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World Watch Research

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# Yemen: Persecution Dynamics

December 2024



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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## World Watch List 2025 – Top 50

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	98	96	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.7	11.1	94	93	92	91	92
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	89	89	88	87
4	Libya	16.0	16.2	15.9	16.2	16.4	10.6	91	91	88	91	92
5	Sudan	14.1	14.2	15.5	14.9	15.3	16.1	90	87	83	79	79
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.9	12.2	89	89	89	88	88
7	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.6	14.9	14.5	16.7	88	88	88	87	85
8	Pakistan	13.6	13.9	15.0	15.0	12.9	16.7	87	87	86	87	88
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.9	16.5	10.9	86	86	86	85	86
10	Afghanistan	15.6	15.9	15.9	16.4	16.7	5.0	85	84	84	98	94
11	India	12.2	12.9	13.3	14.9	13.9	16.5	84	83	82	82	83
12	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.8	16.6	3.3	81	81	80	81	78
13	Myanmar	12.6	11.1	13.5	14.1	12.9	16.5	81	79	80	79	74
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	13.0	15.2	15.6	80	79	76	70	67
15	China	13.2	10.1	12.8	14.6	16.1	11.1	78	78	77	76	74
16	Maldives	15.6	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.7	78	78	77	77	77
17	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.3	14.8	13.9	6.1	78	79	76	78	82
18	Syria	13.5	14.4	13.9	14.4	14.3	7.0	78	81	80	78	81
19	Algeria	14.7	14.3	11.5	14.7	16.0	6.3	77	79	73	71	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	14.0	15.6	76	75	71	68	67
21	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.6	12.9	14.3	8.3	74	71	69	69	67
22	Laos	11.8	10.7	13.5	14.1	13.9	9.8	74	75	68	69	71
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	2.8	74	72	72	70	71
24	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.7	11.3	10.4	16.1	74	71	69	68	67
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.5	12.4	15.5	4.4	73	71	71	71	71
26	Cuba	13.2	8.5	13.9	13.3	15.1	9.1	73	73	70	66	62
27	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	14.0	15.6	72	70	70	68	66
28	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	14.6	15.7	72	70	70	68	62

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
29	Turkmenistan	14.3	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.3	1.5	71	70	70	69	70
30	Nicaragua	12.4	7.6	13.7	13.3	14.1	9.6	71	70	65	56	51
31	Mexico	11.7	9.0	12.5	11.8	11.0	14.6	71	68	67	65	64
32	Oman	14.5	14.1	10.9	13.8	14.1	3.0	70	69	65	66	63
33	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	15.6	70	69	66	66	65
34	Tunisia	12.4	13.2	10.1	12.6	13.8	8.1	70	69	67	66	67
35	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	10.8	14.5	16.1	70	67	67	66	64
36	Bhutan	13.2	13.2	12.3	14.1	14.2	2.2	69	68	66	67	64
37	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.9	68	68	68	65	63
38	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.6	12.2	12.8	14.2	4.3	68	65	65	64	64
39	Tajikistan	14.1	12.7	12.7	13.2	13.7	1.9	68	66	66	65	66
40	Egypt	12.7	13.7	12.1	12.4	10.9	6.3	68	68	68	71	75
41	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.7	67	67	68	74	67
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	2.6	67	66	66	63	62
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.4	13.1	16.1	67	66	65	65	64
44	Vietnam	10.8	9.5	12.2	14.1	14.1	5.9	67	68	70	71	72
45	Turkey	13.0	11.7	11.7	13.2	11.5	5.4	67	64	66	65	69
46	Colombia	11.0	7.9	12.7	11.5	10.5	12.6	66	68	71	68	67
47	Kyrgyzstan	13.5	10.3	11.7	11.4	12.4	6.9	66	59	59	58	58
48	Brunei	14.8	14.8	10.8	10.8	14.0	0.6	66	66	65	64	64
49	Chad	11.0	8.2	10.2	9.9	10.3	15.9	65	61	58	55	53
50	Jordan	12.9	14.3	10.4	12.2	12.8	2.4	65	65	65	66	64

## World Watch List 2025 – Ranks 51-78

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
51	Malaysia	12.8	13.7	11.7	12.4	11.2	3.0	65	64	66	63	63
52	Azerbaijan	13.3	10.2	9.6	12.2	13.7	5.6	65	60	59	60	56
53	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.9	64	63	64	63	62
54	Nepal	12.2	10.6	9.5	12.6	12.3	5.9	63	62	61	64	66
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.4	63	62	63	61	58
56	Russian Federation	12.7	7.9	10.7	13.1	14.1	4.4	63	58	57	56	57
57	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.1	1.7	61	61	60	59	56
58	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	61	64	64	63
59	Indonesia	10.9	11.9	10.9	11.6	10.2	5.7	61	66	68	68	63
60	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.6	61	61	62	62	62
61	Sri Lanka	12.7	8.7	11.5	11.5	8.5	7.6	60	60	57	63	62
62	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	10.3	10.7	12.1	0.2	60	60	60	59	58
63	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	14.6	59	57	55	52	48
64	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	12.1	9.4	58	58	57	50	42
65	Honduras	7.9	4.7	11.7	7.3	9.9	13.1	55	55	53	48	46
66	Togo	9.2	6.7	10.4	7.1	11.5	9.3	54	52	49	44	43
67	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	0.6	54	55	55	57	56
68	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	8.9	54	52	48	43	47
69	Ukraine	6.8	5.0	7.8	12.5	13.5	7.2	53	44	37	37	34
70	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	8.3	53	52	52	51	46
71	Venezuela	6.3	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	9.6	52	53	56	51	39
72	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	16.1	52	52	51	48	47
73	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	9.6	51	44	44	42	42
74	Lebanon	11.5	10.1	7.0	6.2	6.7	7.2	49	48	40	35	34
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	4.4	48	47	44	44	43
76	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	8.1	15.6	47	46	46	43	43

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
77	Belarus	9.9	3.7	5.0	10.8	14.1	3.1	47	46	43	33	30
78	Philippines	9.2	6.6	6.6	6.1	5.7	8.5	43	40	32	34	26

## Copyright, sources and definitions

World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- [Background country information](#) (published annually in summer)
- Persecution dynamics (published annually in January).

These documents are the property of World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. They include data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and 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 end of each document under the heading “External links”. These documents may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © Open Doors International.

The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.

The latest update of WWL Methodology can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>.

## Reporting period

The WWL 2025 reporting period was 1 October 2023 - 30 September 2024.

## Brief country details

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

Yemen: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
35,220,000	a small number	OD estimate

## Map of country



## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

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

## Brief description of the persecution situation

Informal churches in the country have faced intensifying persecution over the last decades; both Yemenis and international partners have been assassinated for sharing their Christian faith. The indigenous Church in Yemen is composed mostly of Christians with a Muslim background and their children who need to live their faith in secret. They face violations of religious freedom from their family and the authorities (both from the official authorities and from Houthi rebels acting as local authorities in certain areas) as well as from radical Islamic groups. Action against known converts includes more than just detention and interrogation; radical Muslims threaten apostates with death if they do not re-convert. There are also reports of compulsory Islamic teaching within educational institutions and the imposition of Islamic cultural norms and dress codes in wider society.

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. Converts may also face loss of inheritance, enforced isolation and defamation. The civil war exacerbates their already difficult situation. Christians are suffering from the general humanitarian crisis and widespread poverty in the country, but Yemeni Christians are additionally vulnerable since emergency relief is mostly distributed through local Muslim groups and mosques, which are allegedly discriminating against all who are not considered to be devout Muslims. The dire conditions force Christians into a state of dependency, where they must avoid conflict and carefully maintain fragile relationships with all people in the community, as their survival often hinges on the goodwill of others. As such, openly expressing their faith is seen as a serious risk, further discouraging them from showing their beliefs.

## 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

Due to security concerns, no detailed reports can be published. In the WWL 2025 reporting period:

- At least one Christian was killed for faith-related reasons.
- Informal fellowships were forced to meet in secret and many had to stop meeting for extensive times due to a crackdown on Christians.
- Various Christians were (or continued to be) detained for faith-related reasons. According to in-country sources, both religious and non-religious factors (i.e., bogus accusations) were 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, forced divorce and loss of inheritance.

## Specific examples of positive developments

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

## Christian communities and how they are affected

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

**Historical Christian communities:** Indigenous historical Christian communities are not present in Yemen.

**Converts to Christianity:** The indigenous Church in Yemen is composed mostly of Christians with a Muslim background. 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.

## Areas where Christians face most difficulties

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

Converts from Islam to Christianity have indicated that there is more pressure in the Shiite Houthi-controlled areas in the North than in areas under the control of the Sunni Hadi government. The Houthi-controlled areas - which comprise more than one-third of Yemen's territory and in which 80% of Yemen's population lives - are heavily policed: Any dissenting opinion is rigorously repressed and is likely to lead to imprisonment, physical abuse and possibly worse. There is a lot of spying in these areas and an atmosphere of fear. Due to the poverty and severe scarcity of resources in the country, the population has become increasingly dependent on the local authorities which has made it important to maintain a good relationship with them. This is done, among other ways, by providing them with information, for example by spying on neighbors. As a result, social control has increased enormously. Christian converts are hindered from meeting for fellowship because of the growing fear that neighbors will report them to the local authorities. Also the possession of Christian materials is particularly dangerous in the Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen. The Houthi's internal security forces operate an intelligence unit that roots out "apostates" (as Christian converts are categorized).

The officially recognized state administration has little grip on the areas under its control, which now cover less than a quarter of the population. In the South, weaker state authority has led to reduced policing, but rural areas remain especially dangerous for Christians due to a strong al-Qaeda presence. 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 reported 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.

## Position on the World Watch List

Yemen: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2025	94	3
WWL 2024	89	5
WWL 2023	89	3
WWL 2022	88	5
WWL 2021	87	7

Yemen's score increased by five points from 89 points in WWL 2024 to an unprecedented 94 points in WWL 2025. As in the last three WWL reporting periods, the pressure on Christians has been at the maximum of 16.7 points in all spheres of life. The significant rise in overall score was due to the jump in the violence score from 5.9 points in WWL 2024 to 10.6 points. The growing power of the Houthis, particularly after 7 October 2023, has made it impossible for many Christian informal fellowships to continue meeting. Additionally, a Christian convert was killed for his faith. The indigenous Church consists mostly of Christians with a Muslim background and need to live their faith in secret. Christians in Yemen have been faced with physical and mental abuse, sexual harassment and rape as well as forced marriages. They face violations of religious freedom from their family and the authorities (both from the official authorities and from Houthi rebels acting as local authorities) as well as from radical Islamic groups.

## Persecution engines

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

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

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

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

**Islamic oppression (Very strong)**

The Constitution declares that Islam is the state religion and Sharia is the source of all legislation. Proselytization by faiths other than Islam is prohibited and Muslims are forbidden to convert to any other religion. Yemenis who leave Islam may face the death penalty. The ongoing conflict, political instability and weak application of the rule of law in many parts of the country, means that pressure faced by Christians and Christian converts in Yemen comes principally from non-state actors - including family or tribal sources but also radical Islamic groups. In such cases, the application of Islamic values is a principal motivation: Islam is a key part of the identity of Yemeni tribes, and militant groups such as the Houthis, 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 had 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 did not experience as many atrocities at the hands of the dictatorship as other countries, strong force was used both publicly and privately to maintain power. Within the context of the current 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. Members of religious minority communities, including Christian converts, are also deemed to be a threat. 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. The Houthis follow Zaidi Shia Islam, a distinct branch of Shia Islam primarily practiced in northern Yemen, where the movement originated. While they share some theological roots with Twelver Shia Islam, found in Iran and other parts of the Middle East, the Zaidis have different views, particularly on the role of the imam. Over time, the Houthis have blended Zaidi beliefs with anti-Western and anti-Sunni sentiments, using their interpretation of Islam to justify their actions, including the persecution of religious minorities such as Christians in areas under their control.

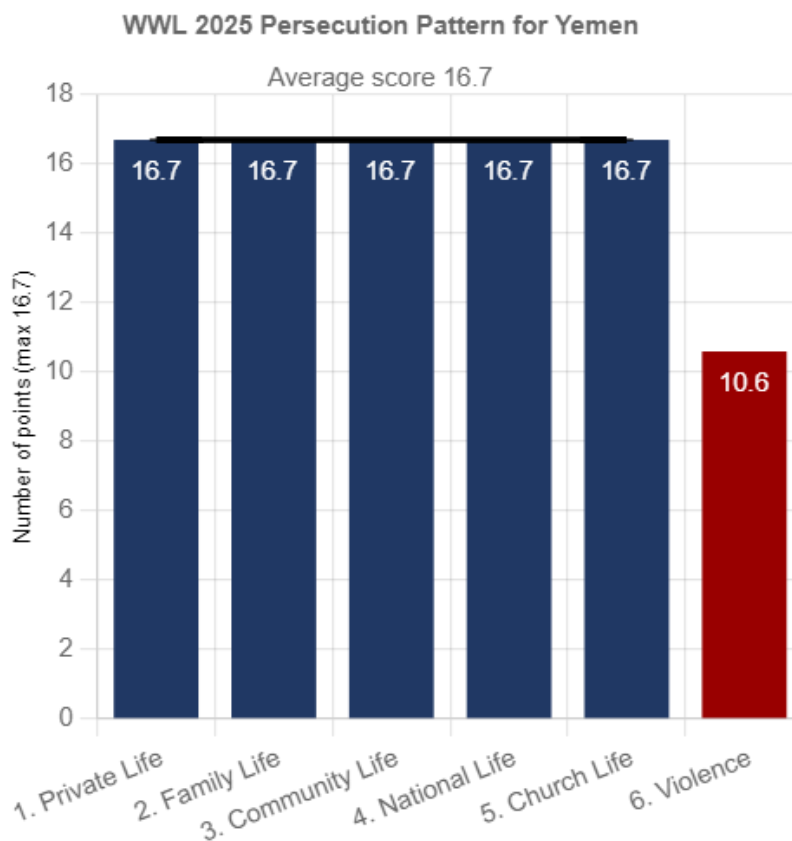
### Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

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

## The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2025 persecution pattern for Yemen above shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Yemen continues to be at the maximum level possible (16.7 points). The extreme level of pressure is explained by the context of war and the fact that the pressure is targeting converts from Islam to Christianity (see next point).
- 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 increased considerably from 5.9 to 10.6 points, especially due to dozens of informal fellowships no longer being able to meet and the murder of a convert. 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 2025 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://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>.*

### Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

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

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

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

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

***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 up 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)**

Christianity is not recognized by any of the powers that control Yemen. Children of Christians from a Muslim background are automatically registered as Muslims, determining their lives from birth to death.

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Block 2 - additional information**

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

### **Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### ***Block 3 - additional information***

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

### **Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Today, the biggest problem in terms of justice in Yemen is not only the unequal treatment in court, but also the near collapse of the justice system itself, making it difficult for Christians to even get a trial when accused. In areas controlled by the Houthis, AQAP and IS, the testimony of a Christians is worth less than that of a Muslim. Local courts, influenced by clan leaders or extremist groups, are inherently hostile towards Christians. In the entire country, converts to Islam risk imprisonment or the death penalty if their faith becomes known.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Although Yemeni and expatriate Christians may be found working in a range of humanitarian, education, development and other charity-run projects, this cannot ordinarily be done openly with a Christian 'label' as it would most probably be viewed as attempted proselytism. If churches set up non-profit organizations and charitable work, they risk being attacked, as happened in 2016 in Aden to a care-home for the elderly.

## Violence

*Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:*

**1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced.**

*Possible reasons for this may be:*

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

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

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

**3. The use of symbolic numbers:**

*In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10\*, 100\* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10\* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100\* could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1,000\* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000\*, 100,000\* and 1,000,000\*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.*

**4. The symbol “x” in the table:**

*This denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security concerns.*

**5. Disclaimer:**

*The civil war in Yemen causes violent incidents targeting Christians to be highly underreported and difficult to obtain. The current levels of fighting in the country (and the general suspicion of people gathering information) have seriously affected the collection and verification of data. In addition, it is important to mention that due to serious security risks, especially for the Christians involved, researchers only have contact with a small part of the Christian Church, which necessarily results in an incomplete picture. Also, many Christians from a Muslim background fear being exposed and tend not to report incidents.*

Yemen: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2025	WWL 2024
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	x	x
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	x	x
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	x	x
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	x	x
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	x	x
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	x	x
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	x	x
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	x	x

Yemen: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2025	WWL 2024
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	x	x
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	x	x
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	x	x
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	x	x

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. In the interests of security, no specific details can be published except for the following general points:

- Several Christians were reported to have been detained during the WWL 2025 reporting period. According to in-country sources, both religious and non-religious factors (i.e., bogus accusations) were 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 2025 reporting period, dozens of informal fellowships had to stop meeting altogether due to the threatening security situation after the Houthis power increased significantly.
- Houthis have also been vilifying Christian converts and actively stopping Christian activities. As a result, many converts seek to leave areas that are under Houthi control.
- Dozens of converts faced physical violence, mental abuse or sexual harassment and rape, forced marriage or abduction while dozens of other Christians had to move to other places in the country - sometimes returning later - and still others reportedly left the country. The motivation for fleeing can vary from fear of assassination (for their faith) to war-related reasons and are often a combination. Most families are so angry and ashamed to discover a family member has left Islam that they are ready to kill, possibly via a radicalized relative or local militant group. In WWL 2025, one convert was killed by family members because of his Christian faith.
- African migrants (including Christians) in transit in Yemen and hoping to find work in one of the Gulf countries, regularly find themselves in the crossfire of the warring factions. They are often detained, and sometimes killed or [forcibly deployed](#) as combatants by Yemeni warring factions (Arab News, 1 March 2022). 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](#) (HRW, 7 December 2022) and [Yemeni activists](#) (Asharq Al-Awsat, 1 September 2023).

Migrants from Africa - including Christians, many of them Ethiopians - are reportedly seen as a source of income and placed into camps where, apart from the human rights violations described above, they risk forced conversion to Islam and forced marriage as well as financial extortion of their families. Sources working with international organizations in the area indicate that the Africans are being targeted by the Houthis based on both their skin color and the perception that they are spreading Christianity. There is an alleged association between the terms "African" and "Christian" for the Houthi forces, leading to a campaign against Christians with the assumption that they may be foreign agents. Since details are difficult to confirm, these violations have not been included in the WWL 2025 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.

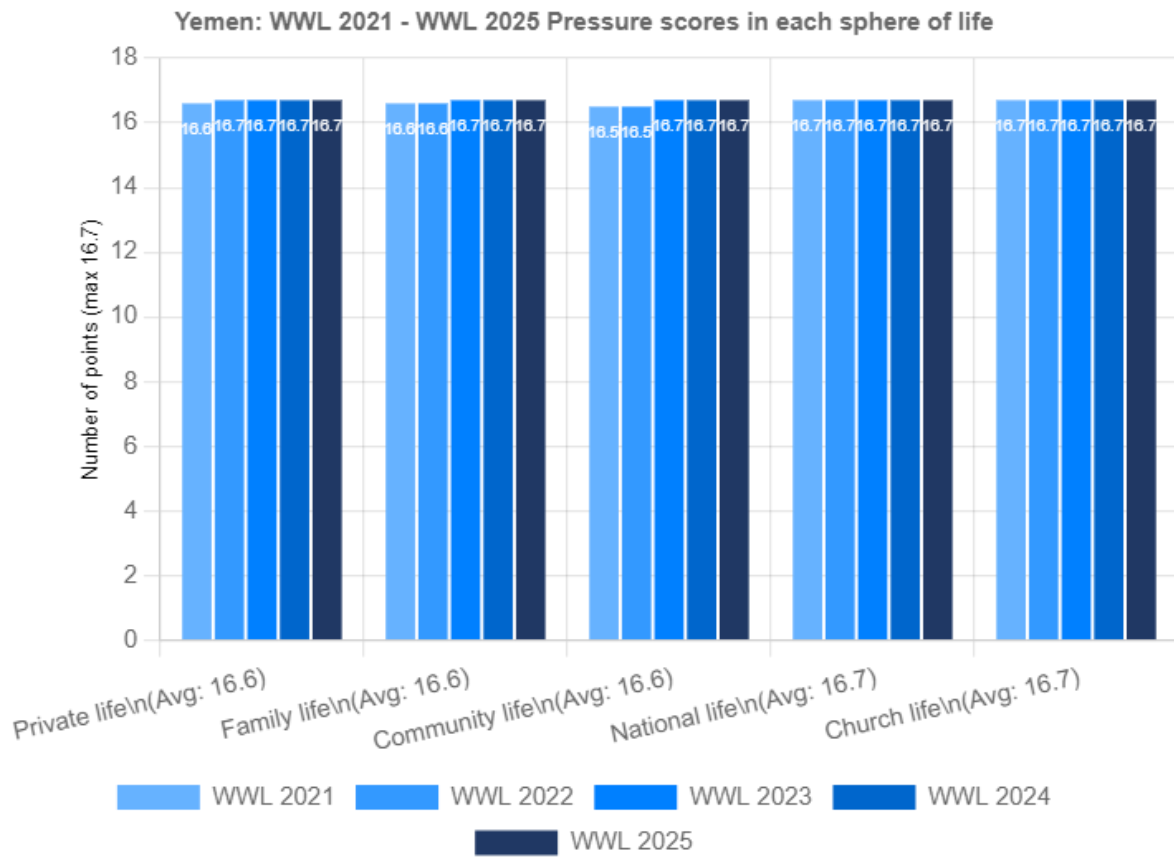
### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Yemen: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2025	16.7
2024	16.7
2023	16.7
2022	16.6
2021	16.6

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

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

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



**5 Year trends: Violence against Christians**





As can be seen in the red chart above, over the past five WWL reporting periods, the violence score has risen from 'low' in WWL 2020 to 'very high' in WWL 2023 - WWL 2025. The surge in the violence score for WWL 2025 is attributed to the closure of dozens of informal fellowships following a serious deterioration in the security situation. This decline in security is largely due to the significant increase in the influence of the Houthis, the growing presence of Al-Qaeda in other areas, and a shift in policy in regions previously controlled by the government, compounded by the tragic murder of a Christian convert by family members.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Yemen	Female Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024
	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites Forced divorce Forced marriage Incarceration by family (house arrest) Violence – physical Violence – psychological Violence – sexual

Against the backdrop of protracted conflict, unlawful attacks on civilians, and one of the world’s largest humanitarian crises, women in Yemen have been experiencing increasing gender-based repression, especially within Houthi-controlled areas ([SAM report](#), 8 March 2023; [Arab News](#), 8 February 2023). Women in Yemen are expected to obey their fathers, brothers, uncles, and husbands. Without the permission of their male guardian, they do not have equal rights in relation to divorce, inheritance or child custody and the practice of "*mahram*" is widespread, requiring women to be accompanied when moving around ([HRW 2024 Yemen 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 church groups. Because families closely monitor the activities of female members of the household, their coming and going from the household and any telephones come under greater scrutiny (particularly as mobile phones are often shared by family members), and it is often more difficult for a female convert to explore her faith and/or practice it with others. This results in fewer women and girls becoming Christians, being active in local churches and passing on their faith to their children.

Converts from a Muslim background are most vulnerable. In a typical scenario, female converts will have their telephone and other means of communication taken away. Next, she might be isolated in the home, physically and mentally abused, and possibly given in marriage to a devout Muslim, raped or even killed to ‘restore the honor’ of the tribe or family. A country expert explains: “The family would try to isolate such individuals to prevent the spread of corruptive influence.” The family control of girls

is the cultural norm in much of the country, although much less so in major governorates such as Sana'a and Aden.

Christian women and girls also risk being sexually abused at the hands of militias due to the concept of “*anfāl*,” which permits non-Muslims in some circumstances to be treated as slaves as part of the spoils of war ([Quran, Surah 8: Al-Anfal](#)). There is also a great risk of sexual assault targeting Christian women and girls, especially migrants from Africa in Houthi-controlled areas. They may be exploited in sex trafficking and sexual slavery, with wealthy Yemeni men as clients ([Free the Slaves](#), 28 November 2023).

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Yemen	Male Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024
	Economic harassment via business/job/work access Forced out of home – expulsion Forced to flee town/country Imprisonment by government Military/militia conscription/service against conscience Violence – physical

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

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

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

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

## Persecution of other religious minorities

Other religious minorities facing rights violations in Yemen are Bahai and Jews, of whom reportedly only one is left in the country. In addition, Ismaili Muslims report that they face discrimination too.

Radical Muslims consider Bahais to be infidels, others discriminate against them because the sect allegedly has connections with Iran, where the religion was founded in the 19th century. Bahai believers in Yemen are occasionally imprisoned, mistreated and tortured, mostly by Houthi authorities. They also face pressure to recant their faith. In addition, they experience oppression and mistrust because their headquarters is in Haifa, which makes them be regarded by some as agents of Israel. On 25 May 2023, armed Houthi forces detained and subsequently abducted 17 people in a raid on a Bahai meeting in a private residence in Sana'a ([Human Rights Watch](#), 30 May 2023). Seven of them were released after an UN experts panel expressed concern on 19 June 2023, that the remaining 16 detained individuals were "at serious risk of torture and other human rights violations and, given the past record, may even face death sentences in connection with the legitimate exercise of their rights" ([US State Department IRFR 2023 Yemen](#)). The last Bahai prisoners were reportedly released in August 2024 ([Bahá'i World News Service](#), 28 August 2024).

The Yemeni government did not allow the last remaining Jew in the country to leave: He has been held in a Houthi prison since 2016 for smuggling an ancient 800-year-old Torah scroll from Yemen into Israel, despite a court order for his release ([Times of Israel](#), 8 March 2024). According to an [Israeli source](#) he was tortured during his imprisonment leaving him partially paralyzed and causing the loss of all his teeth.

According to the United States Department ([IRFR 2023 Yemen](#)):

- As per an UN experts panel statement of 19 June 2023, "Houthi hate speech and incitement to hatred "threaten the life and integrity of the Baha'i community, as well as those of other religious or belief minorities present in the country."
- "Sources reported that elementary school curriculum and textbooks continued to reflect solely the Houthi interpretation of Islamic doctrine and practice, and to contain antisemitic and anti-Israel slogans and rhetoric."
- It is reported that the Shiite Houthis impose restrictions on the freedom of Sunni Muslims in areas under their control.
- Similarly, AQAP presents a significant threat to non-Sunni Muslim populations, especially in the southeastern regions of Yemen.

## Trends Summary

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

The civil war in Yemen, ongoing since 2015, has brought Yemen to the brink of collapse, with intermittent attempts at peace, including the 2018 Stockholm peace process and a 2019 agreement between the secessionist Southern Transitional Council and the UN-recognized government, failing to yield a lasting political solution. In April 2022, a nationwide truce between the two main warring parties - the Saudi-led coalition and the Houthi rebels - briefly reduced violence and improved conditions but ended in October 2022. In 2023, Saudi-led peace talks and prisoner exchanges initially raised hopes, but negotiations soon stalled, and tensions remained. In late December 2023, the UN Special Envoy announced commitments from the Yemeni government and Houthi rebels towards a nationwide ceasefire and UN-led peace process, but the Yemeni government temporarily suspended the UN peace roadmap, citing Houthi attacks amid regional tensions over the Hamas-Israel conflict. Despite Omani-mediated talks in 2023 and early 2024 and a significant Houthi visit to Riyadh, a final ceasefire agreement has so far remained elusive, with ongoing violence from groups like AQAP and renewed calls for an independent South Yemen by the Southern Transitional Council.

### 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. Even if a peace deal is reached, the persistent presence of radical Islamist groups (including the Houthis and al-Qaeda) combined with increasing demands for South Yemen secession will most likely ensure that fighting persists.

### 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. 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. The Houthi blockade on oil exports in 2023 exacerbated economic difficulties and currency depreciation, leading to price increases despite global commodity price declines.

### 4) Islamic militant groups continue to remain a threat

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. As the Houthis occupy the most territory, their influence in the country has increased (including their influence on the education system). By actively engaging in the Gaza-Israel conflict, the Houthis are positioning themselves against Western interests. Additionally, other radical Islamic groups like AQAP have gained influence in non-Houthi areas, particularly in the southern and central regions of the country.

## Further useful reports

Further background information per country and a selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/>
- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

## External Links

- Copyright, sources and definitions: Background country information - <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/>
- 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>
- Christian communities and how they are affected: IRFR 2022 Yemen - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/yemen/>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: forcibly deployed - [https://www.arabnews.jp/en/middle-east/article\\_66748/](https://www.arabnews.jp/en/middle-east/article_66748/)
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: Human Rights Watch - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/07/warring-parties-yemen-silent-amid-reports-migrant-abuse>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: Yemeni activists - <https://english.aawsat.com/arab-world/4520476-yemen-insurgents-establish-training-camps-african-migrants>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: (SAM report - <https://samrl.org/l.html?l=a/10/A/c/1/70/72/4736/%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%8A%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%A9-...-%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%B5%D8%AF-%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%88%D8%AF-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Arab News - <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2247476>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: HRW 2024 Yemen country chapter - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/yemen>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Quran, Surah 8: Al-Anfal - <https://www.quraneasyguide.com/spoils-war/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Free the Slaves - <https://freetheslaves.net/from-illegal-migration-to-human-trafficking-dangerous-journeys-across-the-horn-of-africa-and-the-arabian-peninsula/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: SAM report - [https://samrl.org/pdf/4840They-are-still-at-the-fight-EN\\_compressed.pdf](https://samrl.org/pdf/4840They-are-still-at-the-fight-EN_compressed.pdf)
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Human Rights Watch - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/30/yemen-houthis-forcibly-disappear-bahais>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: US State Department IRFR 2023 Yemen - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/yemen/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Bahá'í World News Service - <https://news.bahai.org/story/1746/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Times of Israel - <https://www.timesofisrael.com/how-an-arab-country-helped-israel-rescue-yemens-last-jews-and-settle-them-in-cairo/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Israeli source - <https://www.makorishon.co.il/news/704803/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: IRFR 2023 Yemen - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/yemen/>