

Helpdesk Research Report: Literature on Yemen
27.02.08

Query: Please identify literature on the economy, and the security, human rights and political situation in Yemen.

Enquirer: Conflict, Humanitarian and Security Department (CHASE)

1. **Overview**
2. **Politics**
3. **Economy**
4. **Security**
5. **Human Rights**
6. **Additional information**

1. Overview

Yemen is seen as having made significant progress since its unification in 1990 and civil war in 1994. In recent years, the government has undertaken various measures to encourage democracy and political pluralism. As a result, much of the literature on the political situation in Yemen focuses on the democratisation process and the role of political parties. This literature describes the political landscape in Yemen as characterised by:

- a semi-authoritarian regime, which allows some freedoms while restricting others;
- a fragmented opposition;
- a poorly designed electoral system which does not reflect the aspirations of the population; and
- a predominance of tribal structures and norms in the rural areas which often parallel government systems.

The main challenges for the Yemeni government include strengthening the rule of law, addressing corruption, and increasing transparency.

The limited number of documents that were found on the Yemeni economy attribute Yemen's slow economic growth to the lack of effective government institutions. Additional constraints such as high production costs, lack of technical skills, smuggling and dumping, lack of access to credit, etc. also hamper the development of various sectors.

Several authors highlight various sources of potential conflict that exist within Yemeni society. These include widespread poverty, rapid population growth, the uneven distribution of scarce natural resources, a heavily armed civilian population, the absence of state authority in the rural areas, resistance to government and legal authority amongst tribal and youth populations, weak political institutions, widespread disenchantment with the slow pace of democratisation and enduring social, economic and religious cleavages. There are also concerns about the links between Yemeni organisations such as the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army and the Islamic Jihad Movement and al-Qaeda, as well as the prospect of the radicalisation of Yemen's large numbers of disenfranchised youth.

Further, the Yemeni government's pursuit of alleged terror suspects has led to instances of detention without trial, alleged extrajudicial killings and lack of due process. Restrictions on press freedom were also widely reported last year.

There is very little current and easily available literature on Yemen. This query has prioritised literature published since 2002 and as a result, the references included can only offer a limited view of the various dimensions of the political, economic, security and human rights situation. As the query did not require input on a specific question, few external experts were contacted.

2. Politics

- Phillips, S., 2007, 'Evaluating Political Reform in Yemen', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington DC
http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/cp_80_phillips_yemen_final.pdf

In this paper, the author assesses the significance of Yemen's limited democratic reforms since national unification; and recommends steps that national and international actors can take to promote more meaningful reform. Phillips argues that if Yemen is to remain a viable state, aggressive political and economic reform must be implemented to weaken the current patronage system and the resulting legal inconsistencies. She believes these issues to be the biggest obstacles to reform. While the idea of a gradual transition to democracy has become an important legitimising platform for the Yemeni government, domestically and internationally, in practice, the situation is more complex. While there have been some progressive changes, Yemen has a president approaching his thirtieth year in power, a government perceived to be increasingly corrupt, and a deeply fragmented political opposition that has been unable to force real concessions from the regime. There has also been an increase in the harassment of journalists in recent years. Still, government-run newspapers sometimes publish articles criticising the narrowing of press freedoms. Ultimately, the author argues that the Yemeni regime seems to allow only those aspects of democracy which do not genuinely constrain it. "The changes that Yemen has witnessed since 1990 thus do not represent a clear democratic transition but contain elements of several broad patterns of political change in the Arab world, where limited openings, controlled pluralism, and regime endurance are related processes and where all too often repression tends to follow periods of relaxed control" (p. 3).

- Longley, A. and Al-Iryani, A. G., 2008, 'Fighting Brushfires with Batons: An Analysis of the Political Crisis in South Yemen', The Middle East Institute Policy Brief
<http://www.mei.edu/files/fighting-brushfires-batons-yemen.pdf>

This article highlights a series of protests that have occurred in Southern Yemen since spring 2007. Amongst other things, the protestors are demanding: equal access to government jobs, benefits and services; political and economic decentralization; the establishment of the rule of law and in particular a legal system that can deal with property disputes and regular corruption scandals; and better stewardship of the national economy and natural resources. The author argues that while these grievances are not new, the intensity of the protests, their grassroots origins, and their connection with similar grievances and potential instability in the North make the situation particularly dangerous for the Salih regime. The regime has three main policy options for solving the growing crisis: increased repression, a combination of co-optation and divide and rule tactics, or an aggressive package of political and economic reform. Such reform would have as its cornerstone meaningful decentralisation. Of the three options, decentralisation is the most likely to preserve unity, encourage economic development, and strengthen Salih's grip on power in the long term. However, the author believes that fear, greed, and old habits are most likely to guide the President's decision, and he will choose a combination of targeted repression, co-optation, and divide and rule tactics. This choice will aggravate the conflict and may result in a prolonged period of instability in the South, which may destabilize the delicate political balance in the North.

- Longley, A., 2007, 'The High Water Mark of Islamist Politics: The Case of Yemen', *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 61, no. 2, pp.240-260
This article is available for purchase from the Middle East Institute:
<http://mei.publisher.ingentaconnect.com/content/mei/mei/2007/00000061/00000002>
(Please note: I have not reviewed this article. The summary below is taken from the publisher's website.)

In Yemen, Islamists seem to have lost their edge in an area formerly considered their strength: grassroots politics. In the 2006 local council elections the Islamist party Islah suffered a resounding defeat at the hands of the ruling General People's Congress (GPC) party. The overwhelming victory of the GPC in the local councils can be accounted for with reference to four main factors: the GPC's use of the state to advance its electoral aims; the political skill of GPC politicians; the political blunders of the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP); and finally, several political liabilities particular to Islah, including internal fragmentation and party members' often harmful records in office. The elections show that President 'Ali 'Abdullah Salih and his supporters have developed a more nuanced semi-authoritarian framework for maintaining power. In contrast, the opposition demonstrated political immaturity, internal weakness, and an inability to use potential grassroots support to oppose the regime. The future of accountability and competitive politics in Yemen is intimately connected to the political survival and revitalization of Islah. In the aftermath of the elections, the opposition must conduct serious, critical self-evaluation if it intends to hold the regime accountable and to curb the ever-increasing centralization of power around the President and his family.

- Burrowes, R. D. and Kasper, C. M., 2007, 'The Salih Regime and the Need for a Credible Opposition', *Middle East Journal*, vol. 61, No.2, pp. 263-280
This article is available to purchase from the Middle East Institute:
<http://mei.publisher.ingentaconnect.com/content/mei/mei/2007/00000061/00000002>
(Please note: I have not reviewed this article. The summary below is taken from the publisher's website.)

Analyses indicate that the Republic of Yemen (ROY) needs to effect major reforms in the next several years if Yemeni society is to again become viable; and that, given the re-election of President Salih in 2006, the best hope for this coming about depends on the emergence of a credible and formidable opposition able to pressure the regime to effect reforms. The evolution of the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) through 2006 suggests that such an opposition has emerged and could have the required effect between now and the next parliamentary elections.

- Book: Long, D. E., Reich, B. and Gasiorowski, M., 2007, 'The Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa', Westview Press, New York
This book is available for purchase from Amazon.co.uk:
http://www.amazon.co.uk/Government-Politics-Middle-North-Africa/dp/0813343615/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1204115259&sr=1-1
(Please note: I have not reviewed this book. The summary below is taken from the publisher's website).

This book is a revised fifth edition, invited authorities provide comprehensive, country-by-country analyses of fundamental issues and critical contemporary events in the Middle East and North Africa. The chapters are structured according to a standard format that addresses in turn each country's history, economics, politics, and foreign policy, facilitating comparison and contrast across countries. A guide to further reading concludes each chapter. Robert D Burrowes, Adjunct Professor of Political Science at the Jackson School of International Studies and Yemen expert, contributes a chapter on Yemen to this book.

- Book: Schwedler, J., 2006, 'Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen', Cambridge University Press, UK

This book is available for purchase from Amazon.co.uk:
http://www.amazon.co.uk/Faith-Moderation-Islamist-Parties-Jordan/dp/0521040000/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1204116382&sr=1-1

A preview is available at:

<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=DVwHXnOSeNUC&printsec=frontcover&dq=economy+yemen&lr>

(Please note: I have not reviewed this book. The summary below is adapted from the publisher's website).

This book is based on nearly four years of field research in Jordan and Yemen and provides a comparative study of the Islamic Action Front (IAF) party in Jordan and the Islah party in Yemen. Schwedler argues that the IAF in Jordan has become more moderate through participation in pluralist political processes, while the Islah party has not. The variation can be explained in part by internal group organisation and decision making processes, but particularly by the ways in which the IAF has been able to justify its new pluralist practices on Islamic terms while the Islah party has not.

- Al-Yemeni, A. A. H., 2003, 'The Dynamic of Democratisation – Political Parties in Yemen', Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Bonn
<http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/01459.pdf>

This booklet charts Yemen's democratisation experience between 1990 and 2000. It explores the structure and performance of the major political parties in Yemen since unification in 1990 and analyses the various party platforms, as well as their strengths and weaknesses. The author also looks at the constraints faced by political parties in an emerging democracy with a weak economy.

- Mashhur, H., Al-Kamim, A. A. M. and Al-Mikhlaifi, M. A., 2005, 'Building Democracy in Yemen: Women's Political Participation, Political Party Life and Democratic Elections', International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)/ Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND), Stockholm
http://www.idea.int/publications/dem_yemen/upload/Yemen_country_report_English.pdf

This report is one of the outcomes of a project on democratic reform in Egypt, Jordan and Yemen. The aim of the project has been to contribute comparative analysis and information on good practice on democratic reform in the three countries, and identify the main challenges and opportunities for reform. The study highlights the current situation in three main areas in Yemen:

- Political participation by Yemeni women: In the 2003 parliamentary election, 42 per cent of registered women were women. However, only 11 candidates stood for election and of those, only one was elected. "This pointed to a gap between fairly 'progressive' legislation, supported by the work of the women's movements, and the reality of Yemeni society's very negative view of women, consecrated by the tribe and the value system" (p.13).
- Political parties: The overall trend is towards the concentration of power in a single party – the General People's Congress. This can be partly attributed to the evolution of electoral law (see point below).
- The electoral system: Despite the existence of constitutional and electoral laws which provide for free and fair elections and political pluralism, the choice of the first-past-the-post system and various legal loopholes have led to questionable results and increasing frustration among the population.

3. Economy

- Al-Asaly, S. M. 2003, 'The Political Economy of Economic Growth Policies: The Case of Yemen Republic', Global Development Network

http://www.gdnet.org/pdf2/gdn_library/global_research_projects/explaining_growth/Yemen_final.pdf

This paper discusses the comprehensive programme initiated by the Yemeni government after the 1995 economic crisis which aimed to achieve higher economic growth rates. This programme adopted two strategies: establishing economic stability, and restructuring the economy. Whereas the stabilisation policies were a success, restructuring policies failed to meet their goals. The inflation rate was reduced to less than 10% within two years and the value of the national currency showed encouraging signs of stability. It was expected that the achievement of stabilisation would automatically lead to economic growth. This process of economic growth did not pick up, and the paper argues that this failure can be attributed to the malfunctioning of national institutions. These have resulted primarily from the weak representation, coordination and commitment that have characterised Yemen's recent experiences with political systems. As it currently stands, the Yemeni political system is a mixture between democratic (nominal multiparty system) and dictatorial (ruling entity determines the roles of all parties in the political process) systems. Some of the paper's policy recommendations include:

- well-functioning institutions must be established to support sound economic policies, guaranteeing a degree of representation, commitment and coordination;
 - government institutions should initiate and implement a comprehensive and sound economic growth strategy; and
 - a more democratic political system should be practiced which will allow for the establishment of modern government institutions.
- World Bank, 2006, 'The International Development Association Country Assistance Strategy for the Republic of Yemen', World Bank, Washington DC
http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2006/08/08/000090341_20060808101759/Rendered/PDF/36014.pdf

This Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) proposes that the World Bank should help the government to make progress on four pillars: increasing non-oil growth; improving human development outcomes; improving fiscal sustainability; and addressing the resource sustainability crisis. The CAS also includes, under each pillar, upfront actions to improve economic governance, although the effects of such actions may only be visible in the medium-term. Based on Yemen's IDA allocation, the World Bank will contribute - to Yemen's development process - a financial amount of around US\$400 million in IDA credits over the four year CAS period.

- World Bank, 2002, 'Economic Growth in the Republic of Yemen: Sources, Constraints and Potentials', World Bank, Washington DC
http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2002/11/01/000094946_02102304035761/Rendered/PDF/multi0page.pdf

This country study focuses on the potentials and constraints of Yemen's various economic sectors and assesses the business and governance environment. The report is composed of three parts. Part I reviews economic performance in Yemen and assesses the government's medium- and long-term development plans. It provides a detailed analysis of the major structural characteristics of the Yemeni economy and assesses the impact of economic reforms undertaken in the mid-1990s and the structure of economic growth. Part II looks at Yemen's private sector environment and investigates why the private sector's response to stabilisation and structural reforms in Yemen has been slow. Part III concludes with policy recommendations including a concise policy matrix for accelerating and sustaining economic growth in Yemen in the medium- and long-terms. The focal point of the report is mainly the need to improve the governance structure and private sector environment to tap the potentials of the Yemeni economy.

4. Security

- Miller, D. B., 2003, 'Demand, Stockpiles and Social Controls: Small Arms in Yemen', Small Arms Survey
http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/sas/publications/o_papers_pdf/2003-op09-yemen.pdf

This study estimates that there are between 6 to 9 million small arms in Yemen, dramatically reducing popular estimates of Yemen having 50 million small arms. This reduced figure does not, however, undermine Yemen's status as one of the world's most heavily armed societies. The study finds that the demand for small arms in Yemen is not an automatic or causal reaction to fears of insecurity, the effects of poverty, or even the politics of exclusion. Instead, evidence strongly suggests that it is grounded in local belief systems that make up the wider political and social order. The author finds that in Yemeni life, tribal rules of behaviour, more than civil or international law, are the main determinants of weapons possession, use, and the consequences of use. While it is informed (but not overruled) by the moderating influence of Islam (or, more specifically, Islamic law), tribal law is the major socialising factor that governs the usually unwritten rules about intra- and inter-tribal relations regarding weapons use. State law is often ignored as largely ineffectual, and in some ways, antagonistic to tribal traditions. "Instruction for the future is largely derived from the past, where Yemenis seek principles for the perpetuation and stabilization of social life. This implies that researchers should not look to state law to understand the 'laws' that govern Yemeni life. It further implies that the location for understanding social rules of small arms use is in the lessons taught by fathers to their children, and the tribe to its members" (p. vii).

- Jones, A., 2005, 'Conflict, Development and Community Participation in Education: Pakistan and Yemen', Internationales Asienforum, Vol. 36, No. 3-4, pp. 289-310
http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/1b/cf/9c.pdf

In 'development', community participation has increasingly come to be seen as a way to encourage community interest, involvement, ownership and ultimately, sustainability of projects. This article argues that while 'participation' has been examined and critiqued for what it actually means in development contexts, participation takes on a new character and is of critical importance in areas which are conflict prone. This paper examines two development scenarios (Pakistan and Yemen) where community participation in education is advocated. In these two cases, tribal, power relationships and conflict scenarios have aspects in common, and government policies for community participation in education are similar. While the link between participation and sustainability of programs cannot be denied, there are other factors in such socio-political environments, which have a bearing on conflict: the understanding of community participation; the degree of 'participation' which is possible; the 'voice/spokesman' on behalf of the 'community'; social hierarchies, traditional elites, and various power relationships. One question to consider is whether 'participation' is a structural innovation which allows the central government to weaken or and destabilise the power of traditional leaders. In such situations, 'transforming' traditional relations could backfire and further intensify conflict.

- International Crisis Group, 2003, 'Yemen: Coping with Terrorism and Violence in a Fragile State', ICG, Amman/ Brussels
http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/report_archive/A400863_08012003.pdf

This paper argues that signs of potential instability in Yemen are offset by significant positive political developments and that the ground reality is greatly complex. It argues that concerns that areas of rural Yemen will become a magnet for members of al-Qaeda fleeing Afghanistan appear exaggerated and, more importantly, can lead to incorrect policy conclusions. A variety of politically motivated attacks on foreign and Yemeni targets have taken place in recent years; however, these have been conducted by diverse actors driven by diverse goals. Detailed, reliable information about such attacks is scarce. While there have

been personal links between Osama bin Laden and members of the Islamic Jihad Movement (IJM) in the past, there is little clear evidence about organisational and financial links between al-Qaeda and the two Yemeni Islamist militant groups, IJM and the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army. An exclusive focus on terrorism, the paper asserts, could obscure the domestic roots of the many problems that confront Yemen. These include widespread poverty, rapid population growth, an uneven distribution of scarce natural and other resources, a heavily armed civilian population that is dispersed throughout remote and often inaccessible regions, a state often unable to extend its authority to rural areas, porous borders and smuggling, weak political institutions, popular disenchantment with the slow pace of democratisation and lingering social, economic and religious cleavages.

- Schanzer, J., 2004, 'Yemen's War on Terror', Orbis, Vol. 41, Issue 3, pp. 517-531
<http://thewashingtoninstitute.org/opedsPDFs/4224cd7e95ec5.pdf>

This article argues that Yemen has emerged as one of the more fertile locations for al-Qaeda activity. Al Qaeda's Yemeni affiliate, the Islamic Army of Aden-Abyan (IAA), has executed a number of attacks against Western interests in recent years. Security concerns are compounded by the fact that the government lacks the resources to effectively control large parts of the countryside. Tribal structures often run parallel to the government. Powerful patriarchs sometimes disregard parameters set by the government, and allegiances to powerful tribal patriarchs often supersede respect for state law. In northern governorates, clashes between various tribal elements are frequent, aided by Saudi support for some tribes. For the author, Yemen's tribal culture, the influence of groups like Islah, and the continuing presence of Al Qaeda-affiliated individuals and groups will pose ongoing problems in Yemen.

5. Human Rights

- Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, 2007, 'Yemen Country Report on Human Rights Practices - 2006', US Department of State, Washington DC
<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78867.htm>

This report documents that significant human rights problems existed in some areas of Yemen in 2006. These included limitations on citizens' ability to change their government due to corruption, fraudulent voter registration, and administrative weakness. Torture and poor prison conditions existed in some prisons. Prolonged pre-trial detention and judicial weakness and corruption were also problems; as well as some limitations on press freedom. Pervasive corruption within the government, discrimination against women, and instances of child labour and child trafficking were also identified. The government took several steps to reduce corruption, including removing and investigating several judges accused of malfeasance, passing a financial disclosure law for government officials, and establishing an independent anticorruption authority with civil society representatives.

- Amnesty International, 2007, 'Amnesty International Report 2007 – Yemen', Amnesty International
<http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/Regions/Middle-East-and-North-Africa/Yemen>

This report highlights that, in 2007, dozens of people arrested in previous years in the context of the "war on terror" remained in indefinite detention without trial. Two escaped prisoners were killed by the security forces in circumstances that suggested they may have been extrajudicially executed. Political prisoners were tried in special courts whose proceedings fell far short of international standards. Dozens of detainees were released in Sa'da Province, but hundreds were believed to be still detained at the end of the year. Death sentences continued to be imposed and at least 30 people were reported to have been executed.

- Freedom House, 2006, 'Countries at the Crossroads Country Report – Yemen', Freedom House
<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=140&edition=7&ccrpage=31&ccrcountry=143>

This report provides an overview of accountability and public voice; civil liberties; rule of law; anticorruption and transparency in Yemen. “In the two years from the end of 2003 until the end of 2005, Yemen's overall performance on democratic governance weakened, with little progress to report on strengthening the rule of law, fighting corruption, and increasing transparency. Yemen's government severely restricted press freedom; security forces intimidated, beat, and arrested dozens of journalists who had expressed criticism of the government. The government also used a restrictive press law to jail journalists and close newspapers that had criticized the government. The government crackdown on press freedom during this two-year period represented one of the most tangible signs of a lack of progress toward democratic governance in Yemen.” (Introduction page)

6. Additional information

Author

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Contributors

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Websites visited

Amnesty International, Brookings Institution, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Danish Institute for International Studies, Eldis, Freedom House, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Google, Google Scholar, GSDRC, International Crisis Group, Middle East Institute, National Democratic Institute, US Department of State.

Need help finding consultants?

If you need to commission more in-depth research, or need help finding and contracting consultants for additional work, please contact us again at consultants@gsdrc.org (further details at: <http://www.gsdrc.org/go.cfm?path=/go/helpdesk/find-a-consultant&>).