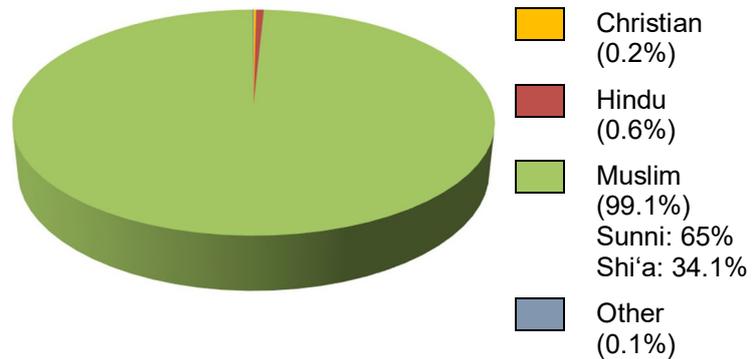
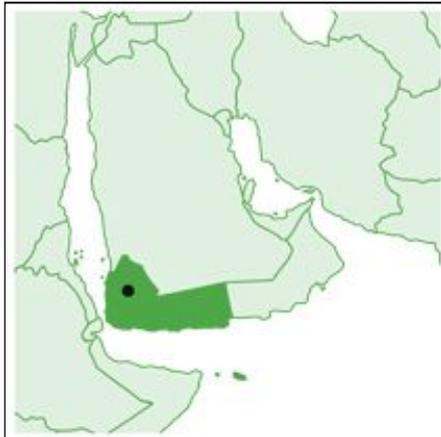


YEMEN



Area: 536,869 km ²	Population: 25.6 million	Political system: Autocracy ¹	Major Language(s): Arabic
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Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Yemen is a republic with a constitution that provides for a president, a parliament, and an independent judiciary. The president is also commander-in-chief of the army. In recent years, different groups of society – Shi'a, Sunni, Jihadists and tribal fighters – have engaged frequently in conflict, leaving the poorest country in the Middle East permanently in a civil war situation.

The parliament, which has 301 seats, is elected for a six-year term. Since the unification of North Yemen and South Yemen in 1990, three elections for the parliament have taken place – 1993, 1997 and 2003. Planned elections in 2009 did not take place because of a dispute over a reform of the election law. Since 1999 the head of state has been elected in direct elections. Former president Ali Abdullah Saleh stepped down in 2012. In his place, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, the sole consensus candidate, was elected for a two-year transitional period to form a national unity government. Shi'a Houthi rebels from the former North Yemen, backed by former president Saleh, staged an armed takeover against the government in 2014. Hadi resigned in January 2015 and fled to Aden. Consequently, the rebels took over the presidential palace.²

In March 2015, a Saudi-led military coalition intervened in Yemen to stop the rebels, doing so with the support of the U.S., Egypt, the Emirates and France. Despite a cease-fire agreement from April 2016, fighting between government troops and Houthi rebels continue with dozens killed.³ Abdulmalik Al-Houthi, the Houthi leader, and Ahmed Ali Abdullah Saleh, son of the former President, have been targeted by the EU with a travel ban and an asset freeze. It came in response to their actions, which were seen as harming Yemen's peace and stability. Two other Houthi as well as former President Ali Abdullah Saleh have been under the same restrictions since December 2014.⁴

International Aid organisations described the situation in Yemen as critical and repeatedly called for peace. According to a joint report of 16 NGOs from April 2016, 6,610 Yemenite have been killed since the beginning of the military intervention and 2.75 million people have fled. 82 percent of the country's population depends on humanitarian aid and about 25 percent of the population is under the imminent threat of famine.⁵ Aid organisations also report a deteriorating security situation, with several incidents including attacks on staff members and abductions.⁶

Five Salesian priests were in Yemen, but three left the country, and at the time of writing the Catholic Church is served by two priests, although one of them has been kidnapped without any news since March 2016. There are also two female congregations.

The constitution of 1994 declares the country as Arabic, Islamic and independent state (article 1) with Islam as the state religion (article 2). Article 3 states that "Islamic law is the source of all legislation". Neither the constitution nor other laws protect freedom of religion, but freedom of thought is protected "within the limits of the law" and the constitution declares adherence to international human rights law. Proselytism is prohibited as well as conversion from Islam to another religion. Mockery of religion is also prohibited. The building of mosques and other places of worship needs approval, but there are no reports of denial of approval for non-Muslim places of worship. Non-Muslim clerics are allowed to wear liturgical dress, and non-Muslim services and liturgies are allowed. Islamic religious education is required for state-run schools, but not for private educational institutes. Other forms of religious education are not provided in public schools. Recently, the transitional government has eased some restrictions on various religious practices and on religious speech, including lifting a ban on public commemorations of the Shi'a holy days of Ashura and Ghadir. Public commemoration of Shi'a holy days occasionally resulted in clashes with Sunni groups.⁷

The internationally-recognised government-in-exile was weakened by the Houthi takeover and lacked the capacity to enforce laws against human rights abuses. According to the U.S. State Department's 2015 human rights report, this resulted in a number of human rights abuses such as arbitrary killings, disappearances, kidnappings, and other violence committed by various groups. The report also lists infringements on citizens' privacy rights and limits on freedom of speech, press, assembly, association, religion, and movement.⁸

Incidents

Three German Evangelical Christians, two development aid workers and their son, were reported killed in September 2014, five years after their abduction.

In December 2015, unknown attackers blew up the Immaculate Conception Church in the Mualla district of Aden. The abandoned Catholic Church, built during the British colonial era in the 1960s, was already severely damaged after a Saudi-led coalition air strike in May.⁹

In March 2016, Islamist fighters killed 16 people, including four Mother Teresa Sisters from Ruanda, India and Kenya, in an attack on a Christian home for the elderly. A kidnapped Salesian priest of Indian origin is also missing since this attack.¹⁰ Bishop Paul Hinder, Vicar Apostolic of Southern Arabia, warned in an interview with Austrian Catholic Church Bulletins, that soon one would be able to count the Christians remaining in Yemen "on the fingers of one hand".¹¹ Since the attack, the liturgical life in the four Catholic parishes in Yemen has almost come to a standstill. Following the Houthi takeover, representatives of the Christian community reported increased scrutiny, with Christians being more discreet in order not to attract attention.¹²

Israel evacuated a group of 19 Jews in mid-March 2016 in a secret mission, leaving an estimated 50 Jews remaining in Yemen, mainly living in a closed compound in Sanaa, according to the Jewish Agency. Since the creation of Israel, some 51,000 Yemenite Jews have been brought to Israel, almost all of them in the years 1949-50.¹³

According to a Human Rights Watch report, a member of the Baha'i faith, detained since December 2013, faces the death penalty. In the indictment, the prosecutor charged Hamed Kamal Muhammad bin Haydara under Yemen's penal code with, among other crimes, insulting Islam and committing apostasy.¹⁴

In 2015 Islamic extremists affiliated with Daesh (ISIS) claimed responsibility for a series of attacks on Houthi-affiliated Shi'a mosques.¹⁵

Prospects for Freedom of Religion

Despite attempts of the transitional government to ease restrictions and provide for equal rights regardless of race, gender, language, belief, or disability, the government-in-exile was unable to enforce the rule of law in the country. Discrimination remained a serious problem. The Houthi refused to approve a draft constitution completed in January 2015.¹⁶ The ongoing conflict is putting the cohesion of society at risk, making dialogue at a national level very difficult. Yemen has also become a base for radical Islamic groups, adding to instability in the country.¹⁷ The continuous fighting and high tensions in the country remain a cause for concern with regard to religious freedom.

¹ Yemen is currently in a state of political limbo. The Houthis claim the parliament has been dissolved and replaced by a transitional revolutionary council, headed by Mohammed Ali al-Houthi. But the UN, US and Gulf Co-operation Council refuse to recognize the Houthis' rule. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14704852>.

² <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=252937#wrapper>

³ http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2016-04/yemen_21.php

⁴ <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/06/08-yemen-un-sanctions/>

⁵ <http://oxf.am/Z7ZT>; <https://www.care.de/meldungen/meldung/News/detail/jemen-waffenstillstand-muss-halten-oder-tausende-mehr-werden-sterben/>

⁶ <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/yemen-icrc-staff-abducted-sanaa>; <http://www.dahw.de/presse3/aktuelle-pressemitteilungen/entfuehrte-aerzte-in-jemen-sind-wieder-frei>

⁷ <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=238486>

⁸ <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=252955>

⁹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-idUSKBN0TS1D220151209>

¹⁰ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35735947>;

¹¹ <http://www.kirchenzeitung.at/newsdetail/rubrik/es-gibt-kaum-mehr-christen-im-jemen/>

¹² <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=238486>

¹³ <http://mfa.gov.il/mfa/israelexperience/people/pages/the-historic-end-of-aliyah-from-yemen-21-mar-2016.aspx>;
<http://www.jewishagency.org/blog/1/article/46201>

¹⁴ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/04/01/yemen-bahai-adherent-faces-death-penalty>;

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=238486>

¹⁵ <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=252955>

¹⁶ <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=252955>

¹⁷ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14704852>