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YEMEN COUNTRY STUDY

A sociopolitical analysis of current conditions in Yemen

USAID/Office of Transition Initiatives

JANUARY 13, 2017

This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared by Development Transformations, LLC.



Contracted under: AID-OAA-I-12-00019
Support That Augments Rapid Transition (START) Indefinite Quantity Contract (IQC)

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The author's views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

MAP OF YEMEN



ACRONYMS

AQAP	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
CBY	Central Bank of Yemen
CSO	Civil Society Organization
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IO	International Organization
LO	Local Organization
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GPC	General People's Congress
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SBF	Security Belt Forces
SRF	Southern Resistance Forces
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to our team of consultants including Mr. Abdul-Ghani Al-Iryani, Ms. Nadwa Al-Dawsari, and Mr. Farea Al-Muslimi for their thoughtful input on research instruments, feedback on earlier drafts of this report, and advice throughout the project. DT's Tiera Rainey provided crucial project management from D.C. and Il Young Shin made important contributions to data analysis. Most of all, thank you to the local Yemeni research staff for their invaluable contributions. Without them, this report would not have been possible.

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INTRODUCTION

This study was commissioned by USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (USAID/OTI) in order to gain a better understanding of how the ongoing conflict in Yemen is affecting the state and society. The research areas and questions, developed in close consultation with USAID/OTI, were based off a desk study and an initial set of key-informant interviews with eight experts on Yemen, conducted September 1-19, 2016. The study focused on the following themes and associated research questions:

- **Social Contract:** How does the population view the state? What do authority figures need to possess and do in order to be considered legitimate and gain public trust?
- **Authority:** Who is exercising authority at the local level? How satisfied are people with the authority? Why? What are they doing well? What could they improve?
- **Security:** Is security improving or deteriorating? Why? If it has deteriorated, what would it take to improve? Who is providing security? Where there are multiple actors is there competition or cooperation?
- **Basic Services:** What services are available? Is the quality of services improving or deteriorating? Who provides them? Is there competition to provide services? Who should provide them? Are there fees associated with them? Are there issues affecting access to services?
- **Social Cohesion:** How has the conflict affected people's view of/trust in each other? How does the presence of IDPs affect people's lives? Is there a sense of belonging to community? If so, how is it expressed? Are there public places to discuss current events/issues in the community?
- **Dispute Management:** What are the types of disputes in the community? Who does the community turn to in order to deal with disputes? Since when? How satisfied are people with current dispute management mechanisms? Why? Who is best suited to manage disputes?
- **International Organizations (IOs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs):** What role are local CSOs playing in people's communities? What do people think about these local CSOs? What role should the international community have in addressing needs?

This report is a summary of the findings and is divided into the following sections: methodology, summary of key findings and considerations, background, general context by governorate, social contract, authority, security, regional actors, basic services, social cohesion, dispute management, and IOs and CSOs.

METHODOLOGY

This study was undertaken in seven governorates – Abyan (Zingibar and Lawdar); city of Aden (all districts); Hadramaut (Sayun and Mukalla); Hajjah (Hajjah City and Bani Qa'is District); Ibb (Ibb City and Dhi As Sufal District); Marib (Marib City and Wadi District); and the city of Taizz (Mudhaffar and Qahirah Districts) – which were selected to ensure representation of regional diversity. A total of 160 qualitative interviews were conducted in November 2016 utilizing a structured questionnaire with the general population (47%), key informants (29%), and authority figures (24%). General population interviewees were selected using a snowball method and key informant and authority figure interviewees were selected through purposive sampling. On average, interviews lasted two hours and were conducted in person by local researchers directly recruited and managed by Development Transformations.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS AND CONSIDERATIONS

KEY FINDINGS

- **Social Contract:** In all areas studied, respondents made reference to the executive unit of the local authority as a relevant entity. These units are either operating on their own or in cooperation with other actors who “control” the area or are “the actual authority” (e.g. Houthis, Southern Resistance, militias). The concept of “the state” carries meaning and legitimacy for many Yemenis and people look to it to solve their problems in all the governorates studied. Despite a longing for the state to fulfill its role, respondents are far from satisfied with the performance of local authorities, which have major shortcomings. Reported performance issues include corruption, cronyism, and lack of transparency, accountability, and necessary skills (experience). For authorities to be considered legitimate and gain public trust, respondents overwhelmingly identified “honesty” and “integrity” as qualities they would look for.
- **Authority:** The parties to the conflict are numerous and have diverse political and ideological foundations, sources of material support, and regional alliances. As the state’s already limited authority continues to erode, external and internal actors are filling the gap and putting into place policies and practices that are cementing a new status quo, which is moving Yemen further from a centralized and unified state. People’s reaction to these changes on the ground are positive in the immediate term because of the relative stability they afford, but people are highly cognizant of the tenuousness of the reforms and eager for “the state” to return. In Houthi controlled areas, there is a rejection or at least a high level of dissatisfaction with them. Respondents describe Houthi incompetence and lack of legitimacy and described their tactics as spanning a range from arbitrary to brutal. Houthis rely on the local authority to exert power and as such, do not want to dismantle the state. There is a constant vying for power by the state (which has no power but bears responsibility) and the Houthis (who have power but have no responsibility).
- **Security:** Security institutions are fragmented and lack professionalism, posing a serious risk to stability. While there are processes under way to integrate the various groups into more cohesive units, they are localized and do not appear to be tied to a central planning process. Regional actors have a strong impact on security and authority outcomes.
- **Basic Services:** Access to basic services remains the highest priority for respondents (water in particular). Economic strife and the financial hardships respondents face affect their ability to buy the bare essentials. Respondents’ comments on services reflected a high degree of tolerance and reliance on coping strategies including purchasing solar panels. Respondents repeatedly stated that the “legitimate government” is responsible for delivering basic services.
- **Social Cohesion:** Respondents’ sense of belonging to community is strong and is reflected through the support they provide to the community by volunteering their time, effort, and expertise. However, levels of trust are low and there is fear of being targeted for speaking out against any status quo authorities and of being arrested based on suspicion rather than any evidence. Public space for conversation has shrunk due to the lack of trust and fear; this has even affected qat-chewing practices with people opting to stay home with their families to chew in order to avoid discussions that could lead to “problems.” The changing dynamics around authority and control are leading to the marginalization of certain groups including Islah and youth.
- **Dispute Management:** Major areas of dispute are over land (particularly land grabbing), services (water and electricity), and distribution of aid. Dispute management is a critical function being carried out by various groups in the power vacuum left by the state. Currently the providers include akels, the security directorate, resistance forces, local authorities,

Security Belt Forces, Houthis, social figures, tribal sheikhs, and CSOs. One of the only areas respondents expressed satisfaction with the Houthis is in their dispute management function, citing the swiftness of Houthi decision-making. Some of these actors are new to dispute management and some respondents reported bias, discrimination, lack of legal back-up to rulings and regionally-based favoritism in solving disputes. In all areas studied most respondents thought that state authorities are the most appropriate institutions to manage their disputes.

- **International Organizations (IOs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs):** Local CSOs viewed as either absent or politicized. Most respondents viewed the international community as the key to resolving issues at home, however, people do not feel listened to when it comes to project identification and implementation. Humanitarian assistance is viewed as highly needed and respondents generally appreciate the work that is being done, however, several respondents articulated a need for support in other sectors, noting that humanitarian assistance alone will not solve the issues at hand.

CONSIDERATIONS

- Varying regional contexts will complicate external interventions intended to assist Yemenis in a post-conflict transition. Given the amount of change resulting from the conflict, there needs to be consideration of how the authority and security systems in each of these areas operate. A peace deal that does not account for the challenges, aspirations, strengths, and grievances of each area will be ineffective and potentially set the stage for future conflict.
- The international community cannot afford to bypass local authorities (which includes the executive offices and the local councils) in the delivery of assistance. They have a strong presence in communities and despite their performance issues people look to them for solutions and believe that they can improve. However:
 - The extent of state capture by a variety of actors, often in competition, presents a dilemma for assistance directed at state institutions.
 - Lack of proper legal authority and institutional capacity are major roadblocks to partnership.
 - Local government's representational role is weak given the historically centralized state structure.
- The international community needs to ensure that it is not aggravating problems of corruption and lack of transparency. There is a need for transparency with the public regarding funding flows for rebuilding and development. Furthermore, in working with/through "trusted individuals" the international community should be cognizant of perceptions of partisanship and interference with the local power balance which could create or aggravate conflict.
- Investment in state institutions is critical but it is also important to consider the level at which intervention should occur. In order to avoid a complete collapse of the state, donors should direct their engagement (program design, implementation, and coordination) to the local level while simultaneously engaging with the national level.
- Addressing the challenge of integrating militias and fighters into more cohesive units that are loyal to the state will be complicated as many fighters' loyalties are to individuals and/or to partisan causes (e.g. southern secession or the Houthi cause). As such, a key concern will be to absolve loyalty through strategically integrating fighters into new fighting units and/or into civilian life. There is a need to further examine who these fighters are, who they support and why, what it will take to socialize them when transitioning back to civilian life, and what training they will need if integrated into a more formal fighting unit. Reintegration is a long and costly process and a major burden on a country with limited resources like Yemen.

- Regional actors and their allies advising them on their interventions need to continue to share lessons learned and put in place a detailed planning processes to ensure there is a safe and manageable exit of the UAE from southern Yemen.
- The improvement of service provision is inextricably linked to the longer-term need to develop the capacity of state institutions to address citizen's needs. Donors should be very careful not to create parallel service delivery platforms that cannot be sustained. There is a bare minimum of services that are required and while services are important, it would be unwise to focus exclusively on restoring and improving them and/or treating this as a panacea to addressing Yemeni grievances.
- Consider programmatic interventions that create opportunities for people to serve and/or volunteer in order to enhance their sense of belonging.
- Communities have been fractured due to the highly polarizing political environment. In order to address this, interventions focused on reconciliation will be necessary.
- Regional actors need to consider the extent to which their policies of sidelining Islah may negatively impact security and stabilization. Islah should also consider how they are perceived by the communities they are in.
- Further study and action is needed on how best to engage marginalized youth.
- An institutional mechanism that has sufficient authority and funding to deal with the appeal and adjudication of land disputes issues is needed. While the land commission established by Hadi was a good step, it only has an advisory role and this is not sufficient. The establishment of such a commission/process should be a post-conflict priority.
- International organizations considering partnering with politically-affiliated NGOs/foundations/institutions should consider the extent to which this could undermine their overall goals. The people have a clear perception of politically affiliated NGOs/foundations/institutions as partisan which is particularly problematic in the current politically charged environment. If donors choose to partner with these organizations, it is best to diversify partnership so as not to appear (or to actually) feed into a political agenda.

BACKGROUND

The current civil war in Yemen was sparked when the Zaydi Shia political movement, known as the Houthis after its founder Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi, stormed Sana'a in September 2014. The Houthis, who previously fought six wars against the Yemeni state from 2004-2010, entered a marriage of convenience with their former foe, ex-President Ali Abdullah Saleh. They began moving southward from their base in Sada'a in spring 2014, eliminating their opponents (mainly Islah¹-affiliated tribes) in the northern governorates of Amran before moving into Sana'a. The current conflict was preceded by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)-sponsored and United Nations (UN)-backed political transition process that began in 2011 but ultimately was unable to fully address the underlying drivers of conflict in Yemen. The lack of progress in improving living conditions for Yemenis and in addressing long-standing grievances gave the Houthis a window of opportunity to ride a wave of public discontent with the status quo. They pushed as far south as Aden in March 2015, forcing the internationally-backed Government of Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi into exile in neighboring Saudi Arabia. In response, Saudi Arabia formed a coalition of nine countries aimed at restoring Hadi to the presidency in Sana'a. They aimed to achieve this through military intervention, which has included Saudi-led airstrikes throughout Yemen and United Arab Emirates (UAE)-led

¹ Islah is a coalition of tribal and Islamist groups and the Yemen chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood. It is the largest opposition party in Yemen and was a major backer of the 2011 youth protests against former President Saleh.

interventions in Aden and Mukalla to recapture territory from the Houthis and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) respectively.

At least 10,000 Yemenis have been killed² as a result of this conflict, and tens of thousands more have died from preventable diseases due to lack of proper treatment and medicine.³ Additionally, out of a population of 26 million, 3.2 million are internally displaced,⁴ 18 million are in need of basic assistance,⁵ and of the 14.1 million who are food insecure, seven million people are severely food insecure (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification stage 4 out of 5).⁶ While fighting continues on several fronts, the conflict has effectively arrived at a stalemate. At present, the Houthis control all state institutions in Sana'a and in November 2016 they announced the formation of the "National Salvation Government," which has not been internationally recognized. Meanwhile, President Hadi's Cabinet operates between Riyadh and the southern city of Aden. The UN mediation process led by Special Envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed has undergone three rounds of negotiations, the most recent ending in August 2016. The international community's packaging of the conflict as one between the government of President Hadi and his supporters on the one hand and the Houthi-Saleh bloc on the other obfuscates more than it clarifies. As analysts watching Yemen closely have argued⁷ and the data from this report confirms, the parties to the conflict are more numerous; do not fit neatly into these blocs; and have diverse political and ideological foundations, sources of material support, and regional alliances.

GENERAL CONTEXT BY GOVERNORATE

Each geographic area studied is experiencing the conflict differently and has varying histories, cultures, strengths, coping mechanisms, and political affiliations. All areas share a poor economic situation that is progressively worsening. Across all governorates respondents identified the recent cut-off of salaries for government employees as a major stress on families. The lack of jobs was also frequently cited as a top concern. Furthermore, bank notes are of very poor quality in the market and some respondents expressed that the economic situation is not only demoralizing but has exacerbated or even incited conflict. This section is organized by governorate and provides a summary of respondent's characterization of the current situation and key highlights from the data for each location.

² UN estimate quoted in August 2016: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-toll-idUSKCN11516W>

³ UNICEF reported in October 2016 that at least 10,000 children alone have died as a result of the decline in health services due to the war. See: https://www.unicef.org/media/media_90751.html

⁴ See the Displacement Tracking Matrix for Yemen for more detail on IDPs: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B6owQSRCTIGYSW0xeFdYWIQ2VVk/view>

⁵ For more info see UN OCHA Yemen Crisis Overview: <http://www.unocha.org/yemen/crisis-overview>

⁶ See World Food Programme: <http://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-emergency-dashboard-january-2017>

⁷ For example, see most recent reports on Yemen from Chatham House

<https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/research/2016-05-25-yemen-stemming-rise-of-chaos-state-salisbury.pdf> and International Crisis Group <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/167-yemen-is-peace-possible.pdf>

ABYAN

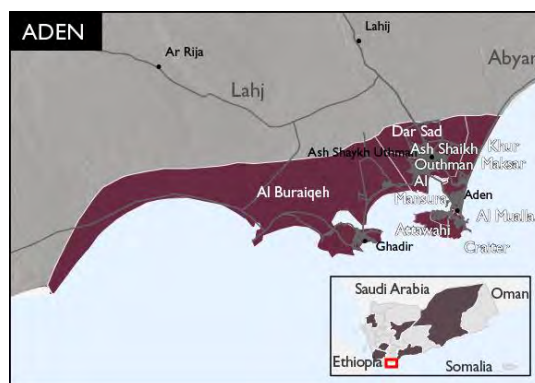
Abyan is a largely rural governorate that has a strong Southern Resistance⁸ presence. Abyan has endured cycles of conflict in recent years including the 2011/12 takeover by AQAP and its affiliate Ansar al Sharia. In June 2012 AQAP was forced out by the Yemeni military, leaving behind major infrastructure damage and displacement. Despite the installation of the “Security Belt Forces,”⁹ which have brought an increase in security to the governorate, many still expressed that they felt unsafe and commented on the general fragility of the state of security. Respondents were generally satisfied with the local authority¹⁰ crediting them with the relative stability in Abyan and returning a state of “normalcy,” but noted that there are resource gaps and personnel issues.



Several respondents noted that electricity, the education sector (which remains relatively functional), and health services had all seen recent relative improvements. However, lack of access to basic services, specifically consistent access to water, which varies by district, remains a key point of concern for many interviewees. Several interviewees on the government payroll expressed concern about not receiving salary payments; despite this, they expressed a sense of commitment to keeping their communities running which kept them reporting to work. Authority figures interviewed expressed optimism and viewed the trend of stabilization as a sign that the government can get back to work and focus on improving institutions and services, and by extension, the quality of citizens' lives.

ADEN

Aden is a port city in southern Yemen, and is the former seat of the British protectorate and subsequently the Peoples Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen). As one of the first cosmopolitan cities in the Arabian Peninsula, it is unique from surrounding governorates that were sultanates through the period of the British protectorate. In March 2015 the Houthi/Saleh forces advanced to Aden under the pretext of clearing it of extremists. Southern Resistance fighters led the defense



⁸ Southern Resistance refers to the political and military aspects of the movement advocating for secession of the south. There are multiple factions (informed by regional and historic trends) of the Southern Resistance, a fact that has aggravated the ability to form a unified position and advance shared interests.

⁹ The Security Belt Forces are a UAE-backed force formed by recruiting fighters from among the Southern Resistance, including the previous Abyan fighters known as local committees, the Hirak movement, and resistance fighters. The UAE reportedly pays their salaries and other costs and they are not considered a part of the serial numbered Yemeni Government forces. They also wear uniforms similar to UAE military. The force underwent intensive training within Yemen and abroad as anti-terrorism forces and launched its campaign of clearing Aden of terrorists. It is reportedly called the Security Belt Force due to its strategy of creating security rings first around Aden and then expanding these perimeters to the neighboring governorates of Lahj, Al Dali' and Abyan.

¹⁰ Yemen's local governance system is comprised of an appointed executive unit led by a governor (which includes representative of the various ministries including finance, planning, public works, etc.) at the governorate level; and at the district level an appointed executive unit (which reports to the governorate-level executive office) led by a district director and an elected local council. Collectively these institutions are referred to as the “local authority.”

and in July 2015 the UAE led a ground invasion to recapture Aden. Since then, the city has been under the control of Southern Resistance elements affiliated with the Hadi Government and backed by the Coalition. Aden is currently the nominal seat of the Hadi Government.

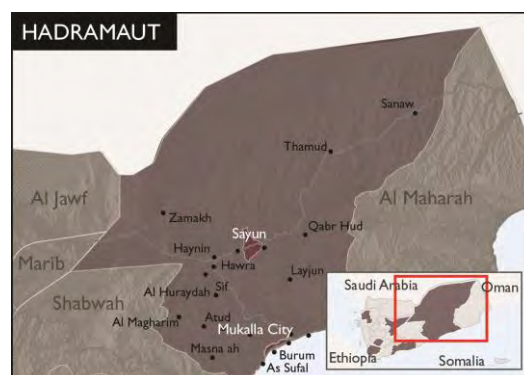
The majority of respondents said that security improved significantly after a major campaign was launched against extremist elements, sleeper cells of different affiliations, and common criminals in March of 2016. However, respondents pointed to human rights violations by security forces including kidnapping, lynching, and torture, especially during house raids in search of militants/terrorists. Extremist groups also reportedly continue to operate. Some respondents referenced them openly controlling neighborhoods and taking action such as going to schools to force girls to wear the niqab. Respondents did not view these developments favorably.

When asked who is the authority in their area, most respondents identified district directors¹² as the primary authority figures at the local level. A number of them are new and overall respondents did not view them favorably pointing to the fact that many issues have not been resolved. Respondents also referenced the “regionalist” approach of authority figures, which is a reference to issues that can be dated back to the early days of socialism and pre-unification. This is a power struggle that continues today among the leaders of the Yemen Socialist Party with those from Abyan and Shabwah aligned on one side and Al Dali’ and Lahij on the other.

Aside from security, respondents saw few other tangible improvements. Salaries remain unpaid, food prices are soaring, and frustrations continue regarding the worsening living conditions, with respondents referencing streets covered in trash and sewage. Respondents also referred to improvements as fragile and noted fears that things might deteriorate easily. People are not as hopeful that a rebuilding effort will take place as they perhaps were after the UAE operation last year. In fact, a respondent also noted that many assessments were conducted (no details were provided about who did so) and that no follow-up had occurred.

HADRAMAUT

Hadramaut is geographically separate from other areas studied and is considered to be culturally, socially, economically, and historically distinct from the rest of Yemen. In April 2015, AQAP and its local affiliates (the Sons of Hadramaut) took control of the coastal city and governorate capital of Mukalla. The city was retaken through a UAE-led military intervention in April 2016 and remains under Coalition influence. The study focused on the cities of Mukalla, a major port city, and Sayun, which represents the Wadi area. Perspectives on security varied amongst interviewees, with many stating the situation was “more stable” and improved. In contrast, others



(particularly in Sayun) stated that they felt insecure and that the level of security provided was poor and deteriorating in quality. Respondents in both Sayun and Mukalla noted that the general population is “responsible for their own security” and has a “high sense of security awareness.”

¹² District directors are the most senior appointed government official at the district level, they report directly to the governor and also are secretary general of the local council at the district level.

There were also references to the Hadrami Elite Force¹³ as a growing contributor to security in the governorate. The few respondents who referenced it noted it is in its formative stage, but their impression of it was positive with one respondent from Sayun expressing hope that they will expand to cover that city. With respect to basic services, many respondents expressed water, electricity, education, and healthcare were decent. However, several noted that they still faced challenges in accessing them. High rates of unemployment, an increase in poverty, and insufficient job creation were all cited as indicators of negative economic growth.

While most identified local authority entities as the authority in Sayun, a few remarked that the people in the area are “managing themselves.” In Mukalla the local authority backed by the Coalition were viewed as the authority, however, there is a combination of apathy and dissatisfaction with them, with repeated references to their corruption and cronyism. With respect to the Coalition presence in Mukalla, respondents expressed general appreciation for the support and resources provided to enforce security, but there is frustration concerning the daily impact of innumerable inspections and military checkpoints. Several respondents also referenced the Coalition’s “hidden goals and purposes.”

Another theme in Mukalla was “de-politicization” reflected in a reduction of political activity with particular focus on the Islah Party. This reportedly resulted in an influx of Islah supporters and organizations to Sayun in an attempt to establish themselves there; a development that is not welcomed by locals, some of whom referred to it as an “invasion.” There is a general perception that Islah is only working to benefit their supporters. Politically, Hadramaut appears to be standing at a precipice of change with the recent announcement of a Hadramaut Comprehensive Conference¹⁴ an indication of the Governorates’ continued expression of its’ autonomous identity.

HAJJAH

Hajjah borders the Houthi stronghold of Sada’a and throughout the GCC-sponsored transition process it experienced clashes between Houthis and Islah-affiliated tribes. The governorate effectively fell under Houthi control in the fall of 2014, though Houthi influence was increasing for months leading up to their descent on Sana’a. This study was conducted in Hajjah City and Bani Qa’is District, which like the rest of the governorate, were previously run by Islah-affiliated tribes and members of the first armored brigade. At the moment, all checkpoints are under the control of Saleh/Houthi forces, which are the main providers of security in the areas studied. Several respondents described the security apparatus as increasingly



¹³ The Hadrami Elite Forces were established approximately a year and a half ago and were deployed after the UAE-led operation in Mukalla in April 2016. They are reportedly deployed in coastal area of Hadramaut where they man checkpoints and are “totally in control.” They have also begun to deploy to the Wadi area. Their force is reportedly made up of 100% Hadramis- consisting of former officers and tribal fighters from Hadramaut. Their commander is General al-Bahsuni who is also the commander of the second brigade. Their salaries, operations costs, training and weapons are reportedly all covered by the UAE.

¹⁴ Hadramaut Comprehensive Conference was announced in late 2016. A steering committee has been established and a chairperson has been selected. It is representative of attempts to further define and advance Hadrami political and social positions in forthcoming political dialogues and settlements.

less-fragmented and as improving, with fewer road blockades and checkpoints and a significant reduction in killings, arson, looting, and other crimes. There is even a ban on celebratory gunfire in the city.

Economic pressure in Hajjah remains the highest concern for all respondents. Many reported that salaries are not getting paid, that there are few jobs, and that poverty rates continue to soar. One interviewee cited reliance on cash for work programs to make ends meet. The large presence of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has reportedly added strain to various communities' already limited resources (including water and health services). Respondents also cited a lack of due process, a rise in the use of child labor (raised by one interviewee), and feelings of insecurity because of the lack of adherence to rule of law. There is a clear theme that the populace feels that the government is indifferent to their suffering and that no interventions or improvements are coming their way. Many felt that their communities and the quality of life were deteriorating and things will only continue to worsen. The perception among respondents is that improvement will only come when "the state" is "empowered" again - with some framing empowerment as a "restoration" of the state and rule of law. A number of respondents attribute the poor performance of local government institutions to issues beyond their control, referencing intrusion and state capture by Houthis and duplication of effort in governing.

IBB

The governorate of Ibb is the second most populous governorate in Yemen and has been under Houthi control since October 2014 when the Governor entered into agreement with the Houthis in order to avoid major bloodshed. Life under Houthi control has had important effects on perceptions of authority, security, and the quality of life. The study was undertaken in Ibb City and Dhi As Sufal District in order to provide insight into both urban and rural contexts. Respondents reported that authority lies fully with Houthi officials, who are a mix of people from outside the governorate and local Houthi supporters, whose alliance to the Houthi movement stems from their Hashemite ancestry. In Ibb, respondents used terms "putschists" and "the de facto authority" when referencing Houthis, suggesting a rejection or at least a high level of dissatisfaction with their authority.



The Houthis have firm control and the final say in all security related issues while their allies, the Saleh-affiliated General People's Congress (GPC),¹⁵ have a secondary role in security matters. The majority of respondents described the security situation as worsening over the last three months, with few describing relative improvement. The security challenges most commonly referenced by respondents were related to road banditry and theft. Most respondents who were not satisfied with the security situation expressed a strong sentiment that reinstating the authority of "the state"¹⁶ is the

¹⁵ The GPC is the largest political party in Yemen, founded by former President Ali Abdullah Saleh in 1982 to consolidate his regime/patronage network. GPC lacks a clear political ideology and contains a wide array of actors. It is currently undergoing an internal power struggle between those supporting Saleh and other party elites.

¹⁶ As discussed in the Social Contract section below, numerous respondents in all governorates referenced the need for "the state." Overall, responses and terminology used when describing the need for the "the state" were abstract,

only way to improve security. One respondent drew a distinction between GPC and Houthis, noting that the GPC are still in government roles and are “not very aggressive and you can coexist with them,” whereas the Houthis are described as lacking competence and legitimacy, a sentiment echoed by several other respondents. However, while not satisfied with them overall, a number of respondents welcomed their role in resolving conflicts on “pending issues.” Some also commented positively on their role in maintaining security considering the absence of state structures - comparing the situation to Taizz and Aden.

The war has impacted all aspects of people’s lives in Ibb, deteriorating the economy and infrastructure and increasing uncertainty and fear. There appears to be a tense atmosphere of fear of arbitrary arrests and human rights violations by the Houthis. Furthermore, unemployment has led to economic uncertainty for many families who can no longer afford to pay rent. Young men reportedly join the Houthis and work at security checkpoints in return for food and qat, with some even going to fight at the frontlines. Thus, the current status quo is increasingly fragmenting the community among different political parties and armed groups, potentially furthering social cleavages.

MARIB

Marib contains most of Yemen’s oil and gas and is a stronghold of the Hadi Government thanks to significant Saudi and UAE support.¹⁷ The tribes in the governorate exercise significant influence on state and society and have been instrumental in fending off numerous attempts by the Houthis to capture territory. The governorate has a long history of resentment of the central government given Marib’s perceived political and economic marginalization, and its calls for greater autonomy have increased over the course of the conflict.



Respondents characterize the situation in Marib as relatively stable and improving. The security situation has reportedly stabilized a great deal since Houthi/Saleh forces were pushed westwards to the outer boundaries of the governorate. The main provider of security in the area is the Security Directorate,¹⁸ which commands the police force in cooperation with the 3rd Military Region units of the National Army. In the Wadi area, however, the responses to security related questions reflected the historic absence of the state. The most improved indicators were provision of services including water, electricity, health, and petroleum products in the Marib City. Additionally, hotels have been restored and food prices are stable. The Marib City electricity plant reportedly works 24 hours and the security services expanded with the increased cooperation with the Marib police, security authorities, and the National Armed Forces.

aspirational, and often normative. Due to time constraints imposed by the scope of this study, the questionnaire did not prompt local researchers to ask follow-up questions to define terms like “the state” as used by respondents. However, our analysis suggests that for the majority of respondents, rule of law constituted a key component of their conceptualization of “the state.” A useful area of follow-up research would be to clarify what people are referring to when they say they want “the state” to return.

¹⁷ In September 2015, 52 UAE soldiers were killed by a missile strike, the largest loss of life in UAE military history.

¹⁸ The Security Directorate is led by the Chief of Security who reports to the Governor and is an officer of the Ministry of Interior.

Despite relative improvements, respondents in both Marib City and the Wadi felt their needs were ignored and noted continued unemployment, poverty, and lack of medical supplies. There is reportedly an influx of IDPs from areas experiencing conflict and from Houthi controlled areas, which has resulted in increased rents and pressure on basic services. As some pointed out, the situation may be getting better in the short-term but people are not yet sure of how the underlying long-term issues in the governorate will affect stability and provision of services. While respondents generally respect the Governor, there is a sense that he worked mostly on the frontlines and externally, while conditions inside the governorate are not improving at the pace respondents expect. There is also a perception that Islah is in control of the Governorate given the Governor's ties to the party. This is met with resentment given the perception amongst respondents that non-Islahis are marginalized and excluded, limiting "co-existence."

TAIZZ

Taizz City put up fierce resistance to Houthi advances and has borne intense levels of conflict, including a siege that lasted until November 2016. Given its historic and cultural significance and strategic location, Taizz remains under threat. Respondents reported that the security situation in the inner city of Taizz improved after the Houthi/Saleh forces were driven out of the parts of the city they controlled, to the outskirts almost a year ago. Since then, respondents highlighted that the maintenance of security fell in the hands of resistance fighters¹⁹ organized into a variety of groups controlling different neighborhoods or districts.



Local authority officials are present and those interviewed expressed a sense of duty and motivation to uphold their responsibilities. However, respondents in the assessed districts of Mudhaffar and Qahirah identified "actual" power as being held by Abu Abbas Battalions (Abu Abbas),²⁰ a Salafi militia. Abu Abbas' control was described by respondents as the best available option at this time but it was noted that its hold is tenuous, and respondents had mixed feelings about its methods. Respondents identified the positives of working with Abu Abbas as their ability to resolve issues and act decisively, particularly in regards to dispute management. However, the respondents disapproved of how Abu Abbas works outside the law and their use of nepotism and favoritism to benefit its members.

The threat of random shelling still loomed large for a number of inhabitants of Taizz, but by far the greatest concern related to economic hardship and lack of consistent governance. Salaries for government employees have halted resulting in poverty and, in the immediate-term, pursuit of

¹⁹ The term "resistance fighters" can be misleading as it suggests a unified bloc. While these various groups have all resisted Houthi/Saleh forces they differ in their political and ideological foundations, sources of material support, and regional alliances.

²⁰ The resistance fighters against Houthi/Saleh forces in Taizz are made up of various groups who have different political and/or religious affiliations. The Abu Abbas Battalions are one of these groups and it engages in armed resistance to the Houthi/Saleh bloc, provides security maintenance, settles minor civil conflicts, and are Salafi in orientation. The group is named after its leader who was reportedly a school teacher and former GPC member who formed the group of resistance fighters. It is believed that he was able to recruit a significant number of youth due to his perceived neutrality and role as an alternative to the Islah fighters who influenced the liberation process of Taizz and other areas.

livelihoods grounded in violence. In general respondents reported improved access to food and relief supplies, which are more consistently distributed. However, they also relayed a feeling of abandonment by the international community. While the intensity of clashes has subsided, there are fears that there may be a coming battle within the city as the various resistance fighters vie for control. To complicate matters further, there is reportedly an ISIL presence in Taizz. However it is allegedly not well organized and when it tried to take control of some areas they were “dealt with firmly and forced out.”

- ❖ **Consideration:** Varying regional contexts will complicate external interventions intended to assist Yemenis in a post-conflict transition. Given the amount of change resulting from the conflict, there needs to be a consideration of how the authority and security systems in each of these areas operate. A peace deal that does not account for the challenges, aspirations, strengths, and grievances of each area will be ineffective and potentially set the stage for future conflict.

SOCIAL CONTRACT

LOCAL AUTHORITIES ARE STILL FUNCTIONING AND PEOPLE LOOK TO THEM FOR SOLUTIONS

Yemen’s local governance system is comprised of an appointed executive unit led by a governor (which includes representative of the various ministries including finance, planning, public works, etc.) at the governorate level; and at the district level an appointed executive unit (which reports to the governorate-level executive office) led by a district director and an elected local council.²¹ Collectively these institutions are referred to as the “local authority.” This study asked respondents who is exercising/practicing authority in their area. In all areas studied, respondents made reference to the executive unit as a relevant entity either operating on its own or in cooperation with other actors who “control” the area or are “the actual authority” (e.g. Houthis, Coalition, Southern Resistance, and various militias). The specific entities pointed to by respondents are the executive offices at the district level (office of the district director and functional offices such as education, water, etc.), which continue to perform their function, but to varying degrees. In rare cases respondents referenced akels and/or local councils as relevant.

Given the interest in local and informal governance the study also asked respondents to describe in a few words their thoughts on local councils and akels.²² Authority figures interviewed were also asked about the extent of their coordination with them. It was found that in terms of local councils and akels, the functioning, performance, and perception of these entities varied from area to area. In theory, local councils are effective local governance mechanisms as they are closer to the people and are potentially better equipped to access and manage a relationship with District Directors. However, their lack of authority and resources means that, for the most part, they are not functioning. Local councils also suffer from limited legitimacy as their terms expired²³ and varying levels of

²¹ Local councils consist of elected officials who according to the 2000 Local Authority Law would be responsible for running day-to-day operations at the local level – including the design and implementation of development projects. However, since day one they have been severely under resourced and their authority eclipsed by national ministries and governorate-level executive offices that can veto their decisions.

²² Akels (literally translated as elder) are individuals who work at the neighborhood or village level to help the community access services and resolve disputes. They also play a role in provision security, but the legality and appropriateness of this practice is debated.

²³ Local councils have a three-year term. The last elections for these roles were held in 2006.

population respondents were very cognizant of corruption and cited many specific examples of their experiences with it. Respondents also pointed to a lack of accountability and over-reliance on external actors to fix the country's problems. Interestingly, authority figures interviewed admitted as much in discussions on service provision, but there was a discernable trend of optimism amongst the interviewed authority figures that they believed services might improve or return in the future.



What do authority figures need to possess in order to be considered legitimate and gain public trust?

- ❖ **Consideration:** The international community cannot afford to bypass local authorities (which includes the executive offices and the local councils) in the delivery of assistance. They have a strong presence in communities and despite their performance issues people look to them for solutions and believe that they can improve. However:
 - The extent of state capture by a variety of actors, often in competition, presents a dilemma for assistance directed at state institutions.
 - Lack of proper legal authority and institutional capacity are major roadblocks to partnership.
 - Local government's representational role is weak given the historically centralized state structure.

- ❖ **Consideration:** The international community needs to ensure that it is not aggravating problems of corruption and lack of transparency. There is a need for transparency with the public regarding funding flows for rebuilding and development. Furthermore, in working with/through "trusted individuals" the international community should be cognizant of perceptions of partisanship and interference with the local power balance which could create or aggravate conflict.

AUTHORITY

CENTRIFUGAL FORCES ARE ALTERING THE STATUS QUO IN AREAS OUTSIDE OF HOUTHI CONTROL

The institutional and political foundations of the modern Yemeni state were in their infancy when the current conflict broke out. The modern state bureaucracy in former North Yemen experienced a golden period in the 1960-70s marked by institutional capacity building and the implementation of projects through local cooperatives. Ultimately, after unification under the Saleh regime, institutional development was highly centralized and affected by Saleh's vast patronage network, which led to a crisis of accountability as state institutions functioned based on the preference of the patronage network.²⁵ Institutional development could also be understood as the "sum of past aid projects"²⁶ given the heavy influence by donors which led to uneven development of institutions, weak follow-through, and overlapping mandates. On the political front, the Saleh regime built an expansive patronage network in an effort to exert control over the periphery and attempted to subdue challenges to the legitimacy of his rule through marginalization (e.g. of the south) and unleashing the coercive apparatus of the state (e.g. six wars with the Houthis). As a result of these dynamics, the state had few strong unifying forces leading up to the conflict.

²⁵ See Al-Iryani, Abdul-Ghani and Abdurahman Al-Moassib (2010). Draft Institutional Mapping of Relevant Ministries. Prepared for the USAID Responsive Governance Program.

²⁶ See Carapico, Shelia (2006). No Quick Fix: Foreign Aid and State Performance in Yemen in "Short of the Goal: U.S. Policy in Poorly Performing States."

As the state's already limited authority continues to erode, external and internal actors are filling the gap and putting into place policies and practices that are cementing a new *status quo* moving Yemen farther from a centralized, unified state. One example of such centrifugal forces is the development of security entities like the Hadrami Elite Forces who are reportedly comprised of only Hadramis, which essentially furthers the agenda of autonomy in that governorate. Another factor is that funding flows are not transparent and that local authorities receive patronage, rather than resources from a legitimate government. As a senior local authority official stated when asked about sources of funding for their office's operational and programming expenses, "we have our ways of accessing funds." Another centrifugal force complicating the potential for a unified state structure is the emergent leaders do not necessarily have allegiance to a unified Yemeni state. Depending how the post-conflict situation develops, the aggregation of power and influence by such actors can also act as a centrifugal trigger. While these trends are not necessarily new (regional actors have historically extended patronage and the armed forces and political actors were never totally unified), what is new is the scale and pace at which it is happening and that it is happening in the vacuum of the central state, however weak it was.

People's reaction to these changes on the ground are positive in the immediate term because of the relative stability they afford, but people are highly cognizant of the tenuousness of the reforms and eager for "the state" to return. The presence of state institutions that collaborate with Sana'a was one of the only factors acting as a bulwark against these centrifugal forces. Prior to its bifurcation into branches in Sana'a and Aden, the Central Bank was an example of such an institution. Should other Yemeni state institutions look toward decentralizing, centrifugal forces would likely accelerate.

The new *status quo* may set the stage for the long-anticipated and called-for process of decentralization in a post-conflict scenario, as the central challenge to unification has always been a lack of political will. On the other hand, the new *status quo* can be understood as being one step closer towards further autonomy for areas that have long called for it such as the south, Marib, and Hadramaut. The bottom line is that an important consideration for donors is how their interventions may affect these dynamics and, in particular, how and whether a local focus may further denigrate the integrity of a unified Yemeni state.

- ❖ **Consideration:** Investment in state institutions is critical but it is also important to consider the level at which intervention should occur. In order to avoid a complete collapse of the state, donors should direct their engagement (program design, implementation, and coordination) to the local level while simultaneously engaging with the national level.

STATE CAPTURE, FRUSTRATION, AND FEAR IN AREAS UNDER HOUTHIS CONTROL

Of the governorates considered in this study, Houthis are exerting their power and influence in Hajjah and Ibb. While respondents in these regions identified the Houthis as the authority, they did draw a clear distinction between the Houthis and the state, with responses often referencing a "kidnapping" or "capture" of the state. As previously described above, in Ibb, respondents used terms such as "putschists" and "the de facto authority" when referencing Houthis, suggesting a rejection or at least a high level of dissatisfaction with them. In Hajjah, Houthis are often referred to as "the militia" and one respondent noted that, "there is competition but it is in favor of Ansar Allah [Houthis] since they are the strong party in the security issues and resolution of disputes if any." In these

"Ansar Allah [Houthis] is the strongest party. There is a story that happened to a person from Taizz. He and his family were renting an apartment in our house. Four months ago, Ansar Allah came and arrested him saying that he is a suspect. He is still detained until now. His family had to return to their village because the man was their only breadwinner. They have no one to maintain the family. Where is the state when all of this is happening?"

SECURITY

SECURITY INSTITUTIONS ARE FRAGMENTED AND LACK PROFESSIONALISM, POSING A SERIOUS RISK TO STABILITY

When asked who provides security in their districts, “the Houthis” were identified in Houthi-controlled areas²⁷ while a multitude of actors were identified in non-Houthi-controlled areas. For example, in Aden active security providers reportedly include the Security Belt Forces, the special forces, the raid forces, the presidential forces, Shallal’s forces, and the fourth military region forces. With so many security actors on the ground, even local leadership struggles to distinguish the roles of the various providers. In Taizz, security is exercised by multiple groups, often based on geographic division, including Islah in the north, Abu Abbas throughout Mudhaffar and Qahira, and some local youths in certain neighborhoods. In Abyan, the data indicated that there is a competition amongst senior Southern Resistance officials to control the Security Belt Forces. It is possible they are attracted by the Security Belt Forces’ resource-heavy UAE patronage and positive reputation due to recent achievements. Coordination between these groups is minimal and *ad hoc*, with each providing security in their own unique style.

While there are processes under way to integrate the various groups into more cohesive units, they are localized and do not appear to be tied to a central planning process. In some cases, fighting units are being integrated into the formal government structure (i.e. answerable to the security director), such as the Southern Resistance fighters in Abyan and Aden. However, data suggests that these structures are poorly managed. For example, in Abyan the Security Directorate has been inactive for a long time due to a shortage of funds, which has impacted their ability to pay salaries to employees and to procure needed equipment. Although the Security Directorate was officially revived in Taizz, its main role is still unclear. This can be attributed to weak planning, lack of resources (which is in contrast to Marib) and Taizz’s low priority status, which many Taizzis resent.

Respondents also spoke of issues with professionalism among security forces. In part this can be attributed to the fact that security forces are undertaking tasks they were not trained for, particularly investigations into reported criminal activity, an issues raised across several governorates. For example, respondents in Hadramaut expressed dissatisfaction in stating that the military should be deployed to defend border areas and fight terrorism, leaving local security tasks to the police. Data from the study also suggests that all entities, at a minimum, lack professionalism in their interaction with civilians. There were also several reports of human rights violations.

❖ **Consideration:** Addressing the challenge of integrating militias and fighters into more cohesive units that are loyal to the state will be complicated as many fighters’ loyalties are to individuals and/or to partisan causes (e.g. southern secession or the Houthi cause). As such, a key concern will be to absolve loyalty through strategically integrating fighters into new fighting units and/or into civilian life. There is a need to further examine who these fighters are, who they support and why, what it will take to socialize them when transitioning back to civilian life, and what training they will need if integrated into a more formal fighting unit. Reintegration is a long and costly process and a major burden on a country with limited resources like Yemen.

²⁷ Questions regarding security were not asked of respondents in Hajjah due to the highly sensitive nature of the data gathering there.

REGIONAL ACTORS

REGIONAL ACTORS HAVE A STRONG IMPACT ON SECURITY AND AUTHORITY OUTCOMES WHICH IS POTENTIALLY DESTABILIZING

The riches of nearby oil-exporting states have had a strong influence on the political economy in Yemen in recent decades. The study confirmed that the trend continues as regional actors, and Saudi Arabia and the UAE in particular, have a strong impact on authority and security dynamics in Yemen. The clearest example of this is the UAE's involvement in southern Yemen. Many interviewees identified the UAE as having a significant role, including training, paying for, and commanding military units (e.g. Security Band Forces and Hadrami Elite Forces). Data indicates that if the funding and support to these UAE-backed units (whose salaries are reportedly much higher than other forces in Yemen) is not transitioned to a more sustainable model, southern Yemen would likely face a cadre of well-trained and unemployed fighters. Respondents also pointed to senior local government officials being highly influenced by regional actors. There is also frustration with a perceived lack of transparency about exactly where and how financial support from regional actors is being invested.

- ❖ **Consideration:** Regional actors and their allies advising them on their interventions need to continue to share lessons learned and put in place a detailed planning processes to ensure there is a safe and manageable exit of the UAE from southern Yemen.

BASIC SERVICES

ACCESS TO BASIC SERVICES REMAIN HIGHEST PRIORITY (WATER IN PARTICULAR)

Yemen is the poorest country in the Middle East and most people have lived their entire lives without access to basic services. The study asked respondents what the top needs in their area are and access to basic services, most especially water, was cited most frequently. With respect to education, respondents hoped for more classrooms to accommodate IDPs who are children, to meet the needs of the youth, and to fund colleges/universities. On infrastructure, many spoke of building roads, health facilities, training centers, and stadiums. Respondents also described economic strife and the financial hardships they face affecting their ability to buy the bare essentials. A particularly notable response was a reference to the community neglecting children who need psychological support as a result of the war and trauma. Children also lack proper nutrition, safe educational environments, and school supplies.

COPING, STATE RESPONSIBILITY, AND UNDERSTANDING

On the whole respondents expressed their dissatisfaction with water, electricity, health, and education services to varying degrees, citing corruption and lack of resources as challenges to effective service provision. However, no anger was expressed during the interviews, presumably because these services have always had shortfalls. Respondents expressed a “this is how it is” attitude in reference to the current situation while some noted that service providers are trying their best. One respondent poignantly noted, “In a country that suffers from the war and has been undergoing crisis for two years, I think that I am satisfied. If the situation was normal, this would be miserable.” This is the level of consciousness among the population that exhibits unparalleled patience and tolerance. People in Hadramaut compared their security and services situation with those in other governorates and found out they are better off. The same comparisons were made by respondents in Marib who reported they have electricity, fuel (resulting in cheaper prices), education, and health facilities. This new culture of comparing services to the lowest standard in other governorates is shadowing the basic minimum requirement standards as understood globally.

Respondents used a number of coping mechanisms to deal with shortfalls in service provision. There is a big increase in the use of solar panels and batteries that supplement gaps in domestic power provision. Water is hauled from water wells to houses by trucks and stored in big tanks. Though the water shortage issue is not new to many Yemeni urban areas, especially those of a mountainous nature, the cost has fluctuated depending on fuel prices.

With respect to health services, Yemen has never had a good health care system or public health facilities. The low quality of health services are compounded by a lack of resources including: medicine, trained personnel, and consumables. Alternatively, respondents noted that there are private facilities, which are of higher quality but are more expensive. Over the last several decades Yemen sent hundreds of thousands of patients to receive their healthcare in Egypt, Jordan, and India, however, this is no longer possible due to the current conflict. With respect to the education sector, many respondents in all areas referring to a “crisis” of cheating in exams, nepotism, and lack of discipline as well as overall corruption in the education system. Added to this are the usual problems of lack of books, overcrowded classrooms, and a lack of infrastructure especially in areas hosting a large number of IDPs.

“Cheating in schools has become the norm as students are now supposed to cheat under the protection of the security members and militias.”

Income seemed to be a key factor in determining one’s ability to access services or mitigate limited access to services, specifically in regards to healthcare. The services of least concern to the interviewees were sewage and sanitation, which could either be attributed to their higher functionality or lesser priority in regards to other service needs. While there were expressions of frustration with the lack of, or limited access to, services, there was an ongoing trend of optimism amongst the interviewed authority figures who believed services might improve or return in the future. Respondents repeatedly stated that the “legitimate government” is responsible for delivering these services. Notably, there was very little mention of service provision by militant groups despite the space available for them to do so. Authority figures mentioned services supported by IOs like Oxfam, Save the Children, and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), but these are in limited areas.

❖ **Consideration:** The improvement of service provision is inextricably linked to the longer-term need to develop the capacity of state institutions to address citizen’s needs. Donors should be very careful not to create parallel service delivery platforms that cannot be sustained. There is a bare minimum of services that are required and while services are important, it would be unwise to focus exclusively on restoring and improving them and/or treating this as a panacea to addressing Yemeni grievances.

SOCIAL COHESION

SENSE OF BELONGING IS STRONG BUT LEVELS OF TRUST ARE LOW

The data collected from all seven governorates suggests that, while tension exists between communities, respondents also felt a strong sense of belonging to their communities. The data reflects high levels of empathy, a sense of solidarity, and, to some degree, unity within communities. For example, in Aden, Taizz, and Marib there are enhanced local communal relationships because of the threat imposed by Houthis on their communities. A crosscutting theme reported in all the governorates studied was increased participation in activism and volunteerism. This trend appears to be in response to the growing list of needs in

“Yes. I feel that I belong to the area and community despite [our] severe suffering. This is my country and the country of my ancestors. We are resilient no matter what happens or how hard conditions get.”

communities across Yemen. In fact, most interviewees said that their sense of belonging is reflected through the support they provide to the community by volunteering their time, effort, and expertise. Respondents representing the private sector saw their sense of belonging reflected through charity initiatives, such as giving discounts to their clients knowing the dire economic situation everyone is experiencing. Another way respondents expressed their sense of belonging was by remaining in their cities and on their land “despite” all the challenges and problems.

Respondents were also asked how the presence of IDPs (where applicable) has affected their lives. In areas where IDPs were present all respondents said they are placing an economic burden on host communities, particularly in the form of increased rents and stress on services. The reactions to those burdens differed based upon local communities’ positive or negative perceptions about IDPs. The data suggests that receptiveness to, and integration of IDPs is more favorable where they share similar values/backgrounds to their host communities. In contrast, those who fall within the “other” category are often accused of creating problems and distorting local norms or traditions. This was the case with IDP perceptions primarily in Ibb, Marib, and Hajjah.

When asked about the level of trust within their communities, many respondents expressed fear of being targeted for speaking out against any *status quo* authorities. Respondents expressed fear of being arrested on the basis of suspicion without any evidence. In Ibb, some respondents expressed fear of reprisal if their responses to the questionnaire were read by Houthis or Houthi supporters. Respondents also reported that the public space for conversation has shrunk due to the lack of trust and fear. Almost every day over numerous hours many Yemenis socialize in qat chewing sessions to discuss a plethora of issues including politics, work, and community affairs. When respondents were asked about this practice they all nearly said that the space has shrunk as people opt to stay home within their families to chew in order to avoid discussions that could lead to “problems.” Other respondents said they tend to gather in small numbers with trusted friends for reasons related to safety. One respondent said that, in the north, people are shying away from Friday prayers in mosques controlled by Houthis because they do not want to shout their slogan of “death to America.” One respondent even warned that social media and access to internet news is “totally controlled and censored by [the] Houthis.”

“If you are neutral, then everyone will accuse you of being a hypocrite.”

“Trust among the people is not the same as it was before because what happened recently, all of the deaths and physical attacks, have made people reluctant to talk or discuss things with each other. People are afraid that what they say is misunderstood and taken to be support of certain groups. Today, people that are not members of the Southern Hiraq are considered to be against the south and its cause.”

“[Trust] have decreased because every person is now a member of a political party or with the legitimate government, for example, or a member of Ansar Allah [the Houthis]. If you are not a member of the party or group that they are from, you will be their enemy, even if you are a member of their family.”

Another major issue affecting social cohesion is ongoing delays in salary payments, which impact Yemenis’ abilities to pay for their basic needs, such as rent and groceries. In schools, administrations are suffering from parents’ inability to pay their children’s dues. Medical facilities are also experiencing the same issue and as an interviewed doctor stated, “[there are] many cases of patients who need surgeries and emergency surgeries [but] they cannot afford the[m]... or the medications. They cannot even pay for a return examination in the hospital.” This inability to pay can also push people to join armed groups in desperation to earn a salary. One respondent stated, “People are now unemployed and they have no work. They join Ansar Allah and work in security checkpoints in return for food and qat. Some go to fight [on the] war fronts.”

DISPUTE MANAGEMENT

MAJOR AREAS OF DISPUTE ARE OVER LAND, SERVICES (WATER AND ELECTRICITY), AND DISTRIBUTION OF AID

When asked what types of disputes are in their area, a large number of respondents pointed to disputes regarding land. One manifestation of this is the occupation of government buildings in cities like Aden and Zinjibar in Abyan which suffered a great deal of infrastructure damage due to recurrent cycles of the war against AQAP in Abyan and the Houthi invasion of Aden. A large number of people who lost their homes in air bombardments and/or shelling settled in government buildings for shelter and continue holding on to these buildings as a means of pressuring the government to reconstruct their damaged homes. There are also issues around corruption as evidenced in Hadramaut where after AQAP was forced out of Mukalla, the Governor stopped all land sales involving the government and arrested a number of surveyors who committed crimes such as falsifying records.

Land grabbing was the most frequently cited dispute in many areas including Aden, Mukalla, Hajjah, and Ibb. In Hajjah, Houthis reportedly bought a large number of farms at the bottom of the western hills adjacent to the Red Sea as early as 2006 aiming to connect to the Midi port to traffic weapons from Iran to their stronghold of Sada'a. The people of Midi realized the Houthis' intentions and banned all land sales to them. However, Houthis are now selling land back to the people of the area as they have switched to new arms smuggling routes. In Ibb, Houthis have reportedly embarked on fund raising by leasing government lands to the private sector. This has created conflict between the Houthis and their GPC allies, as land is very expensive. While land grabbing is not a new phenomenon (as political turmoil is often followed by land grabbing in Yemen) several of the respondents indicated that these are new trends in their regions.

After the 1994 war between the north and the south, the leadership in the south left Aden and went into exile in neighboring countries. Influential figures and senior government officials including from the military (mainly from the triumphant north), started grabbing land and buildings in the south, which were still under government control pursuant to the pre-unification socialist laws. During the National Dialogue Conference, this was one of the major concerns discussed in the context of the Southern Cause. In response, President Hadi formed a land commission in 2013 to address these grievances, but the Commission was limited to an advisory role requiring action by the President to implement and enforce all final decisions. Presently, this phenomenon is repeating itself, with the land grabbers apparently now being from the south. Aside from indicating that land grabbing is a major problem in people's view, there were not sufficient details to clarify this trend. This is an area for further investigation given the importance of this issue and how it might affect the post-conflict situation.

In addition to land, respondents referred to disputes over services. For example, in Abyan, there are disputes over water and electricity as a result of poor (or the complete absence of) governance, scarcity of resources, and corruption. Several informants mentioned disputes due to poor urban planning and random or unlicensed construction where individuals violate neighbors' space with haphazard projects. In fact, illegal construction projects in Buraiqa (in the free zone) and in Kraiter were noted to have caused disputes. In Zinjibar, a respondent recalled how people crowded around a water distribution point competed to get to the water supply first, which only further fueled disputes over precious resources. Several respondents noted that to maximize their supply of power, some people illegally connect their homes to the main electricity grids, causing overloads and shutdowns, which also deprives others of this service. In Aden, a respondent reported that there are daily disputes over water in the uphill area of Al Aidarous, which has caused people to move out of the

area. The fact that some people use pumps to divert water from main lines into their personal storage tanks is also creating conflict.

In Abyan, Hajjah, and Ibb some respondents mentioned disputes over the distribution of relief supplies. In Zinjibar, one interviewee said that the distribution of relief supplies is not carried out with honesty. Disparities over the distribution of development programs was also mentioned by an interviewee referring to the marginalization of the outer districts of the Marib governorate.

- ❖ **Consideration:** An institutional mechanism that has sufficient authority and funding to deal with the appeal and adjudication of land disputes issues is needed. While the land commission established by Hadi was a good step, it only has an advisory role and this is not sufficient. The establishment of such a commission/process should be a post-conflict priority.

DISPUTE MANAGEMENT IS A CRITICAL FUNCTION BEING CARRIED OUT BY VARIOUS GROUPS IN VACUUM OF STATE

Overall, the state capacity for dispute management is virtually absent. Respondents in nearly every area studied reported that the courts are not operating. Even when they are operational, prolonged bureaucratic process by both the police and courts cause frustration and lead people to seek out the quicker processes offered by non-state actors. It is critical to note, however, that in all areas studied most respondents thought that state authorities including courts, the prosecutor's office, and the criminal investigation department of the police are the most appropriate institutions to manage their disputes.

The conflict resulted in the total breakdown of the state's role in dispute management, which was already weak to begin with. Currently the providers of dispute resolution, as mentioned by respondents, includes akels, the security directorate, resistance forces, local authorities, the Security Belt Forces, the Houthis, social figures, tribal sheikhs, and CSOs. Some of these actors (e.g. resistance forces, Security Belt Forces, and CSOs) are new to the dispute management and some respondents reported bias, discrimination, lack of legal backup to rulings and regionally-based favoritism in solving disputes. In areas where local fighters have taken on a dispute management function there is reportedly no standard practice in solving disagreements and there are often inconsistencies in their rulings.

One area where the Houthis are seen positively (even if they are generally disliked) is in dispute management, with respondents referring to the swiftness of Houthi decision-making. Starting in 2014, the Houthis began integrating their Revolutionary Council members into state institutions in Hajjah including the police and judiciary systems where they provided internal dispute management services. They also manage and control the courts and police stations that remain functional but rely on a hybrid tribal-Islamic Shariah system, which is a distortion of the tribal system and not necessarily Islamic as the arbitrators are usually Revolutionary Council members. However, interviewees also expressed perceived limitations to dispute management by the Houthis due to their lack of experience and the excessive force they use when implementing their rulings based on this hybrid system. One respondent also noted that Houthi-led dispute management can be costly as they charge money for these services.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

LOCAL CSOS VIEWED AS EITHER ABSENT OR POLITICIZED

Respondents were also asked about the role and perceptions of local CSOs, and findings point to variations in the level of CSO activity across the areas studied. Despite their large numbers, with few exceptions, CSOs in Yemen are generally nascent with limited capabilities. There were positive steps towards bridging the relationship gap between CSOs and the government started during the National Dialogue, but they were thwarted by the conflict that followed. The majority of respondents described local CSOs as affiliated to political parties including the GPC, Socialist Party, Islah, and the Houthis. References to Islah-affiliated non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and charities were by far the greatest in number, likely due to its wider outreach capacity, organizational structures, and well-placed networks. In Taizz, respondents mentioned self-employment as one of the driving forces for the creation of CSOs. In Aden, one respondent suggested that there are positive trends through the creation of committees working in a three-way partnership between the Local Councils, prominent community members, and local NGOs. In Hadramaut, CSOs are mainly charitable foundations due to their funding base from wealthy Hadramis across the world.

“The humanitarian work and the spirit of initiation are lost because each party is trying to make the humanitarian work and initiatives for their own interest and to achieve their political and social goals. That is why we can find people who refrain from working in such fields of work. One day you may find yourself detained in a prison for no reason and with no charges.”

Most respondents characterized the role of local CSOs as limited to relief distribution and emergency assistance, often as implementers for IOs, who cannot reach the target populations themselves due to security concerns. The Islah Charitable Association is no longer as active as it once used to be due to its marginalization in mainly Houthi controlled areas like Ibb and Hajjah. Its activities are overshadowed by newer CSOs affiliated with Houthis, who are said to be accessing donor funds despite their lack of experience and accountability. In general, Islah’s charitable activities in many parts of the country have also been curtailed to a large extent, due to limited financial support.

Respondents commonly referred to lack of funding and capacity to implement as the main challenges for CSOs while some believed a lack of neutrality, accountability, and transparency were also challenges. One respondent from Taizz said that some CSOs “monopolize” donors such as the King Salman Center. Respondents also attributed lack of a bigger CSO role to fear of repercussions by either one of the two main authorities in their areas (Houthis or the “legitimate government”).

- ❖ **Consideration:** International organizations considering partnering with politically-affiliated NGOs/foundations/institutions should consider the extent to which this could undermine their overall goals. The people have a clear perception of politically affiliated NGOs/foundations/institutions as partisan which is particularly problematic in the current politically charged environment. If donors choose to partner with these organizations, it is best to diversify partnership so as not to appear (or to actually) feed into a political agenda.

INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE VIEWED AS NECESSARY BUT FLAWED

Most respondents viewed the international community as the key to resolving issues at home. It was only in Marib that people faulted outsiders for local problems. IOs and donors are filling a vacuum by providing services. However, people do not feel listened to. As one respondent noted, “the international community can form a committee that listens to the people instead of listening to

officials.” There were repeated references to communities feeling ignored – in particular in areas where there are IDPs. For example, in Hajjah respondents (who were no IDPs) reported marked differences between conditions for IDPs and the host community and that while the IDPs are getting needed support, the local community feels that it is getting nothing in return. Similarly, there is reportedly a sharp divide between the IDPs and the people, especially in Al Qaida in Ibb, where there are tensions over humanitarian aid, resource distribution, and registration.

Though humanitarian assistance is highly needed and respondents generally appreciate the work that is being done, several respondents articulated a need for support in other sectors, noting that it alone will not solve the issues at hand. There were also multiple references to the lack of coordination by IOs with local communities including inaccurate needs assessments regarding humanitarian aid. As one respondent stated, “[IOs] should be flexible and respond to the demands of the community whose conditions are getting worse daily. Their intervention needs to be based [upon daily assessments] of actual needs.”

CONCLUSION

This study illuminates how the current conflict in Yemen has had transformative effects on the state and society including: who maintains authority and security and how it is being exercised; how state institutions are functioning and people’s perception of them; the level of trust between people and feelings of belonging; and accessibility to basic services and dispute management. The data points to a dynamic and uncertain situation that is significantly affected by the actions of external actors. In considering interventions in Yemen, the international community should keep in mind that the situation is not a tabula rasa. The current conflict is an extension of grievances and power dynamics that came before it and will likely endure after it. The current UN-led mediation process revolves around a set of elites that do not represent many of the relevant players on the ground or their interests. When the violence finally stops, the international community would be wise to help ensure that those who waged the war are not the only actors determining the terms of the peace.

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