



OSAC Country Security Report

Yemen

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This report is intended to supplement the U.S. Department of State Yemen Travel Advisory and [Yemen Country Information Page](#).

Embassy & Consulate Contact Information

U.S. Embassy Sanaa suspended operations in 2015 due to the ongoing civil conflict. The Yemen Affairs Unit (YAU), provisionally resident at U.S. Embassy Riyadh, continues U.S. diplomatic work to Yemen.

U.S. Embassy Yemen:

Tel: +966 (11) 488-3800

OSAC Country Chapter(s)

There is no Country Chapter in Yemen.

Contact [OSAC's Middle East & North Africa team](#) with any questions.

Yemen Travel Advisory

The current U.S. Department of State [Travel Advisory](#) at the date of this report's publication assesses that travelers should not travel to Yemen due to terrorism, civil unrest, crime, health risks, kidnapping, armed conflict, and landmines.

Crime

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Yemen as being a **CRITICAL**-threat location for crime directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

The U.S. Department of State has included a Crime "C" Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Yemen, indicating that there may be widespread violent crime and/or organized crime present in the country, and/or that local law enforcement may have limited ability to respond to serious crimes.

Yemen is often rated as one of the world's most fragile state due to the ongoing conflict, exemplified by an increased crime rate and a decrease in law enforcement. The instability created by Yemen's security, economic, and social conditions has created a fertile environment for crime and corruption both in the areas controlled by the Houthis and the internationally recognized government. Despite the prevalence of checkpoints throughout

the country, criminal activities such as kidnapping, petty theft, carjacking, scams, abuses, sexual harassment, assault, murder, violence, looting, and robbery are increasing at an alarming rate.

Kidnapping Threat

The U.S. Department of State has included a Kidnapping “K” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Yemen, indicating that criminal or terrorist individuals or groups have threatened to and/or have seized or detained and threatened to kill, injure, or continue to detain individuals in order to compel a third party (including a governmental organization) to do or abstain from doing something as a condition of release.

Since the beginning of Yemen’s civil war in 2015, rebel groups in Sana’a have systematically and unlawfully detained U.S. citizens, particularly dual U.S.-Yemeni citizens. Reports indicate that criminals target U.S. citizens by virtue of their citizenship, regardless of the amount of time they have spent in Yemen, their established connections with rebel groups, or their connections with local businesses or humanitarian organizations aimed at providing relief to those in need. U.S. citizens, especially youth, are also at risk of kidnapping for purposes of forced marriages. During detentions, which in some cases have lasted well over a year, U.S. citizens have not been able to contact their families or receive U.S. consular visits or those from international humanitarian organizations. U.S. government direct assistance to U.S. citizens in detention is severely limited, since there has been no U.S. diplomatic presence in Yemen following the Houthi rebel takeover of Sana’a.

Terrorism

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Yemen as being a **CRITICAL**-threat location for terrorism directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

The U.S. Department of State has included a Terrorism “T” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Yemen, indicating that terrorist attacks have occurred and/or specific threats against civilians, groups, or other targets may exist.

The threat posed by violent extremist groups in Yemen remains high, most notably in al-Bayda, Abyan, and Shabwah governorates. Al-Qa’ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has expanded its influence in Yemen since the beginning of the conflict. Because of the instability and violence in Yemen, the internationally recognized government cannot effectively enforce counterterrorism measures, and a large security vacuum persists. AQAP has benefitted from the conflict by significantly expanding its presence in the southern and eastern governorates. ISIS has also established a presence in Yemen and claimed responsibility for several deadly attacks throughout Yemen since 2016. Methods include suicide bombings, vehicle-borne IEDs (VBIEDs), ambushes, kidnappings, and targeted assassinations. All governorates of Yemen have witnessed violence due to conflicts between the Houthis, tribal militias, government forces, and a range of non-state actors, including AQAP and ISIS.

The U.S. government remains extremely concerned about possible attacks against U.S. citizens (whether visiting or residing in Yemen), U.S. private-sector facilities, and perceived U.S. and Western interests.

Political Violence and Civil Unrest

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Yemen as being a **CRITICAL**-threat location for political violence directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

The U.S. Department of State has included a Civil Unrest “U” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Yemen, indicating that demonstrations, protests, and/or strikes occur frequently, and/or that local law enforcement may have limited ability to respond adequately. Civil unrest can develop quickly without prior notice, often interrupting logistics and services. Avoid demonstration activity, as even those planned to remain peaceful have the potential to turn violent.

Elections/Political Stability

For nearly a decade, Yemen’s civil conflict has exacerbated one of the world’s worst food security emergencies and engendered a war economy that further disadvantages the most vulnerable. The protracted war has drawn in neighboring states; it has led to collapsed state institutions, local power vacuums and ungoverned spaces that militias and terrorists are exploiting to threaten close regional allies. The war has complicated ongoing counterterrorism efforts and has provided Iran a space to pursue its own ambitions in Yemen, further threatening regional stability.

Instability and ongoing threats in Yemen are at a severe level. During the 2015-2022 conflict, the Saudi led coalition (SLC) conducted numerous airstrikes and these, combined with artillery strikes by warring parties led to high levels of civilian casualties.

In December 2020, the Republic of Yemen Government officially returned to Aden, although the city continues to experience high levels of violence.

The Saudi-led coalition and the Houthis agreed to a formal ceasefire which subsequently lasted six months and resulted in a pause between significant acts of cross-border military activity and contained violence to lower levels in more isolated pockets of the country. Following the expiration of the formal ceasefire in October 2022, warring parties recommitted to pursuing a negotiated settlement to the conflict in December 2023 along with a set of measures to improve living conditions in Yemen. While the peace plan is still being negotiated, a resurgence of conflict remains possible given the intense political instability in the country and recent Houthi attacks against vessels transiting the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

Protests & Demonstrations

The Houthis have frequently encouraged protests in Sana'a against the SLC, and, in some cases, at UN offices and those of other international NGOs. The Israel-Hamas conflict and the Houthis' subsequent attacks in the Red Sea region has also been a catalyst for protest within Yemen. Most recently, mass protests took place in Aden over ongoing power outages in the city. Reports indicated protesters blocked traffic at multiple points and burned tires.

Anti-U.S./Anti-Western Sentiment

The security environment is not hospitable to U.S. citizens. The Houthi slogan of "Death to America, Death to Israel, Curse the Jews, Victory to Islam" exemplifies anti-U.S. sentiment of the rebel group. Local staff employed by the now-closed U.S. Embassy have been imprisoned due to their affiliation with the U.S.

Law Enforcement

The emergency line in Yemen is **199**; the service is unreliable, and the operators do not speak English.

The primary state security and intelligence-gathering entities of the internationally recognized government of Yemen are the Political Security Organization and the National Security Bureau. By law both organizations report to the president. The Criminal Investigation Division, an arm of the Ministry of Interior that conducts most criminal investigations and arrests, the paramilitary Special Security Forces, and the counterterrorism unit report to the interior minister. The Ministry of Defense supervised units to quell domestic unrest. Competing tribal, party, and sectarian influences reduced the exercise of governance in many areas. Houthi forces controlled most of the residual national security entities in sections of the north and other former state institutions. The government of Yemen staffed national security entities in areas under its control, although large areas under nominal government of Yemen control were effectively controlled by tribal leaders and local military commanders. The Southern Transitional Council had physical control of security in large areas of the south, including the government's temporary capital of Aden. Civilian authorities did not maintain effective control over security forces. There were credible reports that members of security forces on all sides committed abuses.

Due to the ongoing civil unrest throughout the country, local authorities may be unreliable and unwilling or unable to provide assistance. The current conflict has caused the deterioration and dislocation of Yemen's security sector. The Houthis remain in control of much of Yemen's traditional military infrastructure and weapons caches in the north. The Republic of Yemen Government (ROYG) armed forces continue to reconstitute themselves, even as they fight the Houthis and an expanded AQAP presence, in partnership with the SLC.

In ROYG-controlled areas, police and security units typically fall under the Interior Ministry; however, competing tribal, party, and sectarian influences have further reduced ROYG

authority, particularly in Aden and other STC-controlled areas where responsibility for police and security functions is fragmented across over dozens of different armed actors with sometimes-competing political allegiances and agendas. The most common police and security agencies belonging to the Ministry of Interior include the Special Security Forces (SSF) which principally patrol and staff checkpoints; the Emergency Police (Najda); and the General Police, which work in police stations and usually respond to reports of general criminal activities. However, police may not provide security support unless the victim pays them.

The situation is similar in Houthi-controlled areas, the police and security units fall under the Houthi Interior Ministry or the Houthis' Revolutionary Committee. The police and security agencies most people will encounter include the Special Security Forces and other security groups administrated by the Houthis' Revolutionary Committee, which principally patrol and staff checkpoints.

Members of the security forces on all sides commit abuses.

Police Response

Police stations are clearly identified with signs. Police officers on foot and in locations throughout Sana'a are also easy to find; however, it is very rare to find a police officer who can speak English.

Police and military checkpoints – official and unofficial – are common and may appear with little or no advance notice. Those staffing checking points generally do not wear police uniforms, which makes it difficult to recognize and differentiate police checkpoints from military or local tribal checkpoints. Sana'a and other Houthi-controlled cities are not safe for foreigners. Those manning checkpoints will likely stop foreigners, interrogate, possibly arrest them, and take them to the nearest police station. Yemenis who also possess any other foreign citizenship must carry their National Yemeni IDs to avoid targeting at checkpoints.

Travelers with Special Considerations

For [specific traveler concerns](#) in Yemen, review the local laws and circumstances on the Department of State's Country Information Page.

- [Women Travelers](#)
- [LGB Travelers](#)
- [Travelers with Disabilities](#)
- [Student Travelers](#)
- [Faith-Based Travelers](#)

Rule of Law, Arbitrary Detention, Official Harassment, Corruption, & Transparency

The U.S. Department of State has not included a Risk of Wrongful Detention “D” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Yemen.

Although the law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, both continue to occur because most Yemenis working in law enforcement have not received salaries for several years or are paid very low salaries, fostering an environment ripe for corruption. Those in Houthi-controlled areas have accused U.S. citizens of being spies for the U.S. Government, subjecting them to strict surveillance and arbitrary detention. Detainees face torture and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment or punishment. Prison conditions are mostly harsh and life threatening, and do not meet international standards. While the law provides for criminal penalties for official corruption, the government did not implement the law effectively. There were reports of official corruption during the year. Corruption was pervasive throughout the country, and observers reported petty corruption in nearly every government office. Job applicants were often expected to purchase their positions. Observers believed tax inspectors undervalued assessments and pocketed the difference. Many government officials and civil service employees received salaries for jobs they did not perform or multiple salaries for the same job. Corruption also regularly affected government procurement.

International and local observers, including Transparency International, agreed corruption was a serious problem in every branch and level of government, especially in the security sector. International observers claimed government officials benefited from insider arrangements, embezzlement, and bribes.

UN reporting also identified corruption among Houthi-controlled entities, including in selection of civil appointments, intimidation of opponents, and diversion of humanitarian aid.

The UN stated it found reasonable grounds to believe that all parties to the conflict engaged in arbitrary detention. Local NGOs reported arrests by unidentified authorities; frequent incommunicado detentions for long periods of time; and torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman treatment during detention.

Persons arrested were frequently denied their constitutional right to be charged within 24 hours. The law prohibits arrests or serving subpoenas between sundown and dawn, but local NGOs reported forces, including but not limited to the government of Yemen, the Houthis, and the Southern Transitional Council, took some persons suspected of crimes from their homes at night without warrants.

Cybersecurity

Privacy rights face routine and arbitrary infringement throughout the country. Houthi security actors search homes and private offices, monitor telephone calls, read personal mail, and email, and otherwise intrude into personal matters without legally issued warrants or judicial supervision. The law requires that the attorney general personally authorize telephone call monitoring and reading of personal mail and email, but there is no indication the law is followed in practice. There have been notable cases of Houthi intrusion into cyberspace. The

Houthi-controlled Public Telecommunications Corporation systematically blocks user access to websites and internet domains it deems dangerous to the rebel actors' political agenda.

Import/Export Restrictions

Yemen is a member of the major treaties administered by the World Intellectual Property Organization, having acceded to the Berne Convention on Copyright in 2008, to the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property in 2007 and the WIPO convention in 1979. However, due to the current conflict and limited government control over state institutions, authorities do not enforce intellectual property rights (IPR) effectively. The Ministry of Industry and Trading's opening of a second IP office in Aden in 2018 independent of the Houthi-controlled IP office in Sana'a raised rights-holder concerns that they would have to file duplicate trademark applications with both registries, and that third parties could use the opportunity to register duplicate trademarks in bad faith.

Conflict has crippled Yemen's economy and leads to frequent volatility in exchange rate and prices. Due to the limited penetration of the formal banking sector, many exchange transactions proceed through unregulated, private money exchange or black-market channels. International Monetary Fund reports highlight gaps in the Central Bank of Yemen's (CBY) supervisory capacity over the entire financial system, including compliance with anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) standards. Houthi-controlled authorities in Sana'a have arbitrarily shut down exchange businesses and seized new Yemeni Rial (YER) banknotes printed by the CBY in Aden, while the inferior quality of some CBY-printed notes has enabled widespread counterfeiting. Reports from both Sana'a and Aden indicate that a range of criminal groups engage in the distribution of counterfeit YER notes and counterfeit foreign currency.

A number of Yemeni individuals and entities are currently sanctioned under the U.S. Department of Treasury's [Yemen Sanctions Program](#) and other authorities. Check the Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) [Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons](#) list prior to undertaking business with any Yemeni individuals or entities.

There are no written restrictions against the use or importation of satellite phones in ROYG-controlled areas, however, restrictions could be leveled in an arbitrary manner. The use of satellite phones in Houthi territory is unlikely to be accepted without prior permission from Houthi authorities.

A country-specific listing of items/goods prohibited from being exported to the country or that are otherwise restricted is available from the U.S. International Trade Agency [website](#).

Additional resources and reports can be found in the [OSAC Traveler Toolkit](#).