World
Watch
Research

Yemen: Country Dossier

December 2019

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Introduction

World Watch List 2020

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017	Total Score WWL 2016
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	11.1	94	94	94	92	92
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.0	93	94	93	89	88
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.5	9.4	92	91	91	91	87
4	Libya	15.3	15.5	15.8	16.0	16.4	11.3	90	87	86	78	79
5	Pakistan	14.0	13.9	15.0	14.9	13.7	16.7	88	87	86	88	87
6	Eritrea	14.5	14.9	15.9	15.9	15.4	10.9	87	86	86	82	89
7	Sudan	14.2	14.6	14.5	15.7	16.1	10.4	85	87	87	87	84
8	Yemen	16.6	16.4	16.4	16.7	16.7	2.6	85	86	85	85	78
9	Iran	14.1	14.3	14.1	15.8	16.5	10.4	85	85	85	85	83
10	India	12.9	13.0	13.5	15.0	13.5	14.8	83	83	81	73	68
11	Syria	13.5	14.2	13.0	13.9	14.4	12.6	82	82	76	86	87
12	Nigeria	12.2	11.9	13.5	12.8	13.0	16.7	80	80	77	78	78
13	Saudi Arabia	15.1	14.9	14.1	15.5	16.5	2.4	79	77	79	76	76
14	Maldives	15.4	15.6	14.0	15.9	16.6	0.7	78	78	78	76	76
15	Iraq	14.0	14.6	13.9	14.5	13.6	5.6	76	79	86	86	90
16	Egypt	12.1	13.1	10.7	13.2	10.5	16.1	76	76	70	65	64
17	Algeria	13.5	14.3	10.4	12.8	13.2	9.3	73	70	58	58	56
18	Uzbekistan	15.1	12.9	14.1	12.2	15.7	3.0	73	74	73	71	70
19	Myanmar	11.8	11.9	13.5	12.5	12.2	10.7	73	71	65	62	62
20	Laos	12.8	9.9	14.1	14.4	14.9	5.6	72	71	67	64	58
21	Vietnam	12.3	8.5	12.9	13.6	14.5	9.8	72	70	69	71	66
22	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.2	13.8	13.3	15.7	1.9	70	69	68	67	66
23	China	11.6	8.4	11.6	12.8	15.1	10.2	70	65	57	57	57
24	Mauritania	13.9	14.0	13.0	13.7	13.4	0.2	68	67	57	55	50
25	Central African Republic	10.1	9.1	13.1	9.8	10.2	15.6	68	70	61	58	59
26	Morocco	12.4	13.3	10.8	11.7	14.1	4.1	66	63	51	49	47
27	Qatar	13.6	13.4	10.8	12.2	14.1	2.2	66	62	63	66	65
28	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	10.2	9.4	11.8	15.6	66	48	-	-	-
29	Mali	9.2	8.2	12.8	10.0	11.7	13.7	66	68	59	59	55
30	Sri Lanka	11.5	9.0	11.0	10.9	9.6	13.1	65	58	57	55	53
31	Tajikistan	13.9	12.3	11.9	12.4	13.1	1.1	65	65	65	58	58
32	Nepal	12.4	10.8	9.9	12.1	12.2	7.0	64	64	64	53	53
33	Jordan	13.1	14.1	10.7	11.7	12.5	1.7	64	65	66	63	59
34	Tunisia	12.0	12.8	10.3	10.8	12.3	5.4	64	63	62	61	58
35	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.5	10.7	12.4	14.0	1.7	64	63	63	56	55
36	Turkey	12.6	11.8	10.7	13.3	11.3	3.7	63	66	62	57	55
37	Brunei	13.8	14.3	10.7	10.3	13.5	0.6	63	63	64	64	61
38	Bangladesh	11.1	9.9	12.7	11.1	8.9	9.3	63	58	58	63	57
39	Ethiopia	10.0	9.2	10.6	10.8	10.4	11.9	63	65	62	64	67
40	Malaysia	12.1	14.6	12.7	12.0	9.6	1.5	62	60	65	60	58
41	Colombia	8.9	7.8	11.9	9.8	8.9	15.0	62	58	56	53	55
42	Oman	12.7	13.1	10.0	11.5	12.7	2.0	62	59	57	53	53
43	Kuwait	13.2	13.1	9.9	11.5	13.4	0.7	62	60	61	57	56
44	Kenya	11.7	10.5	10.9	8.3	10.9	9.1	61	61	62	68	68
45	Bhutan	12.8	10.9	11.8	11.6	13.9	0.0	61	64	62	61	56
46	Russian Federation	12.2	8.3	10.7	10.4	12.1	6.9	60	60	51	46	48
47	United Arab Emirates	12.9	13.0	9.5	11.1	12.6	1.1	60	58	58	55	55
48	Cameroon	8.8	7.2	11.6	7.0	10.4	15.0	60	54	38	-	45
49	Indonesia	10.9	11.1	11.6	10.2	9.5	6.5	60	65	59	55	55
50	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.3	7.2	11.1	9.3	60	52	45	47	53
51	Palestinian Territories	12.2	13.0	9.2	10.2	11.9	3.1	60	57	60	64	62
52	Mexico	8.4	6.8	12.2	10.6	10.0	11.5	60	61	59	57	56
53	Azerbaijan	13.0	10.0	9.3	11.1	12.4	1.5	57	57	57	52	57
54	Comoros	11.7	11.5	9.1	9.9	13.9	0.9	57	56	56	56	56
55	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.3	11.1	9.4	11.9	1.1	57	56	54	48	46
56	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	10.3	10.0	11.2	0.2	56	56	56	57	58
57	Democratic Republic of the Congo	5.6	6.7	10.6	7.4	10.4	15.6	56	55	33	-	53
58	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	5.9	56	48	40	-	51
59	Bahrain	12.1	12.3	9.1	10.1	10.5	0.9	55	55	57	54	54

60	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	7.0	55	52	53	59	57
61	Cuba	9.6	5.6	9.5	11.8	12.0	3.5	52	49	49	47	42
62	Uganda	8.1	4.6	6.7	6.7	9.1	13.0	48	47	46	53	45
63	Burundi	5.1	5.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.7	48	43	-	-	-
64	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	3.7	45	46	-	-	-
65	South Sudan	5.7	1.5	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.6	44	44	-	-	-
66	Mozambique	6.9	4.6	7.1	5.2	8.0	11.7	43	43	-	-	-
67	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	1.1	43	43	-	-	-
68	Angola	6.4	3.6	7.0	8.7	10.4	6.7	43	42	-	-	-
69	Venezuela	3.8	4.4	10.6	9.3	9.5	4.8	42	41	34	-	-
70	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	6.6	3.5	42	43	-	-	-
71	Rwanda	5.3	4.4	6.7	7.8	10.1	7.2	42	41	-	-	-
72	Nicaragua	5.8	4.2	8.5	9.8	9.0	4.1	41	41	-	-	-
73	Togo	8.6	6.7	8.5	7.1	8.4	1.1	41	42	-	-	-

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Brief note on 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). The highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading "External links". The WWL 2020 reporting period was 1 November 2018 - 31 October 2019.

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).

Disclaimer: Due to the current levels of fighting, the gathering of information is regarded by virtually all sides as spying. Even humanitarian NGOs are struggling to assess relief aid needs. In addition to being unable to travel and assess as can be done in other countries, the lack of centralized government control (leading to local militias making their own rules) creates great limitations. These circumstances have seriously affected the collection and verification of data on the persecution of Christians presented in this document.

WWL 2020: Persecution summary / Yemen

Brief country details

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

Pop 2019	Christians	Chr%
Yemen		
29,580,000	a few thousand	OD estimate

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2019).

World Watch List Yemen	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2020	85	8
WWL 2019	86	8
WWL 2018	85	9
WWL 2017	85	9
WWL 2016	78	11

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2016-2020 reporting periods.

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Yemen: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Clan and ethnic antagonism	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

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

Brief description of persecution situation

The Church in Yemen is composed mostly of Yemeni Christians with a Muslim background who need to live their faith in secret. They face persecution from the authorities (including detention and interrogation), family and from radical Islamic groups who threaten apostates with death if they do not re-convert. Tribal law prohibits members from leaving the tribe and the punishment for denouncing Islam can be death or banishment. Both male and female converts to Christianity married to Muslims risk divorce including losing custody of their children.

Christians are suffering from the general humanitarian crisis in the country, but Yemeni Christians are additionally vulnerable since emergency relief is mostly distributed through Islamic organizations and local mosques, which are allegedly discriminating against all who are not considered to be devout Muslims.

Specific examples of persecution in the reporting period

- Various Christians were detained for faith-related reasons during the WWL 2020 reporting period. According to sources, both religious and non-religious factors are often involved in these cases.
- At least a dozen 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 houses and relocate in the country out of fear of assassination for their faith or for war-related reasons.

WWL 2020: Keys to understanding / Yemen

Link for general background information

BBC country profile: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14704852.

Recent history

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

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

"In 2016, the UN brokered a months-long cessation of hostilities that reduced airstrikes and fighting, and initiated peace talks in Kuwait. However, the talks ended without agreement. The Houthis and Saleh's political party announced a Supreme Political Council in August 2016 and a National Salvation Government, including a prime minister and several dozen cabinet members, in November 2016, to govern in Sanaa and further challenge the legitimacy of Hadi's government. However, amid rising tensions between the Houthis and Saleh, sporadic clashes erupted in mid-2017, and escalated into open fighting that ended when Houthi forces killed Saleh in early December 2017. In 2018, anti-Houthi forces made the most battlefield progress in Yemen since early 2016, most notably in Al-Hudaydah Governorate. In December 2018, the Houthis and Yemeni Government participated in the first UN-brokered peace talks since 2016. In April 2019, Yemen's parliament convened in Seiyoun for the first time since the conflict broke out in 2014 and elected a speaker and vice speakers." (Source: CIA 2019 World Fact Book Yemen, accessed 3/12/19).

"On 14 September, the Huthis claimed responsibility for an attack on Saudi oil facilities that temporarily cut off nearly 50 per cent of the country's oil production capacity. Riyadh, Washington and several European governments accused Iran of the attack, and the Huthis' claim has tied the group more closely to Tehran in the eyes of its opponents." (International Crisis Group, 16/10/19 accessed 3/12/19)

In August 2019 separatist forces aligned with the United Arab Emirates took over the UN-recognized government's temporary capital of Aden, risking infighting between the Saudi-aligned coalition. However in a hopeful move, separatists and the government signed a power-sharing agreement In Riyadh to end the conflict in southern Yemen in November 2019. The deal, which was brokered by Saudi Arabia, comes after months of fighting in the area and is meant to form a new and stable government which can tackle the challenge of the Iranian-backed Huthi forces especially in Sana'a and the north. Also, Saudi Arabia took steps to de-escalate tensions with the Huthis by extending dialogue with the rebels and limiting air strikes in Yemen. In return, the Huthis have stopped all attacks on Saudi Arabia and a wider Saudi-Houthi de-escalation initiative is being discussed. According to the International Crisis Group reporting on 11 November 2019, this could lead to an [end of the conflict](): "If both the Riyadh agreement and the Saudi-Houthi initiative survive, and UN mediators are able to weave them into a single negotiation track, a national political settlement could be possible."

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. The EIU classifies the Yemeni government as 'authoritarian'.

Due to the civil war, fresh elections are not expected to be held in the short-term. The administration is split. The IRF2018 refers to media reports which state that "the Houthis continued to exert control over the parliament in Sana'a, and despite the flight of many parliamentarians, continued to enact their legislative agenda. Terrorist groups AQAP and ISIS, as well as other militias and separatist groups, continued to contribute to the violence." As the [Economist Intelligence Unit]() puts in its overview of Yemen's political structure: "In the areas controlled by the Houthi rebels, the Revolutionary Committee oversees the ministries and public agencies. Mr Hadi's government operates partly from Riyadh and partly from Aden, where security is poor, and it is unclear how much capacity it has to govern on the ground." The [EIU]() summarizes the polictial situation as follows: "Although greater international attention on Yemen will increase calls for an end of the conflict, prospects for peace are still small. The lack of incentive for the rebel Houthis to negotiate, and the unacceptability for Saudi Arabia of having a perceived Iranian proxy on its borders, in the form of the Houthis, means there is little common ground. Moreover, even if a deal was agreed, the ongoing presence of al-Qaida and growing calls for southern secessionism will mean conflict continues."

According to the [Freedom of thought Report]() Yemini government and Constitution is rated as having grave violations: "Islam is the official state religion of Yemen and the constitution states that Islamic law is the source of all legislation. Freedom of religion, speech and the press are all severely restricted. Yemen is a member of the League of Arab States (LAS), as well as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)."

Advocacy organization Middle East Concern reports on the legal landscape: "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. Expatriates are generally free to conduct non-Islamic worship in private, but there 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."

Religious landscape

According to WCD statistics, over 99% of the population are Muslim - around 65% are Sunni, primarily in the south and east and about 35% are Shiite, located mostly in the northwestern corner of the country. 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 Christians 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 by Islam and by state law. Converts may face the death penalty (though generally not implemented by the government but rather by radical Muslims, with the government turning a blind eye) if their new faith is discovered. Though focusing most of their attention on political events, government officials continue to intimidate Christians even amid the chaotic war situation. Oppression has mostly been felt coming from Islamic militants who have had more freedom to operate.

MEC reports: "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 (AQAP) and the Islamic State group are strong, especially for nationals who have left Islam."

Economic landscape

The World Bank ranks the Yemini economy in the category 'low income'. One third of Yemen's population is malnourished, including around 2.9 million women and children who are acutely malnourished. Even before the war, more than 45% lived below the official poverty line. The situation in Yemen is considered an ongoing humanitarian crisis. The Relief Web September 2019 Update states: "Since 2014, war has driven poverty in Yemen from 47 percent of the population to a projected 75 percent by the end of 2019. If fighting continues through 2022, Yemen will rank as the poorest country in the world, with 79 percent of the population living under the poverty line and 65 percent classified as extremely poor. In addition the situation is worsening while funding is not always available: Around seventeen million people in Yemen are in immediate need of humanitarian food assistance. While a record 12.4 million beneficiaries were reached with food assistance in August, pipeline breaks due to insufficient funding are likely to lead to partial ration cuts from October to December. Additionally, increased levels of conflict are expected to restrict humanitarian access in the worst affected areas of Hajjah, Al Hudaydah, Aden, and other conflict areas. This raises concerns that many Yemenis will begin to face increasing food consumption gaps, especially those who are heavily dependent on humanitarian assistance to meet household consumption needs."

There is rampant unemployment and some 80% of the population is in need of humanitarian aid. Prices for commodities like water and flour have risen immensely. In besieged cities the price increase has been 5000%. Supplies of electricity and water have discontinued in most areas. Even if the war stops, Yemen faces long-term challenges, including declining water resources, high unemployment, and a high population growth rate. Within the next two decades, Sana'a could run dry due to high water demands of the city and a lack of rain water to keep the ground water level high.

FSI show economic indicators continue to worsen. HDI shows the employment ratio is at only 32.7% of the population who hold jobs and literacy rates were not available.

Social and cultural landscape

Society in Yemen is conservative, Muslim and tribal. Tribal society remains very strong, and the government is a secondary institution to the traditional ways of tribal governance. The government is not likely to intervene in intertribal conflicts, even if tribes are physically harming or imprisoning members. Tribal law and custom prohibit members of the tribe from leaving the tribe. The punishment for this would often be death or banishment. One country researcher reports: "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".

FSI social and cohesion indicators continue to worsen. Factionalized elites, Group grievances, Demographic pressures and IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) are among the worst.

HDI reports life expectancy for Yemen at 65.2 years with 9 years of expected education. UNICEF estimated that in the current crisis 71 million children are internally displaced and 4.7 million children are n need of educational assistance and that 357,487 children are suffering from Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM).

Technological landscape

The technological landscape in Yemen is affected by the civil war and is currently disrupted. As the [CIA World Factbook](#) puts it, "mobile towers are often deliberately targeted; maintenance is dangerous to staff; aid organizations rely on satellite and radio communications" and telecommunications equipment in rural areas are scarce.

The country's percentage of Internet users and penetration was rated at just 25% in 2019, according to the [2019 Arab Youth Survey](#). Active social media users and penetration is 7.9%, which is just higher than its mobile version (7.2%). Mobile subscriptions and penetration is available to 63% of the population.

Historically, the government controlled most local television and radio except for some privately owned radio stations. The [2019 Freedom in the World Report](#) states that since the start 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 Saudi-led coalition and Hadi government forces have also harassed and arrested reporters."

Security situation

The ongoing civil war in Yemen is the result of several local and national power struggles, aggravated by a regional proxy conflict between Saudi Arabia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Yemen is currently the theatre 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).

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; many citizens, particularly Christians, are suffering from the lawlessness and are believed to be under surveillance by radical Muslims and can become a specific target for militants. 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.

According to a leader of a NGO active in the country, wherever the Saudi-led coalition forces have dominated or freed areas, the local Christians were often targeted by radical Sunnis as a consequence. However there are some glimmers of hope after the Yemeni government signed a power-sharing agreement in November 2019 with southern separatists to form a new and stable government and since a Saudi-Huthi de-escalation initiative is being discussed.

Trends analysis

1. Peace negotiations keep stalling and re-starting. In its fifth 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 for a political solution. The fact that the process came to a standstill in August 2019 with the collapse of the anti-Houthi coalition has further complicated the situation. Former allies United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have parted ways, together with the different militias they have supported. However there is some hope for a turn in the conflict after the peace agreement between Southern Transitional Council (STC) and the UN-recognized government in November 2019.

2. The war in Yemen has led to high levels of violence and lawlessness. This increases the likelihood for the oppression of minorities, including Christians. In its Yemen Country Profile, the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) stresses the fact that even if a peace deal is agreed, "the ongoing presence of al-Qaida and growing calls for southern secessionism will mean the conflict continues".

3. Yemen is experiencing a humanitarian crisis. The poorest country of the Middle East finds itself in the middle of a devastating humanitarian catastrophe. The country's humanitarian and economical condition is so severe that it will take years to recover. According to the BMI Research Group's Yemen Country Risk Report, 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 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* - this 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. On the other hand, amidst the insecurity of war, it is reported that the number of converts to Christianity is slowly rising.

External Links - WWL 2020: Keys to understanding / Yemen

- Link for general background information: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14704852. - http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14704852
- Recent history: CIA 2019 World Fact Book Yemen - https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ym.html
- Recent history: International Crisis Group - https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/yemens-multiplying-conflicts
- Recent history: end of the conflict - https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/peace-possible-yemen-out-moment-crisis-chance-solution
- Political and legal landscape: Economist Intelligence Unit - http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=937283277&Country=Yemen&topic=Summary&subtopic=Political+structure
- Political and legal landscape: EIU - http://country.eiu.com/Yemen

- Political and legal landscape: Freedom of thought Report - https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-western-asia/yemen/
- Political and legal landscape: Middle East Concern - https://www.meconcern.org/countries/yemen/
- Religious landscape: MEC - https://www.meconcern.org/countries/yemen/
- Economic landscape: 2.9   - https://www.apnews.com/5a4645766b414fe59b5f00ca3e543bd9
- Economic landscape: million women - https://www.apnews.com/5a4645766b414fe59b5f00ca3e543bd9
- Economic landscape: and children - https://www.apnews.com/5a4645766b414fe59b5f00ca3e543bd9
- Economic landscape: projected 75 percent - https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-key-message-update-september-2019
- Economic landscape: 80% of the population - https://www.unicef.org/appeals/yemen.html
- Social and cultural landscape: UNICEF - https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/unicef-yemen-humanitarian-situation-report-july-2019-enar-0
- Technological landscape: CIA World Factbook - https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ym.html
- Technological landscape: 2019 Arab Youth Survey - https://www.arabyouthsurvey.com/about_the_survey.html
- Technological landscape: 2019 Freedom in the World Report - https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/yemen
- 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

WWL 2020: 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 during the sixth century, Yemen had bishops, priests, monks and martyrs, resembling any other Christian land. There was a large cathedral in Sanaa.

The freedoms for Christians were halted when King Dhu Nuwas converted to Judaism. He carried out a major massacre of the Christian population. The survivors asked 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. Badhan, the fifth and last Persian ruler of Yemen is traditionally reported to have converted to Islam in 628 AD and Yemen fell under the political dominance of Islam since that time.

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, the Church could return to Aden and South Yemen, to serve British and other expatriates and to 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, any access for the Church was impossible until the 1960, due to the inaccessible nature of the country.

Before the current civil war in Yemen (which began in 2015), there were thousands of expatriates, often working in development, who were allowed to worship in some churches in Aden and Sanaa. Most of these Christians have been forced to leave the country due to the dangerous situation. Some of the churches have been ransacked.

Church spectrum today

Due to the state of war, only indigenous Yemeni Christians - mostly converts - are left in the country. No details can be published.

External Links - WWL 2020: Church information / Yemen

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

WWL 2020: Persecution Dynamics

Reporting period

1 November 2018 – 31 October 2019

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 85 points, Yemen ranked 8 in WWL 2020, the same position as in WWL 2019.

The score fell by one point due to a very slightly lower number of reported violent incidents against Christians during the WWL 2020 reporting period. Like other civilians, Christians are suffering greatly from the war and from the increasing influence of Islamic militants, which adds to the already vulnerable position of indigenous Christians. Most expatriate and migrant Christians have left the country, leaving a Church now composed mainly of indigenous Christians with a Muslim background.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines: Yemen	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Very strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Clan and ethnic antagonism	CEA	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	Weak

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

Islamic oppression (Very strong):

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

Clan and ethnic antagonism (Very strong):

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

Dictatorial paranoia (Medium):

Yemen has been under a dictatorship for the majority of the past thirty-six years. 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 during 2018 suggest that in Houthi-controlled areas, increasingly harsh measures have been taken by the Houthi administration against individuals or associations who are deemed by the ruling authority to be a threat. This has included members of religious minority communities, including Christian converts.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of Persecution: Yemen	IO	RN	CEA	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG		VERY STRONG				STRONG	WEAK
Government officials	Strong		-				Strong	Weak
Ethnic group leaders	Strong		Very strong					
Non-Christian religious leaders	Very strong		Very strong					
Violent religious groups	Very strong						Very strong	
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	Very 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 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 state, 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 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 Bahai's for questioning for disapproval of Islam. However they are mostly pre-occupied with power-related priorities.

Drivers of Clan and ethnic antagonism:

- ***Ethnic group leaders (Very strong), Islamic leaders (Very strong):*** Tribal law and custom prohibit members of the tribe from leaving the tribe 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. For example, the Muhameshen or as they have also been called, the Akhdam. If a member of this marginalized group is actually a Christian, then he or she faces ostracism and complete exclusion from their community. This entails exclusion from education, health care and other public services.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia:

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

Geographical hotspots of persecution

The situation in general is dangerous for Christians in Yemen. Some areas are particularly threatening, such as in the south where there is a strong al-Qaeda presence. Christians have also indicated that there is more pressure in the Shiite Houthi-controlled areas in the west than in areas under the control of the Sunni Hadi government.

## 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. Migrant Christians, particularly from Africa and also from Asia remain in the country though many have left as well. In what is most likely a combination of racial and religious persecution, migrant Christians face harassment and discrimination from society at a community and national level, and even outright violence from radical Islamic movements. As their numbers have decreased considerably and the Church is now composed mainly of indigenous Christians, the category of expatriate Christians is currently not scored in WWL analysis.

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

Converts to Christianity: At least 95% of the Yemeni Church is made up of converts from Islam. Although there are only a few thousand Yemeni Christians, there has been a growth in numbers which means that more local advice and support is available for new Christians than before. Vulnerability for converts remains very high throughout the country due to a combination of i) traditional family/community/tribal attitudes; ii) the impunity with which radical Islamic groups are able to operate; and iii) the refusal of state (or de facto state) authorities to tolerate any form of dissent, fearing it could lead to greater destabilization.

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

The Persecution pattern

WWL 2020 Persecution Pattern for Yemen
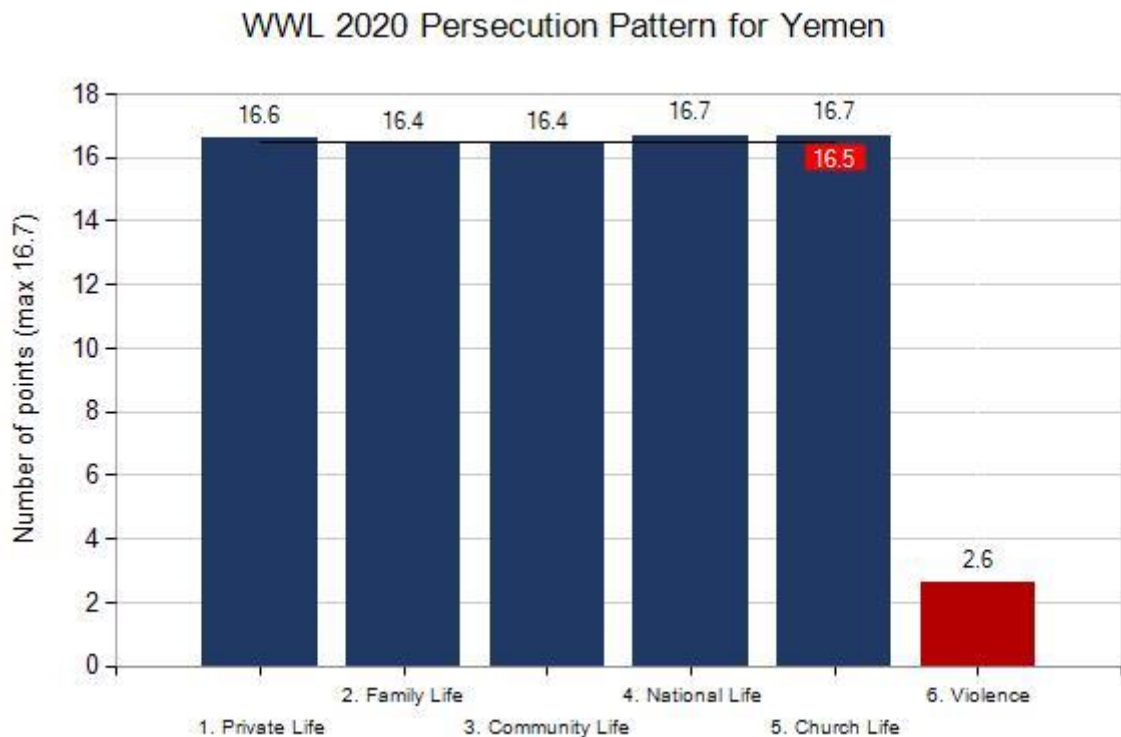
The WWL 2020 persecution pattern for Yemen shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Yemen continues to be at an extreme level (16.5), the same level as in WWL 2019. The extreme pressure is explained by the war and pressure on the indigenous church which is mostly composed of converts from Islam to Christianity.
- Pressure in all Spheres of life is at an extreme level. The National and Church spheres both scored the maximum possible (16.7), directly followed by the Private sphere with 16.6 points. This is typical for a situation in which there are mostly Christians with a Muslim background in a country with Islamic oppression as the main persecution engine, leaving no room for any open church activities or private worship.
- The level of violence against Christians saw a decrease from 3.1 in WWL 2019 to 2.6 points in WWL 2020. The level of violence is nearly impossible to research due to a lack of access to accurate and verified information as a result of the war situation. Therefore, it is likely that in reality figures are higher.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, details are shown from four of the highest scoring block questions, with those items scoring highest listed first. 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 0 – 4 points, please see the "WWL Scoring example" in the WWL Methodology, available at: http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/, password: freedom).

Private sphere:

- *Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable (Block 1: 1 / Score: 4 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.
- *It has been risky for Christians to conduct acts of Christian worship by themselves (e.g. prayer, Bible reading, etc.) (Block 1: 2 / Score: 4 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 or areas that were "liberated" by Sunni forces. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and IS control large parts of the country.
- *It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials (Block 1: 3 / Score: 4 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.
- *It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians (Block 1: 9 / Score: 4 points):* It is very risky for local Christians to meet and great care is needed to avoid arousing suspicion, provoking hostile reactions and possibly jeopardizing the safety of other converts.

The above listed questions are just a selection, it is also dangerous Christians in Yemen (i.e. full score of 4 points) to reveal their faith in verbally or in writing (including online), display Christian images or symbols, access Christian materials via different media and to meet with other Christians.

Family sphere:

- *Babies and children of Christians have automatically been registered under the state or majority religion (Block 2: 1 / Score: 4 points):* Converts from Islam cannot have their children registered as Christians.
- *Christian baptisms have been hindered (Block 2: 4 / Score: 4 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.
- *Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs (Block 2:7 / Score: 4 points):* For Yemeni Christians from a Muslim background with children, there is strong family and societal pressure to ensure that children are brought up according to Islamic norms. There is a great risk of the children being taken away if the new faith of their parents is discovered.

- *Christian children have been pressured to attend anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education (Block 2: 8 / Score: 4 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.

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.

Community sphere:

- *Christians have been under threat of abduction and/or forced marriage (Block 3:3 / Score: 4 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.
- *Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith (Block 3:7 / Score: 4 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.
- *Christians have had less access to health care because of their faith* (*Block 3:8 / Score: 4 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.
- *Christians have faced disadvantages in their education at any level for faith-related reasons (e.g. restrictions of access to education)* (*Block 3:9 / Score: 4 points):* Lack of access to adequate education is significant challenge for many Yemenis. Converts from Islam are additionally vulnerable if their faith is known. Classes on Islam and Islamic culture are part of school curricula in elementary, secondary and higher education. By default, these classes reduce the likelihood of Christians successfully finishing their education.

National sphere:

- *Christians have been barred from public office, or has promotion been hindered for faith-related reasons (Block 4.6 / Score: 4 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.

- *Officials at any level have refused to recognize an individual's conversion as recorded in government administration systems, identity cards, etc. (Block 4.2 / Score: 4 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.

- *Those who caused harm to Christians deliberately have been left unpunished (Block 4.14 / Score: 4 points):* Perpetrators of crimes against Christians including so-called 'honor crimes', are likely to receive impunity, given the weak rule-of-law in much of Yemen. Tribal justice systems (which are widely applicable) expect the head of family to carry out punishment. In more official systems, Islamic principles are likely to be applied which will greatly disadvantage converts from Islam. Even those who executed four nuns in Aden and 12 staff members of a Christian nursery in 2016 were not investigated.

- *Christians accused in court have been deprived of equal treatment (Block 4.15 / Score: 4 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.

Church sphere:

- *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 (Block 5.3 / Score: 4 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. Not only does the official government have little control over the entirety of the country, 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.

- *Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings (Block 5.5 / Score: 4 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.

- *Churches have been hindered in importing Christian materials from abroad (Block 5.13 / Score: 4 points):* Considering that the distribution of 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.

- ***Churches have been hindered in establishing, managing, maintaining and conducting schools, or charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural organizations, institutions and associations (Block 5.18 / Score: 4 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

The situation in Yemen is very chaotic due to the civil war, making violent incidents against Christians highly underreported and difficult to obtain. The current levels of fighting in the country (and the general suspicion of people gathering information) has seriously affected the collection and verification of data. For security reasons, few details can be published.

Several Christians were reported to have been detained or sentenced to imprisonment during the WWL 2020 reporting period. According to sources, both religious and non-religious factors are often involved in such cases. Some converts were physically or mentally abused and several Christians had to move to other places in the country - sometimes returning later - and a few Christians 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.

5 Year trends

Chart 1:

Average pressure has been at an extreme level over the five reporting periods, rising from 14.6 in WWL 2016 (covering the start of the civil war in January 2015) to a levelling off at 16.5/16.6 . As the war continued, the average pressure remained at an extreme level from WWL 2018 to WWL 2020.

WWL 2016 - WWL 2020 Persecution Pattern history: Yemen	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2020	16.5
2019	16.5
2018	16.6
2017	15.9
2016	14.6

Chart 2:

Pressure in all *spheres of life* has been on the increase since WWL 2016 and has now more or less levelled off at an extreme (sometimes maximum) level. As a result of the war, large groups of migrant and expatriate Christians left the country, leaving indigenous Christians 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 very highest levels of persecution, especially in the *Family* and *Community spheres of life*.

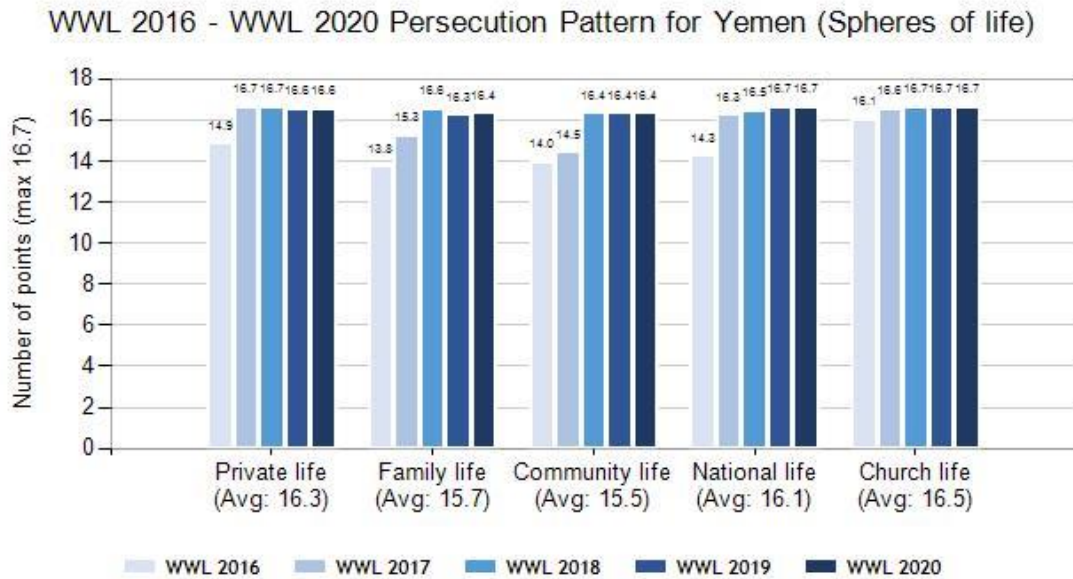WWL 2016 - WWL 2020 Persecution Pattern for Yemen (Spheres of life)

Chart 3:

There has been a distinct increase in reported violent incidents since WWL 2016. The relatively lower scores for violence in WWL 2018-2020 do not mean the situation of Yemeni Christians has improved. In a chaotic situation of civil war many incidents go unreported. Also, it may also reflect that converts have adapted to the more dangerous situation on the ground, thus practising their faith in even more secrecy.

WWL 2016 - WWL 2020 Persecution Pattern for Yemen (Violence)
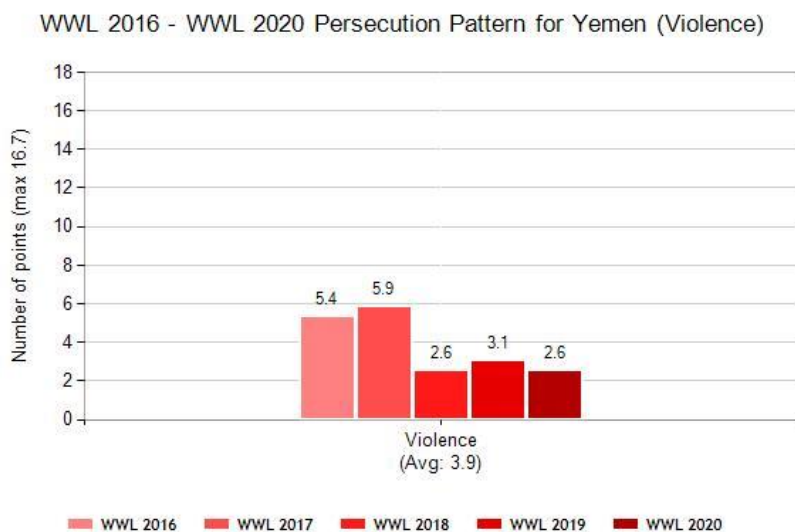
Gender profile of persecution

Female Pressure Points:

- *Denied access to Christian material*
- *Denied custody of children*
- *Forced divorce*
- *Forced marriage*
- *Incarceration by family/house arrest*
- *Travel bans/restriction of movement*
- *Violence - physical*
- *Violence - psychological*
- *Violence - sexual*

Yemen is a strongly patriarchal society in which women enjoy very little rights; women are expected to obey their fathers, brothers, uncles, and husbands. In Yemen, women cannot marry without permission of their male guardians, do not have equal rights in inheritance, divorce or child custody, and have little legal protection. Yemeni women are entirely dependent on having a protective male in their lives, since there is legislation designating head of household status to the man.

In a context without any religious freedom, conversions of females is considered a shameful act against the whole family. In a culture where the oppression of women is normal, female Christians with a Muslim background are additionally vulnerable. In a typical scenario, female converts will first have their telephone and other means of communication taken away. Next, she will be moved to a different area, and possibly be given in marriage to a devout Muslim as a second or third wife and be held as a hostage in her new home.

Forced marriage to a strict non-Christian is a common solution to bring a young female convert into line; as there is no minimum age for marriage, girls are married as young as eight years old to ensure they are virgins at the time of marriage and legislation does not criminalize marital rape. The law does not address other types of gender-based violence such as beatings, forced isolation, imprisonment, and early and forced marriage. Each of these omissions of protection can be exploited for religious persecution of Christian women.

Women also face unequal treatment in courts, where the testimony of a woman is given half the weight of a man's testimony.

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, and it is often more difficult for a female convert to explore her faith and/or practice her faith with others. This results in fewer women and girls becoming Christians and being active in local churches.

Furthermore, the family control of girls is the cultural norm in much of the country; although much less so in major cities such as Sana'a and Aden. For a Christian wife with a non-Christian husband, if families press for a divorce on account of the wife's faith, it is likely that the custody of any children will be granted to the husband or to other Muslim family-members regardless of the ages of the children. Ordinarily the mother would be granted custody until the age of puberty, but an over-riding factor will be the ability to provide an Islamic upbringing.

Male Pressure Points:

- *Denied access to social community/networks*
- *Imprisonment by government*
- *Military/militia conscription/service against conscience*
- *Violence – physical*

Life in general in Yemen is tremendously difficult in an ongoing war with no religious freedom. The most common pressure for Yemeni male converts comes from family and community. Pressure varies in intensity according to the family hierarchy; it is most keenly felt by women and girls, followed by younger men, followed by older men (reflecting cultural levels of status and freedom).

War has separated family members and Christians and others cannot move about freely in the country. All males, including Christians, can be forced to join militias, if they are of military age. Boys as young as 10 are also recruited into militias. 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.

Men face a greater risk than women of being killed for their faith, kidnapped, tortured or of losing their job. They are also more likely to be imprisoned by the local authorities and are generally more likely to face persecution in the public sphere. This also affects their families, since men are usually the sole provider for the household. When men are imprisoned or killed, it means the loss of the household's breadwinner. Without support, the man's family will face significant financial hardships and may be subject to exploitation. Men are more likely to be targeted by radical Muslims and may be forced to spend lengthy periods in hiding, away from their families when they become a target. Or, the entire family may choose to move and relocate, creating instability for the household. This can lead to greater poverty in the faith community.

Persecution of other religious minorities

Other religious minorities facing persecution 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. At least 22 adherents of Bahai have been held by authorities in Sana'a since mid-September 2018. They face charges of apostasy – for abandoning the state-sanctioned religion - teaching the Bahai faith and spying; the latter is subject to the death penalty (See UN News, 18 October 2018).

The tiny Jewish community is the only indigenous non-Muslim religious minority group and allegedly there are only 40 members left in the country. Most of them live in the capital Sana'a, which is controlled by Houthi rebels. 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 minister said the Yemeni government is unware of the fate of the country's remaining Jews. Sectarian messages and antisemitic statements continue to be printed, including in school textbooks issued by Houthi authorities. (Radical Islamic teaching was also promoted in these textbooks.) In a Quranic culture book for third graders, the words "America" and "Israel" are surrounded by the words: "Our enemy, the head of evil, and the biggest Satan". Finally, the slogan on the Houthi flag is self-explanatory: "God Is Great, Death to America, Death to Israel, Curse on the Jews, Victory to Islam."

According to the US State Department's 2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: "In January the Houthi-controlled National Security Bureau (NSB) sentenced to death Hamed Kamal Muhammad bin Haydara, a Bahai, on charges of espionage. He had been imprisoned since 2013, accused of apostasy, proselytizing, and spying for Israel. He remained in prison awaiting execution at year's end. According to the Bahai International Community (BIC), in October armed soldiers in Sana'a arrested Bahai spokesperson Abdullah Al-Olofi and detained him at an undisclosed location for three days. According to the BIC, in September a Houthi-controlled court in Sana'a charged more than 20 Baha'is with apostasy and espionage. A group of UN independent experts reported that authorities arrested 24 individuals in the incident, at least 22 of whom are Bahais. Amnesty International reported the charges could possibly result in death sentences. The five UN experts said charges 'must be dropped and discriminatory practices based on religion outlawed' and added, 'We reiterate our call to the de facto authorities in Sanaa to put an immediate stop on the persecution of Bahais.'"

The 2018 IRF report continues: "According to the BIC, as of October there were six Bahais in prison in the country for practicing their faith. During a speech in March, Houthi leader Abd al-Malik al-Houthi called on his followers to defend their country from the Bahais, who he described as infidels. According to media reports, Houthi authorities modified the University of Sana'a student and faculty identification cards to include the Houthi flag and slogan 'Death to America, Death to Israel, Curse the Jews, Victory to Islam'. Houthi Cultural Supervisor Yahya Abu Awadah introduced a mandatory course into the university curriculum called 'The Arab-Israeli Conflict'. Course material included the glorification of Hezbollah and condemnation of Zionism."

Future outlook for the church

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

- *Islamic oppression:* Violent Islamic groups such as al-Qaeda and IS are expected to remain a serious threat in the country for a long time to come due to the weak central security. They will also benefit from divisions among the anti-Houthi coalition as they will easily be able to fill the void left by the former coalition forces, unless the latter will be able to find a political solution to their differences. The situation for Christians will become worse because these developments allow for a stronger polarization of society and the spread of radical views - both of which particularly disadvantage converts from Islam. Since the majority of the Christian community (affected by most expatriate Christians leaving the country) are converts from Islam, they will be facing increased danger in the future. However, amid the insecurity of war, it is reported that the number of converts to Christianity is growing slowly.

- *Clan and ethnic antagonism:* Nationwide, sectarian and tribal divisions are deepening which are an important barrier to peace and stability. Tribal groups were forced to take sides when Al-Qaeda and IS started fighting each other in 2019, naturally presenting a risk to Christians in the country. This has created chaos and division amongst the tribal groups in the country. If the country continues to disintegrate, people are likely to rally round their own tribe even more, which could increase the levels of pressure on converts to Christianity.

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

  As the war drags on, the government 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 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 local Christians, Local Christians are more likely to be imprisoned in an attempt to extort money or gain leverage or bargaining power with Western governments or 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.

External Links - WWL 2020: Persecution Dynamics

- Geographical hotspots of persecution: RecordedFuture.com - https://www.recordedfuture.com/yemen-internet-activity/
- Gender profile of persecution: little legal protection - https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/YEMEN-2018.pdf
- Gender profile of persecution: legislation - http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/926401524803880673/pdf/125804-PUB-REPLACEMENT-PUBLIC.pdf
- Gender profile of persecution: eight years old - https://www.undispatch.com/years-decline-child-marriages-skyrocketing-yemen-war/
- Gender profile of persecution: marital rape - https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/09/world/middleeast/yemen-war-children.html
- Gender profile of persecution: gender-based violence - https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/YEMEN-2018.pdf
- Gender profile of persecution: unequal treatment in courts - https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/YEMEN-2018.pdf
- Gender profile of persecution: militias - https://apnews.com/082c0b7b6253468e97da5ee0c3f43066
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Bahai believers - http://http/www.worldatlas.com/articles/religious-beliefs-in-yemen.html
- Persecution of other religious minorities: UN News - https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/10/1022762
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Moammer al-Iryani - https://www.timesofisrael.com/yemeni-minister-says-fate-of-countrys-remaining-jews-unknown/
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Quranic culture book - http://https/www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper
- Persecution of other religious minorities: 2018 Report on International Religious Freedom - https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/yemen/

Additional reports and articles

WWR in-depth reports

A selection of in-depth reports is available at: http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/ (password: freedom).

At the time of publication there were no items specifically for Yemen.

World Watch Monitor news articles

Articles are available at: https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/yemen

Recent country developments

Up-to-date articles are available at: http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Yemen (password: freedom).