 2022 - <https://napoleoncat.com/stats/facebook-users-in-yemen/2022/05/>
- Technological landscape: GSMA, "The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2022" - [https://www.gsma.com/r/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/The-Mobile-Gender-Gap-Report-2022.pdf?utm\\_source=website&utm\\_medium=download-button&utm\\_campaign=gender-gap-2022](https://www.gsma.com/r/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/The-Mobile-Gender-Gap-Report-2022.pdf?utm_source=website&utm_medium=download-button&utm_campaign=gender-gap-2022)
- 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](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>
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## WWL 2023: Church information / Yemen

### Christian origins

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

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

According to an article published by Stratfor in April 2016, [over 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.

### Church spectrum today

Before the current civil war in Yemen began in 2015, there were thousands of expatriates, often working for development agencies, who were allowed to worship in registered churches in Aden and Sana'a. Most of these Christians have been forced to leave the country due to the insecurity caused by civil war. Some churches have since been ransacked.

It is mostly indigenous Christians - converts - who are now left in the country. However, there are currently also large numbers of Ethiopian and Eritrean Christian refugees residing in Yemen.

## 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, and not just ostracized or expelled by their families, clans and tribes. Also, all factions involved in the civil war monitor the population under their control for signs of conversion to Christianity.

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

Converts from Islam to Christianity have indicated that there is more pressure in the Shiite Houthi-controlled areas in the North than in areas under the control of the Sunni Hadi government. The Houthi-controlled areas - which comprise more than one-third of Yemen's territory - 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, which now cover less than a quarter of the population. However, due to the lack of state power there is also less policing in the South.

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

## Christian communities and how they are affected

### Communities of expatriate Christians

Before civil war erupted in 2015, most Christians in Yemen were expatriate or migrant workers (from North Africa, the West, South and East Asia and Arab countries) and refugees (mainly Ethiopian). The majority were Roman Catholics or Anglicans (with some Orthodox in the case of Ethiopian refugees). Virtually all Western expatriates have left the country for security reasons as a result of the devastating war. Some Christian migrants, particularly from Africa and also from Asia, remain in the country. The US Department of State (IRFR 2021) mentions that "according to the UN Group of Experts, many Ethiopian and Eritrean Christian economic migrants transit the country on their way to find work in Saudi Arabia, causing the total number of Christians in the country at any given time to fluctuate." In what is most likely a combination of racial discrimination and religious freedom violations, migrant Christians face harassment and discrimination from society at a community and national level, and even outright violence from radical Islamic movements. However, since their numbers have significantly decreased 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.

## External Links - Church information

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

# WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Yemen

## Reporting period

01 October 2021 - 30 September 2022

## Position on the World Watch List

Yemen: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	89	3
WWL 2022	88	5
WWL 2021	87	7
WWL 2020	85	8
WWL 2019	86	8

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

Yemen's score increased by one point compared to WWL 2022. The main reason was a slightly higher number of reported violent incidents against Christians. There were more Christians being detained for a long time. Opposition and limitations were experienced by informal fellowships. Pressure on converts is at extreme levels in all spheres of life. Christians in Yemen have been faced with physical and mental abuse, sexual harassment and rape as well as forced marriages.

## Persecution engines

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Drivers of persecution

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

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

## Drivers of Clan oppression

- **Ethnic group leaders (Very strong), Islamic leaders (Very strong):** Tribal law and customs are anti-Christian and punishment for disobedience can be death or banishment. The same applies to any tribe member leaving Islam, since religious and ethnic identity are intertwined. Some tribal chiefs have their own fighting units.
- **Extended family (Very strong) and Ordinary citizens (Strong):** The same mechanisms as for *Islamic oppression* apply here: Community and family honor should be respected above anything else. There have been incidents where citizens forced their convert daughters into

marriage with Muslims. This often exposes the women to abuse and a lack of freedom to be a part of the general community. Also, there is a caste system in Yemen, in which those who have more tribal roots look down upon and marginalize those that have more ancestry from East Africa and have darker skin (such as the Muhameshen, also referred to as the Akhdam). If a member of this marginalized group is actually a Christian, then he or she faces ostracism and complete exclusion from their community. This entails exclusion from education, health care and other public services.

### Drivers of Islamic oppression

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

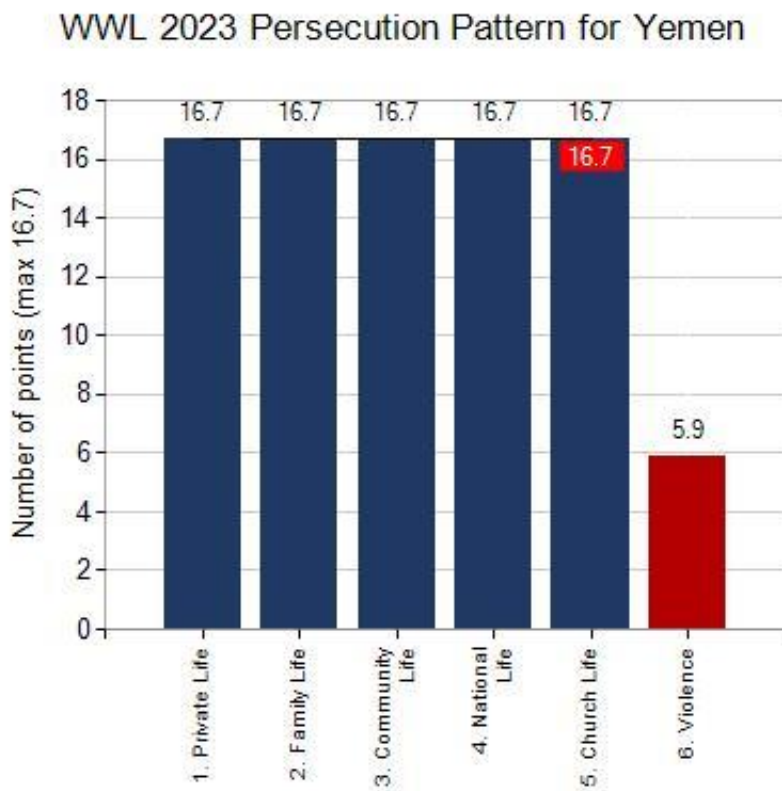
### Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Violent religious groups (Very strong) and Revolutionaries (Strong):** In the context of civil war, Houthi rebels, al-Qaeda and IS affiliates will do anything to increase their territorial power. In Houthi-controlled areas, harsh measures have been taken by the Houthi administration against any individual or association deemed to be a threat by the ruling authority. This has included arresting members of religious minority communities, including Christian converts and adherents of Bahai as well as certain Shia splinter groups, who they consider to be hostile to their ideology.
- **Government officials (Strong):** Yemeni authorities use strong force to maintain power. Although state institutions are weak, there have still been reports of state-perpetrated injustice against Christians. Also the state has allowed violence against Christians, which has led to a situation of impunity.

### Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

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

### The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2023 persecution pattern for Yemen shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Yemen continues to be at an extreme level (16.7 points. 0.1 point higher than in WWL 2022) and is did scored at the maximum level possible. The extreme pressure is explained by the war and pressure on the indigenous church which is mostly composed of converts from Islam to Christianity.
- Pressure in all *spheres of life* is at the maximum extreme level possible (16.7). This is typical for a situation in which there are mostly Christians with a Muslim background in a country with *Islamic oppression* as the main persecution engine, leaving no room for any open church activities or private worship.
- The level of violence against Christians saw an increase from 5.2 in WWL 2022 to 5.9 points in WWL 2023. The level of violence is very difficult to research due to a lack of access to accurate and verified information as a result of the war situation. It is likely that in reality the levels of violence are higher than scored in WWL analysis.

## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

*In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2023 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 and to prevent any hostile reactions which would possibly jeopardize the safety of other converts.

#### **Block 1 - additional information**

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

### Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

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

Converts from Islam cannot have their children registered as Christians.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Block 3 - additional information**

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

## Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

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

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

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

According to the Constitution, non-Muslims are officially prohibited from holding the office of president. However local Christians must anyway live their faith in secret and would not attempt to attain such a post. Promotion is very difficult for Christians 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 greatly disadvantage converts from Islam.

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

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

## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

The three official church buildings (all located in Aden) which served expatriate Christians or refugees (mainly Ethiopian), have been damaged as a result of the war (including targeted attacks) and are closed. Building churches (or other buildings) in Yemen requires permits by the official government. Since churches cannot obtain legal status, it is not possible to obtain permission to build a place of worship. At the moment this is mainly not possible due to the war situation. 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. It has become 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

*Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse).*

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 2023 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. In the WWL 2023 reporting period, multiple fellowships experienced opposition and limitations in gathering due (at least in part) to a crackdown on Christians, which included arrests. Houthis have also been vilifying Christian converts and actively stopping Christian activities. As a result, many converts want to leave areas that are under Houthi control. Dozens of converts are expected to have suffered physical violence, mental abuse or sexual harassment and rape, forced marriage or abduction while dozens of other Christians had to move to other places in the country - sometimes returning later - and still others reportedly left the country. The motivation for fleeing can vary from fear of assassination (for their faith) to war-related reasons and are often a combination. Most families are so angry and ashamed to discover a family member has left Islam that they are ready to kill, possibly via a radicalized relative or local militant group.

African migrants (including Christians) on their way to find work in one of the Gulf countries regularly find themselves in the crossfire of the warring factions. They are often detained, and sometimes killed or [forcibly deployed](#) as combatants by Yemeni warring factions. In addition, detained migrants have been tortured, "subjected to forced labor, sexual exploitation, forced to traffic drugs and other forms of abuse", according to [Human Rights Watch](#) (7 December 2022). More than 200 Christians, mostly foreign workers from Africa, were reportedly detained by Houthi security forces in 2022. Christians in Yemen are frequent targets for harassment and extortion and this has worsened in Houthi-controlled areas in particular. It is unclear to what extent faith played a role in this worsening situation, although sources working with international organizations in the area indicate that for the Houthi security forces "African" equals "Christian" and they have mounted a campaign against Christians, reasoning that they are likely to be foreign agents. Since details are difficult to confirm, these violations have not been included in the WWL 2023 scoring for Yemen.

## 5 Year trends

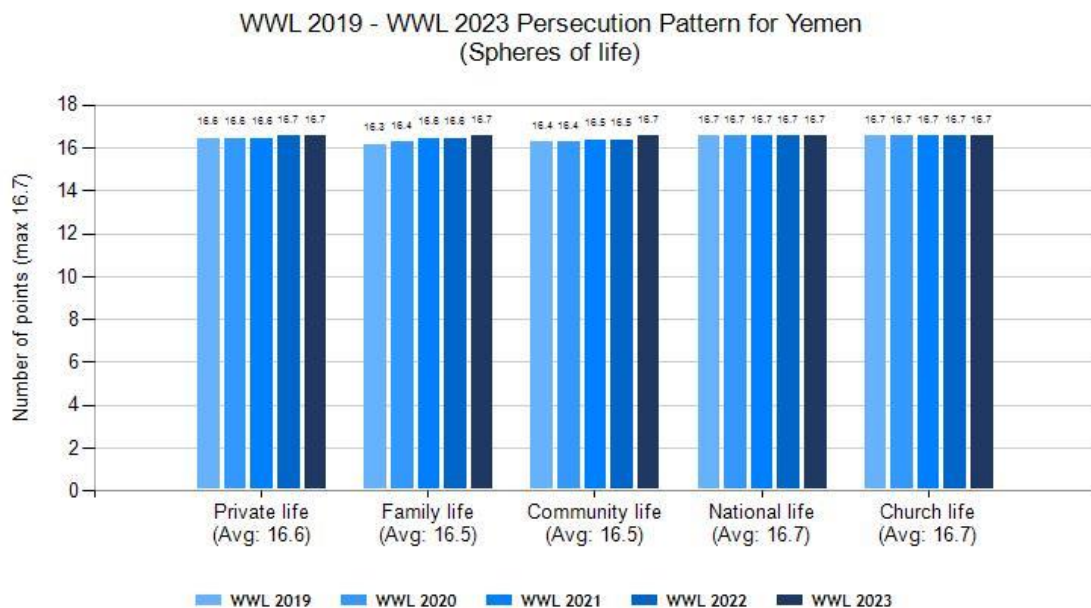
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Yemen: WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2023	16.7
2022	16.6
2021	16.6
2020	16.5
2019	16.5

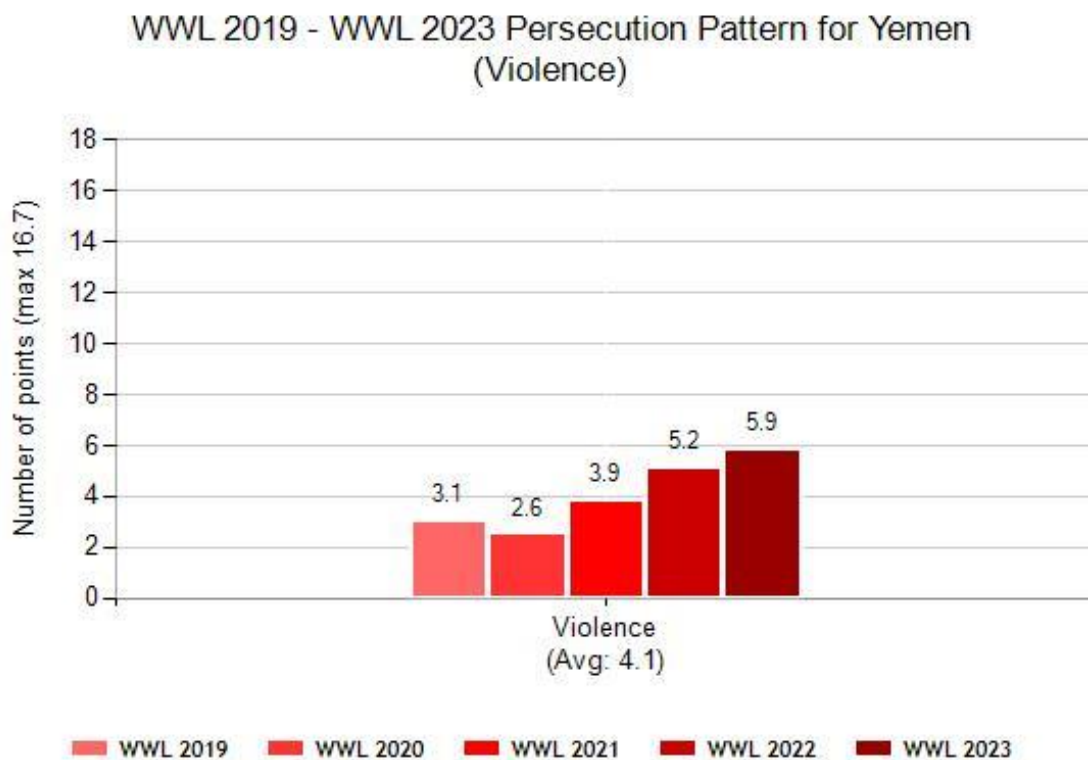
Average pressure has been constantly at an extremely high level over the past five WWL reporting periods, reaching the maximum score possible of 16.7 points in WWL 2023.

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



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

## 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



Over the past five WWL reporting periods, the violence score has risen (with interruptions) from 'low' to 'very high' in WWL 2023. The relatively lower scores for WWL 2019 and 2020 do not necessarily mean that the violence situation at that time was much better than it is now: In the chaos of civil war, it has to be remembered that many incidents go unreported.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

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

Yemen is a strongly male-controlled 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 2021 country chapter). Conversion from Islam to Christianity is forbidden both in Islam and in Yemeni law. Within this patriarchal, Islamic context, a female converting to Christianity is considered a shameful act for the whole family. According to a country expert: “Under Arab tribal law, women who convert to Christianity from Islam have dishonored their families, clans and tribes and are subject to the harshest penalties, including honor killings.”

Women and girls have more limited access than men to information about the Christian faith and participation in 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. A country expert explains: “The family would try to isolate such individuals to prevent the spread of corruptive influence.” The family control of girls is the cultural norm in much of the country, although much less so in major governorates such as Sana'a and Aden.

Christian women and girls also risk being sexually abused at the hands of militias due to the concept of “*anfāl*,” which permits non-Muslims in some circumstances to be treated as slaves as part of the spoils of war ([Quran, Chapter 8](#)). According to local experts these groups are running prostitution rings in the country; there are some reports that Christian migrants in Yemen, as well as Yemeni female Muslim converts to Christianity risk being exploited. There is no clear data yet indicating to 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	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; 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 heavy restrictions on religious freedom. The most common pressure for Yemeni male converts comes from family and community. Pressure varies in intensity according to the family hierarchy; it is most keenly felt by women and girls, followed by younger men, followed by older men (reflecting cultural levels of status and freedom).

All males, including Christians, can be forced to join militias, if they are of military age. [Young boys](#) are also being recruited into militias (Deutsche Welle, 7 October 2021). 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 pressure in the private sphere, men are more likely to experience challenges in the public sphere and Yemen's collectivist culture. (However, some male converts married to Muslim women do report being perceived as unclean by their wives and are hence shunned from physical contact). Pastors and church leaders are also in danger of imprisonment if discovered. Within detention facilities, Christian detainees have reportedly experienced physical and mental torture.

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

## Persecution of other religious minorities

Other religious minorities facing rights violations in Yemen are Bahai and Jews. 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. Bahai believers in Yemen are occasionally imprisoned, mistreated and tortured, mostly by Houthi authorities. They also face pressure to recant their faith. In addition, they experience oppression and mistrust because their headquarters is in Haifa, which makes them be regarded by some as agents of Israel.

According to the United States Department (IRFR 2021):

- "The UN Group of Experts reported that in March, Houthi leader Abdulmalik al-Houthi incited violence and discrimination against Baha'is, Jews, and other religious minorities by saying these groups "don't want to coexist... They want to take away the sovereignty of Islam." Additionally, Houthi imams and Islamic scholars made antisemitic remarks throughout the year, and a popular Houthi chant was 'Death to Israel'."
- "In February [2021], the Baha'i Faith International Community released a statement that said the Houthis continued to "intimidate and endanger the lives of Baha'is" and used baseless charges to seize their property. The statement indicated there were 19 Baha'is who continued to face the dilemma of either appearing in Houthi 'court' to face false

charges and unjust imprisonment or risk the Houthis branding them as 'fugitives'. The September UN Group of Experts report stated the Houthis had seized and frozen the assets of 70 Baha'i Faith community members in the July 2020 to June 2021 period."

- "On October 31, 2021, a rocket attack took place on the Sunni-run al Hajouri mosque and center in the Juba district of Ma'rib Governorate, killing and injuring dozens. No party claimed responsibility, but according to the Yemeni government and Human Rights Watch, the Houthis were behind the attack. Several months earlier, on June 10, a ballistic missile hit a mosque in central Ma'rib city. Sources also attribute this attack to the Houthis."
- "Levi Salem Musa Marhabi, a Jew who has been detained since 2016 for allegedly helping to remove an ancient Torah scroll from the country, is reportedly still being held. In addition, the Houthis forced "three Jewish families out of the country during the year, leaving an estimated four to six Jews in the country, including Marhabi".

Most of the tiny Jewish community 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). This is a troubling fact since the longer the Houthis are able to influence the minds of children, the more hostile ideology is likely to take root and come to fruition as the younger generation grows up.

## Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

### Clan oppression

Nationwide, sectarian and tribal divisions are deepening which are an important barrier to peace and stability. Tribal groups were forced to take sides when al-Qaeda and IS started fighting each other in 2019, naturally presenting a risk to Christians in the country. This has created chaos and division amongst the tribal groups in the country. If the country continues to disintegrate, people are likely to rally round their own tribe even more, which could increase the levels of pressure on converts to Christianity. An assessment by think tank Garda World (Crisis24 country report) confirms AQAP's consolidation of power particularly in South Yemen through collaboration with local Sunni tribes "despite effective operations against them by UAE-backed militias".

### Islamic oppression

Along with the Zaydi Shiite Houthi movement, violent Sunni groups such as al-Qaeda and IS are expected to remain a serious threat in the country for a long time to come due to weak central security. In addition, they are likely to benefit from the end of the ceasefire in October 2022. The situation for Christians is likely to become worse because these developments allow for a stronger polarization of society and spread of radical views - both of which particularly disadvantage converts from Islam. Since the majority of the Christian community are converts

from Islam, they will be facing even more danger in the future.

### **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 2021 country file) expects the conflict "to continue, with varying degrees of intensity, in 2023-27. Fighting between forces aligned to the Saudi-backed internationally-recognized government in the south, and the Iran-backed Houthi rebels in the north, is expected to intensify by early 2023 following the collapse of a temporary ceasefire agreement in October 2022. ... High inflation will persist during the forecast period, constraining growth and worsening already dire humanitarian conditions."

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 level of persecution from this Persecution engine increases with the level of anarchy. The more the lack of rule of law provides impunity to those committing crimes against Christians, the more the latter will be vulnerable to the effect of this persecution engine. Pressure has already reached a dramatically 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 assessment by think tank Garda World (Crisis 24 country report), crime - especially looting - 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

- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: forcibly deployed - [https://www.arabnews.jp/en/middle-east/article\\_66748/](https://www.arabnews.jp/en/middle-east/article_66748/)
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: Human Rights Watch - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/07/warring-parties-yemen-silent-amid-reports-migrant-abuse>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Quran, Chapter 8 - <https://www.quraneasyguide.com/spoils-war/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: Young boys - <https://www.dw.com/en/underage-martyrs-recruiting-child-soldiers-in-yemen/a-58203651>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Moammer al-Iryani - <https://www.timesofisrael.com/yemeni-minister-says-fate-of-countrys-remaining-jews-unknown/>

## Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the new Research & Reports page of the website od.org. As in earlier years, they are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) using the following links:

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