

YEMEN 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution declares Islam the state religion. It provides for freedom of thought and expression “within the limits of the law” but does not mention freedom of religion, belief, or conscience. The constitution states sharia is the source of all legislation, although it coexists with secular common law and civil code models of law in a hybrid legal system. The law prohibits denunciation of Islam, conversion from Islam to another religion, and proselytizing directed at Muslims. Apostasy is a capital offense, and blasphemy is punishable by fines or imprisonment.

The conflict that began in 2014 between the government and Ansar Allah, a movement more commonly known as the Houthis whose revolutionary ideology is grounded in interpretations of Zaydi Shi’ism, continued throughout the year. Government control was limited in much of the country’s territory, which constrained its ability to address abuses of religious liberty, including those committed by security personnel, tribal leaders, or local military commanders in areas under its nominal control. In his March report, the UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief said state and nonstate actors “exploited the identity of religious or belief minorities to further their political, economic, and military objectives.” According to a March report by the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), government and allied forces suppressed religious rituals as a part of their efforts to limit the spread of COVID-19, although this suppression declined during 2021 as the government focused less on pandemic prevention. The UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief stated authorities subjected prominent Christian figures to intimidation or threats of being charged with apostasy, which carried the death penalty. He also said progovernment armed forces targeted Houthi Shia religious sites for expropriation or destruction, and reportedly killed worshippers and committed sexual violence while attacking these religious sites. The NGO Open Doors stated that in areas dominated or freed by the Saudi-led coalition, radical Sunni groups frequently targeted Christians.

During the year, the Houthis continued to control approximately one-third of the country's territory, including 70 to 80 percent of the population. The UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief stated that the Houthis coerced Jewish and Baha'i communities into leaving the country through blackmail and intimidation, arbitrarily detaining Jewish and Baha'i religious leaders and community members. *Arab News* and social media posts reported that according to the NGO Yemeni Network for Rights and Freedoms, since 2015, the Houthis had committed more than 3,000 abuses against mosques and other places of worship and "were involved in 109 killings of religious men, imams, and religious leaders." These abuses occurred in 14 governorates and included kidnapping as well as killing imams and preachers, beating and torturing worshipers, and prohibiting Sunni prayers during Ramadan. In March, ACLED reported Houthi forces were responsible for more than two-thirds of recorded cases of religious repression in the country in 2021. ACLED also stated incidents of religious repression in Houthi-controlled areas increased by 52 percent from 2020 to 2021 and attributed the increase to "a surge in the repression of Sunni and Salafi groups, the suppression of non-Zaydi religious rituals, and the imposition of Houthi ideology."

As of year's end, the Houthis continued to imprison Jewish Yemeni citizen Levi Salem Musa Marhabi, whom they have held since 2016 and despite a 2019 order by a Houthi "court" that he be released. According to the NGO Insaf, Houthi officials tortured Marhabi during his detention, leaving him partially paralyzed. The UN special rapporteur said the Houthis practiced systematic discrimination against members of the Baha'i community, arresting and deporting them, raiding their gatherings, seizing their properties, and denying them employment opportunities. According to ACLED, the Houthis targeted Christian converts through "judicial harassment on charges of apostasy" as well as other extrajudicial means such as threats and assaults. They imposed ideologically driven constraints on women's freedom of movement and access to employment, education, and health care. According to the UN special rapporteur, the Houthis spread "hateful rhetoric" against religious minorities in the educational curriculum. According to Open Doors, Christians and other religious minorities were the most vulnerable in Houthi-controlled areas in the north and rural areas

in the south, where there was a strong al-Qa'ida presence and where ISIS-Yemen (ISIS-Y) also targeted Christians.

Open Doors said pressure on Christians in all spheres of life, including education, employment, family life, and the ability to observe religious practices, was “at extreme levels.” Converts faced death threats and risked banishment from their tribes if they did not return to Islam. Open Doors reported Muslim humanitarian aid providers denied assistance to religious minorities.

The Department of State suspended U.S. embassy operations in Sana'a in 2015, and U.S. diplomatic operations regarding Yemen have since been coordinated by the Yemen Affairs Unit (YAU) based in Saudi Arabia. Due to security concerns arising from the conflict, the U.S. government had limited to no access to religious communities in the country during the year. The YAU continued to closely monitor the conditions of religious minority detainees and to press for their release, maintain communication with religious contacts among the Yemeni diaspora communities, and promote religious freedom through social media. The U.S. Ambassador to Yemen and the U.S. Special Envoy for Yemen spoke with foreign government officials, civil society organizations, and religious leaders during the year regarding Marhabi's ongoing detention.

On November 30, 2022, the Secretary of State designated the Houthis as an “entity of particular concern” under section 301 of the Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act of 2016 (P.L. 114-281) for having engaged in particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 31 million (midyear 2022). More than 99 percent of the population is Muslim (2010 estimate, the latest available), associating their beliefs with either the Shafi'i order of Sunni Islam or Zaydi Islam, a distinct form of Shia Islam. There are also significant numbers of Sunni followers of the Maliki and Hanbali schools, and others who are Ismaili and Twelver followers of Shia Islam. While there are no official statistics, the U.S. government estimates 65 percent of the population is Sunni and 35 percent Zaydi.

The NGO ACAPS estimates that 55 percent of Muslims are Shafi'i Sunni and 45 percent are Zaydi Shia. Hindus, Baha'is, Christians (many of whom are economic migrants), and Jews together make up less than 1 percent of the population.

There is no firm estimate of the number of persons of Indian origin or of those who practice Hinduism, Sikhism, or the Dawoodi Bohra variant of Ismaili Shia Islam residing in the country. The preconflict Hindu population was 150,000 (2010 estimate), concentrated in Aden, Mukalla, Shihr, Lahaj, Mokha, and Hudaydah. Many members of the Indian-origin community have resided in the country for generations and hold Yemeni citizenship. According to one source, the number of Indian nationals is fewer than 3,000.

According to a Baha'i Faith spokesperson, the Baha'i Faith community has as many as 2,000 members (2016 estimate, the latest available). Christian groups include Roman Catholics, Ethiopian Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Anglicans, and Protestants. 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. Open Doors estimates there are a few thousand Christians in the country, most of whom are converts from Islam.

The Jewish community is an Indigenous minority religious group. Media outlets reported in March that approximately four Jews remained in the country after the Houthis expelled 13 individuals from three families in early 2021. One Jewish citizen, Levi Salem Musa Marhabi, remains in Houthi-controlled detention, where he has been since 2016. In January, a different UN report issued by the UN Panel of Experts stated that seven Jewish individuals remain in the country, including one whom the Houthis have detained.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution declares Islam to be the state religion. It provides for freedom of thought and expression "within the limits of the law" but does not mention

freedom of religion, belief, or conscience. The constitution states sharia is the source of all legislation.

Sharia serves as the basis of the legal system, although it coexists with secular common law and civil code models of law in a hybrid legal system. The courts of the first instance address civil, criminal, commercial, and personal-status cases. Informal tribunals, operating mostly in rural areas, administer customary law in addition to sharia to resolve disputes.

The constitution states that the president must be a Muslim who “practices his Islamic duties”; however, it allows non-Muslims to run for parliament, as long as they “fulfill their religious duties.” The law does not prohibit political parties based on religion, but it states parties may not claim to be the sole representative of any religion, oppose Islam, or restrict membership to a particular religious group.

The criminal code states that “deliberate” and “insistent” denunciation of Islam or conversion from Islam to another religion is apostasy, a capital offense. The law allows those charged with apostasy three opportunities and 30 days to repent; upon repentance, they are spared the death penalty.

Blasphemy laws prohibit the “ridicule” of religions, punishable with up to three years’ imprisonment or a fine of unspecified amount. If Islam is the religion subject to ridicule, the punishment is up to five years or a fine of unspecified amount. The criminal code prescribes five years’ imprisonment or a fine to anyone who “distorts willfully the Holy Quran in a manner that changes its meaning with the purpose of harming the natural religion.”

Family law prohibits marriage between a Muslim and an individual whom the law defines as an apostate. Muslim women may not marry non-Muslims and Muslim men may not marry women who do not practice one of the three Abrahamic religions recognized by law (Islam, Christianity, or Judaism). By law, a woman seeking custody of a child “ought not” be an apostate; a man “ought” to be of the same faith as the child.

The law prohibits proselytizing directed at Muslims.

There is no provision for the registration of religious groups. The law prohibits NGO involvement in political or religious activities.

By law, the government must authorize construction of new buildings. The law, however, does not mention places of worship specifically. The law criminalizes “assaulting the sanctity of faith” and prescribes up to one year’s imprisonment or a fine of up to 2,000 rials (\$3) to a person who “destroys or misrepresents or profanes a mosque” or other government-authorized religious site or disrupts religious rituals.

Public schools must provide instruction on Islam but not on other religions. The law states primary school classes must include knowledge of Islamic rituals and the country’s history and culture within the context of Islamic civilization. The law also specifies knowledge of Islamic beliefs as an objective of secondary education. Public schools are required to teach Sunni and Shia students the same curriculum, but the government is unable to enforce this requirement in Houthi-controlled areas, where NGO analysis of instructional materials indicates schools are teaching Zaydi principles only and the Houthis have been systematically changing the curriculum to reflect their ideology.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

The conflict that began in 2014 between the government, led by then President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, and the Houthis, an armed movement whose revolutionary ideology is grounded in interpretations of Zaydi Shi’ism, continued throughout the year. The parties agreed to a two-month truce brokered by the United Nations, beginning on April 2, the first day of Ramadan. The parties subsequently agreed on two separate, two-month extensions, which formally lapsed on October 2. At year’s end, however, the main terms of the truce agreement remained in place, including a halt in Saudi-led coalition airstrikes, Houthi regional attacks, and greatly reduced fighting inside the country. The

government exercised limited legal or administrative control in much of the country's territory throughout the year, which constrained its ability to enforce laws or address abuses of religious liberty committed in the country, including those committed by security personnel, tribal leaders, or local military commanders in areas under its nominal control. In a televised address on April 7, Hadi transferred his powers to an eight-member Presidential Leadership Council, headed by Rashad al-Alimi, that brought together rival non-Houthi leaders, including Southern Transitional Council (STC) leader Aidarous al-Zubaidi.

Most analysts continued to state that political and economic issues were more significant drivers of the conflict than religion. While the Houthis' ideology (and that of some of their opponents) is rooted in religious terms, not all Yemeni Zaydis are Houthi, and not all Houthi supporters are Zaydi.

On March 2, then UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief Ahmed Shaheed released a report titled *Rights of persons belonging to religious or belief minorities in situations of conflict or insecurity*. In the report, Shaheed said state and nonstate actors "exploited the identity of religious or belief minorities to further their political, economic, and military objectives." Analysis posted online in September by the Middle East Institute (MEI) stated, "Throughout the war, the country has undergone a radical political, religious, and cultural makeover, partially overturning the Yemeni Republic [in the north of the country] and opening a new chapter as a theological state presided over by a religious leader, Abdul Malek al-Houthi."

According to Humanist International's *Freedom of Thought Report 2022*, authorities in both government- and Houthi-controlled areas "brutally repressed" expressions of humanist values. The NGO reported it was difficult to run an overtly humanist organization in the country.

In March, ACLED published a report, *Mapping Religious Repression in Yemen (2020-2021)*. According to the report, the government and its allies, including STC forces, suppressed religious rituals as a part of their efforts to limit the spread of COVID-19. ACLED stated that in 2021, religious repression by these forces

decreased by 62 percent from 2020 levels, “reflecting a declining focus on the pandemic.”

In December, Open Doors released a report on the country that stated that in areas controlled by groups associated with the Saudi-led coalition, radical Sunni groups frequently targeted Christians. According to UN Special Rapporteur Shaheed, authorities subjected prominent Christian figures to intimidation or threats of being charged with apostasy, which carried the death penalty.

Government authorities reportedly permitted prisoners and detainees to engage in Islamic religious observances but prevented religious minorities from practicing their faiths.

In his March report, UN Special Rapporteur Shaheed stated that progovernment armed forces targeted Shia religious sites within Houthi-controlled territory, either taking them over or destroying them completely. Armed forces also reportedly killed worshippers and committed sexual violence while attacking the sites. The report did not provide specific examples.

Members of the Jewish community were not eligible to serve in the military or national government. Authorities forbade them from carrying the ceremonial national dagger.

In August, the Israel-based *Kann News* reported the STC was restoring a Jewish cemetery in Aden. A Yemeni official said the renovation of the cemetery was a “message to all Aden residents that Aden is a city of peace and that we will not accept any harm to any holy site.”

Abuses by Foreign Forces or Nonstate Actors

At year’s end, the Houthis continued to control approximately one-third of the country’s territory, containing 70 to 80 percent of the population. Media sources reported that in areas they controlled, the Houthis enforced a strict interpretation of Zaydism, that is not shared by other Zaydi Shia in the country, and

discriminated against individuals who did not follow their interpretation of those practices and doctrines, particularly religious minorities and women.

The Houthis established the Supreme Political Council in 2016. The Supreme Political Council is a 10-member entity that purports to establish and determine a governing structure for the country under the Houthi-led regime in Sana'a. The international community deems the Supreme Political Council unconstitutional and illegitimate, and the international community continued to recognize the authority of the Presidential Leadership Council.

According to ACLED's *Mapping Religious Repression in Yemen* report, Houthi forces were responsible for more than two-thirds of recorded cases of religious repression in the country in 2021. ACLED also stated that incidents of religious repression in Houthi-controlled areas increased by 52 percent from 2020 to 2021 and attributed the increase to "a surge in the repression of Sunni and Salafi groups, the suppression of non-Zaydi religious rituals, and the imposition of Houthi ideology." Repression against non-Muslim religious minorities, including Baha'is, Jews, and Christians, was concentrated in the Houthi-controlled areas of Amran, Ta'iz, and Amanat al-Asimah. According to ACLED, although non-Muslim minorities constituted less than 1 percent of the population, approximately 5 percent of religious repression events in the country targeted religious minorities.

In his March report, UN Special Rapporteur Shaheed stated the Houthis coerced Jewish and Baha'i communities into leaving the country through blackmail and intimidation, arbitrarily detaining Jewish and Baha'i religious leaders and community members. *Jewish Insider* reported that after the release of the report, Abdullah Ali Fadhel Al-Saadi, the country's permanent representative to the United Nations, said at a meeting of the UN Human Rights Council, "We commend [the special rapporteur's] efforts and support his references to Houthi violations against religious minorities. Like all other extremist terrorist organizations, the Houthis have undertaken violations of the rights of Jewish and Baha'i societies. The Houthis have expelled many minorities, blackmailed them, and have arbitrarily detained their leaders and seized their work and properties."

Arab News and social media posts reported that according to the Yemeni Network for Rights and Freedoms, since 2015, the Houthis committed more than 3,000 abuses against mosques, and other places of worship and “were involved in 109 killings of religious men, imams, and religious leaders.” The abuses occurred in 14 governorates, including Sana’a, Amran, Hajjah, Sa’dah, al-Jawf, Ma’rib, Dhamar, Ibb, Al-Bayda, al-Dhale, Ta’iz, Raymah, and al-Mahwite, and included kidnapping as well as killing imams and preachers, beating and torturing worshipers, and prohibiting Tarawih prayers (a Sunni Ramadan ritual). The Yemeni Network for Rights and Freedoms also stated Houthi authorities imposed their ideology on preachers and converted mosques into schools “for sectarian radicalization of children.”

On January 25, the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen reported to the president of the Security Council that in “Houthi-controlled areas, detention and the judicial system are being instrumentalized to quell any opposition or perceived dissent, especially by journalists, women, and religious minorities.” The panel stated there were “seven Jewish individuals still in Yemen, including one who remains detained despite an order to release him issued in July 2019.” The panel also documented two cases of unnamed Christians detained by the Houthis based on their religion.

In March, *Jewish Insider* reported the executive director of the American Sephardi Federation told the media outlet the Yemeni Jewish individual in detention referenced by UN Special Rapporteur Shaheed in his March report was “undoubtedly Levi Salem Musa Marhabi, who has been illegally imprisoned and tortured by Ansar Allah since 2016.” According to the NGO Insaf, Houthi officials tortured Marhabi during his detention, leaving him partially paralyzed. Houthi authorities accused Marhabi of helping to remove an ancient Torah scroll from the country, but a 2019 Houthi “court” decision ordered his release. The Houthis reportedly continued to demand the return of the scroll from Israel.

In an annex to his March report titled *Experiences of persons belonging to the Baha’i minority community in conditions of increasing insecurity*, UN Special Rapporteur Shaheed said Houthis practiced systematic discrimination against the Baha’i community. Houthis arrested, deported, raided gatherings, banned

institutions, and seized properties of Baha'is solely based on their faith. Houthi leaders also subjected Baha'is to "smear campaigns" and "hateful rhetoric" that incited violence against them, accusing them in televised addresses of being foreign agents or enemies of the state, including claims the Baha'is were acting as Israeli spies. Houthi authorities banned banking institutions from making loans to Baha'is, arbitrarily seized Baha'i businesses and properties, and discouraged employers, through intimidation, from hiring Baha'i individuals.

In its January report, the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen stated judicial procedures against several Baha'is remained active, although Houthi authorities had expelled them from the country. The panel stated one of the objectives of these court cases was "to complete the seizure of their assets and properties."

In October, the Baha'i International Community (BIC) released a statement saying Baha'is "remain[ed] systematically persecuted at the hands of the Houthis simply because of their religious affiliation." BIC said the Houthi "judiciary" approved "the confiscation of Baha'i-owned assets and property, and the blacklisting of Baha'is, leading to thousands of them being denied the possibility to earn a living and many more being placed under constant surveillance." According to BIC, 24 Baha'is under indictment by Houthi authorities and "six Baha'is who were unjustly detained and tortured in Sana'a and later deported from the country [were] branded by the authorities as fugitives, despite the fact that the condition the Houthis gave for their release was their immediate departure."

ACLED stated Houthis targeted Christian converts through threats, assaults, and "judicial harassment on charges of apostasy." The NGO said that in some cases, Houthi authorities pressured Christian converts to surrender by detaining their relatives or raiding and vandalizing their homes. According to ACLED, "Muslim civilians [were] also threatened with trumped up accusations of conversion to Christianity."

According to the Open Doors report, Christians and other religious minorities were the most vulnerable in Houthi-controlled areas in the north and rural areas in the south, where there was a strong al-Qa'ida presence. The report also stated that because Houthi-controlled areas were heavily policed and characterized by

an atmosphere of spying and fear, religious dissent was more likely to lead to imprisonment, physical abuse, or death than in government-controlled territory.

On November 8, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) published a report stating humanitarian access in government- and Houthi-controlled areas remained challenging. According to OCHA, between July and September, there were 307 incidents of movement restrictions, approximately 94 percent of which were in Houthi-controlled areas. This was largely a consequence of the Houthis requiring that a close male relative (*mahram*) accompany female Yemeni aid workers when conducting field missions within and between governorates as well as on trips outside Yemen involving transit through Sana'a International Airport, which led to the cancellation of field visits and aid deliveries.

Amnesty International stated, "The mahram requirement, ... is not part of Yemeni law [and] is being enforced by the Houthis through verbal directives. Since April, the Houthi de facto authorities ... increasingly insisted on the mahram requirement to restrict the movement of women across areas they control in northern Yemen, including Sa'dah, Dhamar, Hudaydah, and Hajjah Governorates, and Sana'a." An Agence France-Presse report in March stated that the mahram requirement reflected how the Houthis were "enforcing their austere brand of Islam with an iron fist."

In March, the NGO Mwatana for Human Rights issued a statement condemning the Houthis' "ideological targeting of women." The group said authorities "harassed women traveling without a mahram, expelled and prevented women from work, imposed gender segregation in some universities, demanded women dress a certain way, and endangered women by preventing access to reproductive healthcare in some areas under its control." The NGO said clerics in Houthi-controlled areas used misogynistic rhetoric in Friday sermons and post-prayer sermons.

According to the media outlet *iMArabia*, in April during the month of Ramadan, Houthi rebels stormed several Sunni mosques in areas under their control, particularly in Sana'a and Amran, to stop Tarawih prayers and replaced them with

recorded speeches by Houthi leader Abdul-Malik Badreddin al-Houthi. Minister of Information, Culture, and Tourism Muammar al-Eryani denounced the attacks as an extension of the Houthis' attempts to impose their sectarian beliefs on areas under their control and posted a video on Twitter of Houthi rebels storming the Iman Mosque in the Nuqum neighborhood in Sana'a.

In April, *iMArabic* reported the "Waqf Commission" and "Guidance Office" in Sana'a and Ibb directed Houthi militias to delay the Maghrib (sunset) prayer call by several minutes during Ramadan "in order to impose their beliefs on the need to cover the night and see the stars, which is the latest Houthi invention to violate freedom of belief."

In March, the independent news agency al-Masdar Online reported that the Houthis continued to repress non-Zaydi religious practices by imposing "taxes" and Zaydi norms on religious celebrations, including weddings, at Salafi centers, and for Tarawih prayers conducted during Ramadan, and maintained a mandatory 20 percent charitable "tax" (*zakat*) on economic activities.

According to the March report of UN Special Rapporteur Shaheed, the Houthis spread "hateful rhetoric" against religious minorities in the educational curriculum. The Houthis added anti-Israel slogans and rhetoric into the elementary education curriculum and books. Sources reported to the United Nations that leaders in Houthi-held areas amended school curricula to solely reflect the Houthi understanding of Islam.

In April, ACLED reported that pro-Houthi authorities closed a women's Quranic memorization center and mosque in Ibb Governate's Ar Radmah District for failing to teach lessons by the Houthi founder, Hussein al Houthi. According to ACLED, this was a continued escalation in Houthi attacks on Sunni women's places of worship from the prior year.

MEI reported in September that individuals reported being taken from their jobs to attend religious workshops in which they were taught about the Zaydi faith and the Houthis' moral leadership. They were ushered into buses from their workplace without notice and given no choice. Through peer pressure or

willingly, some parents sent their children to Houthi summer camps held in mosques and schools, mainly in Sa'dah and other territories under the movement's control. The MEI report also stated the Houthis, in addition to targeting Baha'is, Christians, and Jews, restricted the freedom of Sunni Muslims.

During the year, the NGO Freedom House criticized the situation in the country, based on Houthi authorities' "growing assertion of ideological control over education in recent years, including through replacement of staff, suppression of dissent, and political indoctrination." According to the NGO, this was a continuation of the widely reported trend in 2021 of the Houthis changing textbooks to indoctrinate students in what they considered the "true Islam" and to incite violence and hate through persistent antisemitic rhetoric.

The 10th periodic report of the government's National Commission to Investigate Alleged Violations of Human Rights (National Commission), released in August, detailed the unlawful recruitment or use of child soldiers by all parties to the conflict, including the Yemeni Armed Forces. The report further stated Houthi militia leaders recruited children under the age of 18 as soldiers by enticing them, sometimes with promises of money, to participate in militia-led "religious orientations, which aim at inculcating Houthi militia's ideas in the children's minds and swaying them into the importance of fighting in the ranks of the group." The National Commission documented 106 incidents of child recruitment by Houthi militias between January 2021 and July 2022.

Multiple media outlets throughout the year reported that the Houthis continued to use the antisemitic slogan, "Allah is great, death to America, death to Israel, curse the Jews, victory to Islam." The UN Panel of Experts on Yemen stated children in Houthi summer camps were instructed to shout this slogan. Houthi-controlled media also broadcast antisemitic statements and sermons. On June 22, in an address televised on the Houthi propaganda television outlet al-Masirah, Houthi leader Badreddin al-Houthi said the Prophet Muhammad emphasized keeping living spaces clean as part of one's faith and that Jewish neighborhoods were "the dirtiest place in Medina" during the Prophet Muhammad's lifetime. Badreddin al-Houthi also stated that the Prophet told his followers, "Do not be like the Jews."

On March 14, Muhammad Ali al-Houthi, a member of the Houthi Supreme Political Council, said in an interview on the Lebanese television station al-Mayadeen that the Russian war on Ukraine was “the result of the evil-doing of the Jews.” He said, “If the president of Ukraine was someone else rather than that Jew [Volodymyr Zelenskyy], perhaps they would not have ended up in war.”

On April 5, the official Houthi website Ansarollah.com published an article in which the author stated Jews and Christians refused to convert to Islam out of “arrogance” and that Jews rejected the Prophet Muhammad because he was an Arab. The author said, “Allah's curse be upon the unbelievers.”

On April 25 on al-Masirah, Houthi Deputy Minister of Higher Education Ali Yahya Sharaf al-Din said the Israeli flag “consists of two entwined triangles, representing religion and state, and two blue stripes, one at the bottom and one at the top, representing the efforts of Israel, that religious state, to take large parts of our Arab countries, from the Euphrates to the Nile.”

On April 26, a program on al-Masirah featured university professor Abd al-Wahud Muqasher, who stated that Muslims’ conflict with Jews is religious and “an existential conflict of civilizations.” He added that Muslims “are fighting Israel and those behind it – America and the crusader West.” According to the Quran, Muqasher said, Jews are the “filthiest and most evil human beings.” Muslims must exterminate the Jews, he claimed, and every Muslim must fight in order to liberate Palestine and Jerusalem “from the filth of the Jews.”

On September 4, al-Masirah broadcast a music video threatening Israel, with captions in both Arabic and Hebrew. The lyrics included the words, “Tell the Zionists that they will be disgraced.... Israel will come to an end.... We will disfigure their faces [and] let them taste our might and the heat of the piercing swords.... Tomorrow we will see Jerusalem cleansed of the filth of the Jews.”

Open Doors reported that Islamic terrorist groups such as al-Qa’ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and ISIS-Y oppressed local Christians, including Christian converts, whom they viewed as apostates, including by prohibiting worship activities and the observance of rituals such as baptism. Open Doors said these

groups operated with considerable impunity, “especially in Hadi-government-aligned areas.” According to a July UN report, AQAP was “well established in the central and eastern provinces” and was active in Shabwah, Abyan, and Bayda Governorates, while ISIS-Y’s presence in the country was in decline. In 2020, the United Nations stated ISIS-Y was active in Bayda and Dali Governorates.

According to analysis published in September by the Carnegie Middle East Center, groups identified as Salafi (Sunni Muslims who define Islam as anything that the Prophet Muhammad said or did and that was upheld by the first three generations of his followers) have become a significant force in the Saudi-led coalition. The Carnegie paper stated the Saudis had three reasons for strengthening ties with Salafi groups in the country: enmity between the Salafis and Houthis, the Salafis’ lack of a specific political agenda, and the continuation of Saudi religious influence in the country.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

According to the NGO International Christian Concern, most Christians were converts from Islam and practiced their faith in secret, meeting in small groups in homes or outdoors. The NGO said they had access to the Bible and other Christian resources online and through Christian media.

Open Doors said pressure on Christians in all spheres of life, including education, employment, family life, and the ability to observe religious practices, was “at extreme levels.” According to Open Doors, converts married to Muslims were at risk of losing custody of their children and managers denied promotions to employees they suspected of being Christian. Christians were often presumed to be associated with the West and were therefore expected to have access to funds. The NGO stated this made Christians “especially prone to become victims of crime....” The organization also reported that hospitals refused care to Christians. Open Doors stated that Muslims who converted to Christianity were considered to have brought dishonor upon their families and faced death threats and risked banishment from their tribes if they did not return to Islam. The NGO said Christian women experienced sexual harassment, rape, or forced marriages to Muslim men.

According to relief organizations, most local NGO employees were Muslims and international NGOs also depended on Muslim workers, including tribal leaders, for distributing humanitarian aid. Open Doors reported in May that Christians, including Christian converts, and other religious minorities frequently experienced discrimination when attempting to access humanitarian aid if aid distributors learned of their faith. An Open Doors analyst stated, “Their names can be removed from distribution lists, especially if help is being given out through local mosques where it can be checked whether someone is a good Muslim or not, based on mosque attendance.”

Due to the ongoing conflict, there was no way to ascertain the status of the country’s minority Ismaili Muslim community.

In May and June, the United Arab Emirates research and consulting firm ASDA’A-BCW surveyed youth between the ages of 18 and 24 in 17 Arab states and territories and reported that 34 percent of Yemeni respondents said preserving their religious and cultural identity was more important than creating a more globalized society.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The Department of State suspended embassy operations in Sana’a in 2015 and diplomatic operations related to Yemen have since been coordinated by the YAU, based in Saudi Arabia. Due to security concerns arising from the conflict, the U.S. government had limited to no access to religious communities in the country during the year. The U.S. government continued to engage with representatives of religious communities in the Yemeni diaspora and to closely monitor the conditions of religious minority detainees and to press for their release. It also condemned attacks impacting civilian targets and infrastructure. The U.S. Ambassador to Yemen and the U.S. Special Envoy for Yemen spoke with foreign government officials, civil society organizations, and religious leaders during the year regarding the ongoing detention of Marhabi.

The YAU also promoted religious freedom through social media. For example, on November 7, the YAU posted on Twitter, highlighting that freedom of religion had been central to the American experience since the inception of the United States.

On November 30, 2022, the Secretary of State designated the Houthis as an “entity of particular concern” under section 301 of the Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act of 2016 (P.L. 114-281) for having engaged in particularly severe violations of religious freedom.