

Thematic Report: Drivers of Armed Violence Impacting Civilians in Yemeni Cities

January 2021

Over a third of civilian casualties caused by armed violence in Yemen this year have been in urban areas. However, the type of armed violence, and the nature of the conflict driving these incidents, varies significantly from city to city, each place laced with its own complex set of dynamics, presenting a unique but deadly set of threats to inhabitants. Violence frequently impacts on residential areas, with the effects amplified and exacerbated in densely populated urban areas. This report examines the nature of armed violence impacting civilians in three of Yemen's most populous cities, Sana'a, Ta'izz and Aden, as well as Hudaydah, whose outskirts have been subsumed by hostilities over the past two years, and Ma'rib, where the influx of IDPs has swelled the city's population. In each case, the report uses 2020 CIMP data from the districts comprising the main urbanised parts of the city. The report is based on CIMP data from 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2020.

Yemen Map



Methodology box

The type of armed violence impacting civilians in each of Yemen's cities is largely shaped by the nature of the conflict driving the violence. When collecting information on civilian impact incidents, CIMP looks at a range of parameters, including the types of conflict driving armed violence:

- **Overall conflict:** Incidents related to hostilities between the main warring parties, typically along the main lines of control
- **Tribal conflict:** Incidents whereby at least one tribal actor is involved, such as disputes involving tribal groups
- **Localised military conflict:** Incidents linked to hostilities involving two or more local military/security parties
- **Terrorism:** Incidents related to terrorism, such as terrorist attacks
- **Counter terrorism:** Incidents on account of military/security forces' counter-terrorism operations
- **Isolated incidents:** Incidents that are unrelated to any known conflict or local trends; motive and actors may be unclear
- **Protest-related violence:** Incidents on account of violent protests and/or violence directed towards protests and protestors.
- **Dispute-driven violence:** Incidents whereby smaller, localised disputes escalated into armed violence

City Profile 1: Ta'izz City

Population: 391,722

Overview

Ta'izz city hosts a number of active frontlines, as the largest city through which Yemen's main lines of control pass. 278 civilian casualties were reported in Ta'izz city in 2020, including 71 civilian fatalities, up from 63 in 2019. The city also saw double the number of women casualties in 2020, up to 53 from 27 in 2019.

City map



Details

Driven by the proximity of the frontlines to civilian neighbourhoods, 193 (69%) of the 278 civilian casualties this year were linked to the overall conflict. Shelling has been the main driver of civilian casualties in each district. However, each area bears a slightly different threat profile, shaped also by the presence of a number of local, rival armed factions.

In the east of the city, where the frontlines are particularly active, all but 3 of the 28 civilian impact incidents recorded in Salh district this year were linked to the overall conflict, more than any other district in Ta'izz. The majority (84%) of these on account of shellfire. 102 civilian casualties were reported in the district in 2020, including 91 on account of shelling.

Also proximate to active frontlines, Al-Mudhaffar, in western Ta'izz city, saw 70 civilian casualties on account of shelling this year. Half of these were the 34 women who were killed and injured when shellfire hit the central prison in the district on 5 April. Moreover, of 30 civilian casualties on account of IED incidents in the city this year, 23 were reported in Al-Mudhaffar, all on account of localised military conflict. The district sees regular IED attacks targeting security installations and personnel, often harming civilians. In 2020, 37% of civilian IED casualties across Yemen were in Al-Mudhaffar. These attacks impact both residential areas and busy commercial areas, particularly those near security installations: Al-Qubba market, a popular market near the local authority building and a military headquarters, and Bir Basha, home to the popular Abdo Saif qat market and less than 2km from the air defence base, have both been focal points for hostilities this year, each seeing 2 IED attacks, cumulatively resulting in 21 civilian casualties. These, and other nearby areas, have also seen cases of civilians getting caught in the crossfire of armed clashes driven by disputes and localised military dynamics, as well as a spate of dispute-driven shootings.

Although further from the main frontline areas, Al-Qahirah district, in the centre of the city, also saw more civilian casualties on account of shelling than any other type of armed violence: 21, out of 54 civilian casualties in the district throughout the year. The district also saw 12 civilian casualties on account of civilian becoming caught in the crossfire of clashes, driven by localised military conflict and disputes. Usayfirah, a disputed territory, has been a particular hotspot for unrest, along with Jamal Street, one of the busiest streets in Ta'izz city, running directly through the city's centre. There were also 9 civilian casualties reported on account of sniper fire in the city this year, including 2 in the east, in Salh, 3 in the west, in Al-Mudhaffar, and 4 in central Al-Qahirah.

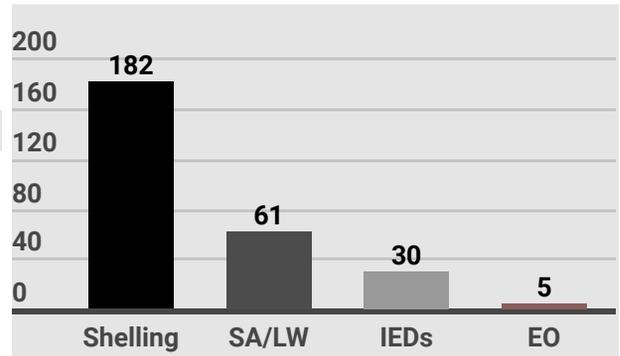
Main types of armed violence threatening civilians



Constituent districts

- Al-Mudhaffar
- Al-Qahirah
- Salh

Civilian casualties by type of armed violence in Ta'izz city in 2020



Main protection implications

111 households are estimated to have been displaced as a direct result of armed violence in Ta'izz city in 2020. Moreover, the hostilities resulted in restricted freedom of movement for as many as 100 households, impacting civilians across the city, including those out in the open on the streets and those visiting market places. The city also sees sporadic road closures on account of hostilities, resulting in further impediments to freedom of movement.

Armed violence also left as many as 276,654 households facing restricted access to critical infrastructure and services, including education and healthcare. Moreover, shelling on residential areas in the city centre in late November 2020 forced a number of schools and colleges to evacuate. Hospitals in the city have also faced severe disruptions due to violence, such as clashes and shootings, encroaching on their premises, endangering staff and patients.

Forward Look

As tensions remain among local armed groups, dispute driven violence, isolated incidents and localised military conflict is likely to continue to impact civilians across the city, particularly in the form of IED attacks and armed clashes. In the meantime, the ongoing proximity of hostilities on the main frontlines to residential and commercial areas in the city will continue to pose the threat of shellfire to civilians.

Overview

In the north of the country, well behind the main lines of control in Yemen, Amanat Al-Asimah saw fewer civilian impact incidents and fewer civilian casualties in 2020 than in 2019, and also fewer than some of the other major cities in the country, including Hudaydah, Ma'rib, Ta'izz and Aden. 41 civilian casualties were reported in 2020, down from 211 in 2019.

Main types of armed violence threatening civilians

AIRSTRIKES **SHOOTINGS**



GRENADES

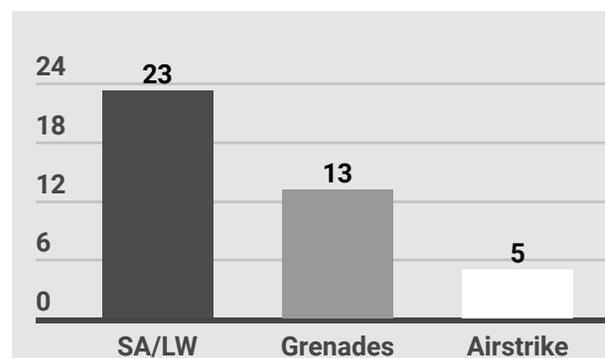
City map



Constituent districts

- Al-Wahdah
- As Sabain
- Assafiyah
- At Tahrir
- Ath Thaorah
- Azal
- Bani Al-Harith
- Maain
- Old City
- Shu'aub

Civilian casualties by type of armed violence in Sana'a city in 2020



Details

Away from the main frontline areas, the only civilian impact incidents reported in the city in 2020 that were linked to the overall conflict were airstrikes. Despite seeing fewer civilian impact incidents overall than other cities, there were more civilian impact incidents in Sana'a city on account of airstrikes than in any other city in the country. Airstrikes caused 15 out of 26 civilian impact incidents in the city in 2020. However, airstrikes resulted in 5 civilian casualties in the city last year, down from 196 in 2019. By contrast, shooting incidents were responsible for the highest number of civilian casualties across the city; 17, out of 41. including 6 in the Old City, 5 in Bani Al-Harith, and 3 in each of As Sabain and Shu'aub. 6 civilians were also harmed in the crossfire of isolated outbreaks of armed clashes in Maain and Assafiyah. Assafiyah, Bani Al-Harith and Maain districts each saw a total of 9 civilian casualties on account of armed violence in 2020.

Another 13 civilian casualties were reported in Sana'a city on account of isolated hand grenade incidents. This included 7 in Assafiyah district, where 2 civilians were killed and 5 injured when a hand grenade was thrown into a restaurant. Of 40 civilian hand grenade casualties across Yemen in 2020, 32 were reported in major cities.

Unlike in 2019, airstrikes predominantly impacted civilians in the city's more peripheral districts in 2020. Bani Al-Harith district, to the north of the city, saw 8 airstrike incidents over the past year, 6 of which were reported to have hit Sana'a International Airport. In the eastern outskirts of the city, 3 civilian impact incidents on account of airstrikes were reported in Al-Wahdah, and 1 in each of Azal and Shu'aub. Houses were also hit by airstrikes once this year in As Sabain and a municipality office was hit by strikes in Maain district, although no civilian casualties were reported in either strike. Civilian casualties from armed violence were concentrated in more central areas, including in Maain and Assafiyah.

Main protection implications

The number of households estimated to have been directly displaced on account of armed violence was comparatively low, at 5 households, but the potential for airstrikes remains, putting civilian homes, and women and children in particular, in a continually vulnerable position. In the meantime, as a direct result of armed violence in the city's neighbourhoods, 33 households were assessed to have faced restricted freedom of movement in 2020.

Forward Look

Airstrikes occasionally surge on the city in relation to broader conflict dynamics, such as in retaliation to cross-border missile or UAV attacks. It is possible that any further extraterritorial aspects to the conflict will prompt further airstrikes on the capital. Although in 2020 these saw a significant drop, and were for the most part focused on the city's outskirts, including around the airport, the propensity for strikes to hit populated areas remains, presenting a severe threat to civilians in the city. Security forces in Sana'a are largely homogenous and as such, localised military conflict is a rarity in the city. However, low levels of insecurity persist, and isolated security incidents are reported on occasion, particularly where disputes escalate. Such incidents are likely to continue on a sporadic basis.

Overview

18 December marked two years since the Hudaydah ceasefire entered into force. Nonetheless, although frontlines have been largely fixed in place throughout that period, hostilities have persisted, including on the outskirts of the city. Shellfire has been the overarching type of armed violence to impact civilians in the city, accounting for 136 of the 151 civilian casualties reported in the city this year.

City map



Details

All 130 civilian impact incidents reported in Hudaydah city in 2020 were linked to the overall conflict, with no reports of any isolated security incidents or dispute driven violence, likely due to the monopoly over control held by one of the warring parties who maintain a presence in the city. The vast majority of the incidents (115) were on account of shellfire on the city's outskirts, which resulted in several mass civilian casualty incidents, including on 31 May, when 4 civilians, including 3 children, were killed, and 18 other civilians, including 15 children, were injured when artillery shells hit a gathering near a house in Az Zuhur neighbourhood in an area near As Salakhanah hospital in Al-Hali, and on 3 December when 10 civilians were killed and 6 injured when artillery shells hit the Thabit Brothers Industrial Complex, also in Al-Hali.

While central parts of the city remain relatively quiet, with no civilian incidents reported in Al-Mina district in 2020, the outskirts, particularly in Al-Hali in the east of the city, around 50 Street and Sana'a Street, have been subsumed by hostilities since 2018. 116 civilian casualties were reported in Al-Hali, compared to 35 in Al-Hawak, in the south in 2020. In the eastern outskirts, the 7 July and Ad Dhubyani neighbourhoods have both come under repeated shellfire, impacting civilian businesses, such as local hotels, a dairy factory and the Thabit Brothers complex on multiple occasions, and civilian homes. The 22 May Hospital was also hit by shellfire 3 times last year. Kilo 16 is another hotspot, although sits in a less populated area along the Hudaydah-Sana'a highway to the east of the city. In the south of the city, hostilities were concentrated around the airport and Al-Mandhar.

Besides shelling, 7 civilians were harmed when caught in the crossfire of armed clashes, while remnant explosive ordnance resulted in another 5 civilian casualties in the city in 2020, including 3 on account of landmines and 2 on account of UXO. This was a significant drop from 17 landmine casualties in the city in 2019, 11 of whom were in Al-Hawak.

Main types of armed violence threatening civilians

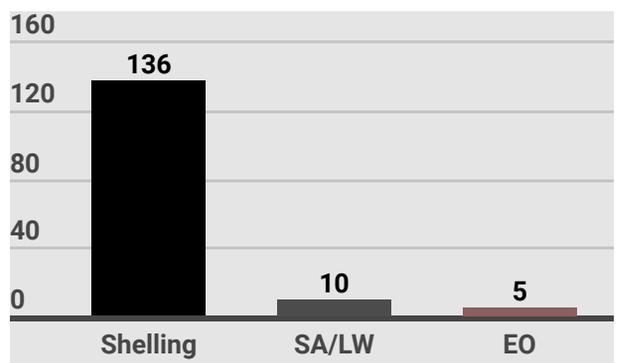


SHELLING

Constituent districts

- Al-Hali
- Al-Hawak
- Al-Mina

Civilian casualties by type of armed violence in Hudaydah city in 2020



Main protection implications

283 households were displaced as a direct result of armed violence in Hudaydah, more than in any other city in Yemen, putting women and children at particular risk as residential areas continue to come under bombardment. Another 51 households were assessed to be facing restricted freedom of movement, while access to infrastructure and services, most notably health and education, has been restricted for as many as 205,247 households.

Forward Look

The situation in Hudaydah remains closely linked to broader conflict dynamics and the ongoing political process. While the Stockholm Agreement and constituent Hudaydah ceasefire did see a lessening in the impact on civilians in the city and wider governorate, driven largely by a drop off in airstrikes, hostilities have persisted on the static frontlines. Fighting is unlikely to subside until significant progress is made in negotiations. Patterns in hostilities have been relatively consistent for the past two years, but should they destabilise, the impact on civilians would likely increase. While remnant explosives continue to pose a threat in the city, particularly in the south around the airport, Al-Masna and Al-Mandhar, the vast majority of civilian landmine and UXO casualties reported in Hudaydah over the past year were outside the city, in southern districts.

Overview

Despite being away from active frontlines, Aden is a hub of insecurity, with competing factions and high levels of local unrest, often driven by territorial and revenue-related disputes that manifest in localised armed clashes and targeted attacks. The end of the year was marked by a mass casualty incident at Aden airport, bringing the total number of civilian casualties recorded in the city in 2020 to 142, up 37% from 104 the year before.

City map



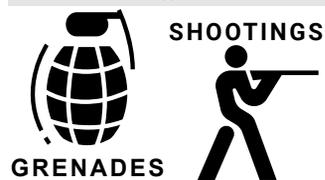
Details

At the end of 2020, a mass casualty incident at Aden airport resulted in at least 44 civilian casualties; at least 13 civilians were killed, and at least another 31 civilians were injured in a mass casualty incident in Aden on 30 December, when the airport was exposed to several explosions on account of alleged missile fire. Among the fatalities were 3 aid workers. This is the highest number of civilian casualties reported in the city on one day since widespread clashes broke out in January 2018. The incident was a one-off attack, coinciding with the arrival of the new cabinet, but serves as a reminder of the vulnerability of civilians in cities across the country, particularly when exposed to such large-scale attacks.

Over a third (41) of the remaining 98 civilian casualties reported in Aden last year were on account of shootings. 11 of 16 shooting incidents were isolated incidents, the drivers of which were unclear, while 2 were linked to disputes and 1 to localised military conflict. Aden is also one of few cities in Yemen to have seen civilian casualties linked to security forces' responses to protests, as dissatisfaction with failing service provision in the city, accompanied by inflation and high prices, has driven sustained civil unrest. 7 civilian casualties, including 1 fatality, were reported amid shootings to disperse protestors in the city this year. Another 19 civilian casualties were reported on account of civilians getting caught in armed clashes, driven by localised military conflict, disputes and isolated incidents.

There were 50% more civilian casualties on account of hand grenades in the south than in the north, 23, 16 of whom were reported in Aden. Aden was the only city in the country to supersede Sana'a city in numbers of civilian hand grenade casualties. 3 grenade incidents were dispute-driven, while another 3 were isolated incidents. This profile has shifted from last year, when the city saw 6 civilian grenade casualties, and 27 civilian casualties on account of frequent IED attacks. IEDs resulted in 6 civilian casualties in the city this year.

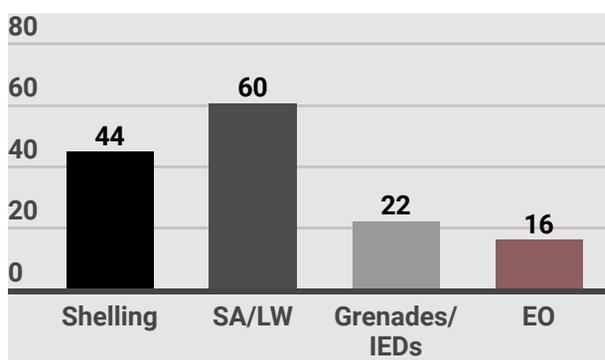
Main types of armed violence threatening civilians



Constituent districts

- Al-Buraiqeh
- Al-Mansura
- Al-Mualla
- Ash Sheikh Othman
- Attawahi
- Craiter
- Dar Sad
- Khur Maksur

Civilian casualties by type of armed violence in Aden in 2020



Main protection implications

With insecurity rife across Aden, incidents of armed violence in 2020 restricted freedom of movement for 82 households, as clashes and targeted attacks repeatedly impede civilian safety.

Forward Look

Aden city typically see high levels of competition and posturing between the parties, with a number of groups present in the city with different affiliations. Political rifts are common, and drive intermittent bouts of unrest, as well as manifesting in targeted attacks, endangering any civilians in the vicinity. Civilians are likely to continue to remain at risk of being caught up in ongoing insecurity, including targeted attacks and shootings. There was a drop in IED attacks in 2020, but should tensions pick up, particularly as Aden enters a transition period as the Riyadh Agreement is implemented and the new cabinet settles, the risk of an uptick in attacks remains.

In the meantime, civil unrest is likely to continue as popular dissatisfaction with service provision, inflation and failed salary payments continues to drive protests. Instability is also likely to remain, particularly while the security situation finds a new holding pattern under the Riyadh Agreement. Spoiling is likely, and targeted attacks will continue to present a risk to any nearby civilians, particularly those that occur in or near residential or commercial areas.

Overview

Ma'rib city does not host any active frontlines, and as such hosts a high number of IDPs. As hostilities escalated on the frontlines in northern governorates in 2020, there was an uptick in reports of missile and rocket attacks on the city, which hosts a number of military bases. 46 civilian casualties were reported in Ma'rib city last year, an almost fourfold increase from 12 in 2019.

City map



Details

All 24 civilian impact incidents recorded in Ma'rib city in 2020 were linked to the overall conflict. Moreover, 22 were on account of missile and rocketry shelling hitting residential neighbourhoods in the city, resulting in 40 civilian casualties, a quarter of whom were children. Ar Rawdhah area was particularly frequently hit. 16 (40%) of 40 civilian shelling victims in the city were reported in Ar Rawdhah. As Salam area also saw several shelling incidents, including reports of a school being hit and several shops sustaining damages. There was also 1 landmine incident, which resulted in 6 civilian casualties.

Main types of armed violence threatening civilians

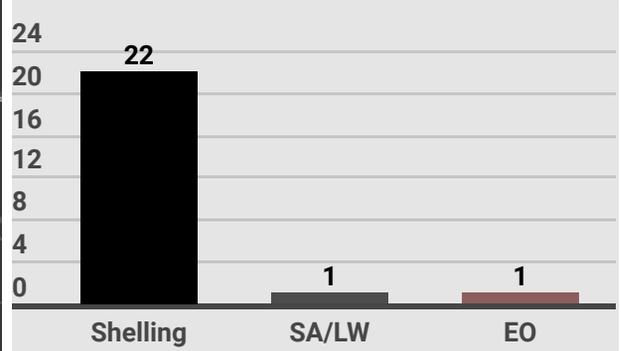


SHELLING

Constituent districts

- Ma'rib City

Civilian casualties by type of armed violence in Ma'rib city in 2020



Main protection implications

78 households were displaced as a direct result of armed violence in Ma'rib city in 2020, potentially resulting not only in primary but also secondary and tertiary displacement due to the high number of IDPs present in the city. Ma'rib city's population is estimated to have increased more than fivefold in recent years, hosting over 600,000 IDPs, some on formal IDP sites, while others have likely been absorbed into the local population or are being housed through informal channels. Civilians who have already been displaced at least once are more vulnerable to further displacement, due to the limited resources available to them and the often more temporary nature of their housing.

Forward Look

While Ma'rib governorate remains contested, military camps in and around Ma'rib city will likely remain a target of further missile and rocket attacks, putting nearby residential areas, schools, hospitals and commercial property at ongoing risk. Should frontlines shift closer to the city, the frequency of these attacks would be likely to increase, although currently the frontlines in the governorate appear to have settled into a holding pattern, with little significant change likely.

The Civilian Impact Monitoring Project is a service under the Protection Cluster for the collection, analysis and dissemination of open source data on the civilian impact from armed violence in Yemen, to inform and complement protection programming.



Protection Cluster Yemen

For more information, please visit www.civilianimpactmonitoring.org



CIVILIAN IMPACT MONITORING PROJECT
a service of the Protection Cluster Yemen