

Polity IV Country Report 2010: Yemen

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2009</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2010</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Polity:</td> <td>-2</td> <td>-2</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Democ:</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autoc:</td> <td>3</td> <td>3</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Durable:</td> <td></td> <td>17</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tentative:</td> <td></td> <td>No</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2009	2010	Change	Polity:	-2	-2	0	Democ:	1	1	0	Autoc:	3	3	0	Durable:		17		Tentative:		No		<div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Authority Trends, 1946-2010: Yemen</p> </div>
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Polity:	-2	-2	0																						
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Tentative:		No																							
SCODE	YEM	CCODE	679	Date of Report	1 June 2011																				
Polity IV Component Variables																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
2	0	0	2	3	3																				
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)																									
End Date	22 May 1990		Begin Date	28 April 1993																					
Polity Fragmentation: No																									
Constitution	1991 (1994, 2001)																								
Executive(s)	President Ali Abdallah Salih (MSA); first seized power in North Yemen in 1978; designated president of unified Yemen in 1990; initially directly elected, 23 September 1999; reelected, 20 September 2006, 77.2%																								
Legislature	Bicameral: House of Representatives (301 seats; directly elected; most recent elections, 27 April 2003) General People's Congress (MSA): 228 Yemeni Congregation for Reform (Islah): 47 Other parties: 12 Non-partisans: 14 Shura Council (111 seats; appointed by president)																								
Judiciary	Supreme Court																								

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Gradual Transition from Self-Selection (5)

Note: Yemen was created on 22 May 1990 with the unification of the (northern) Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) and the (southern) People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (YPR). Prior to the formation of a unified Yemen state in the early 1990s, Ali Abdallah Salih was president of North Yemen. Initially appointed to the position of president of North Yemen following a bloody military coup in 1978, Ali Abdallah Salih became the Republic of Yemen's first chief executive in 1990. A long-time authoritarian ruler, for much of the past decade President Salih has sought to establish "regulated" procedures for

¹ The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

executive selection without relinquishing his actual power. In 1994, following North Yemen's military victory against South Yemeni secessionists, he was re-elected as national president by a legislature completely dominated by his own party, the northern-based General People's Congress Party (GPC). In accordance with a 1994 constitutional provision that required the president to be elected by popular vote from a pool of at least two candidates endorsed by Parliament, the country's first direct presidential elections were held in September 1999. While these elections were procedurally fair, nevertheless, they were organized in such a way as to pose no significant threat to President Salih's rule. As a result of an opposition boycott of the 1997 parliamentary elections by the southern-based Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), no significant opposition candidates received the minimum number of votes from the GPC-dominated legislature to run for office. The President's sole opposition was a member of his own party. In the absence of any real political challenge, Salih was re-elected in 1999 with over ninety-six percent of the vote. On 16 July 2006, Salih announced that he would not seek re-election. However, on July 20 violent riots broke out in the capital and other cities after the government cut subsidies on petroleum and caused a doubling of prices; Salih subsequently retracted his promise to help "train Yemenis in the practice of peaceful succession" to instead "deliver the ship of our nation to safe harbour." Salih was re-elected in elections on 20 September 2006, which were considered by observers to be an "open and genuine contest," albeit with important shortcomings and marked by some political violence. The allied opposition Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), while stopping short of contesting the outcome, claimed the vote was rigged and Salih's margin of victory was seriously inflated; Salih won seventy-seven percent of the vote in this election.

Executive Constraints: Slight Limitations (2)

For all practical purposes Yemen operates as a de facto one-party state controlled by northern Yemeni interests under the supervision of a dominant president. The General People's Congress (GPC) party, the former ruling party of North Yemen, maintains hegemonic control over the institutions of governance (along with their junior partner, the Islamic-based al-Islah party). President Salih, head of the GPC since its inception in the early 1980s, dominates the political arena in Yemen and is only mildly constrained by either his own party or the legislature. The Constitution effectively consolidates political power in the hands of the president, who wields broad executive authority and is empowered to appoint a vice president, a prime minister, and the cabinet and can hold office for an unlimited number of terms. Constraints on the president's authority were reduced by the 1994 amendments to the Constitution that abolished the Presidential Council in favor of a single leader. In the past few years President Salih has been able to implement amendments to the Constitution that have further consolidated his power by extending presidential terms from five to seven years and by adding an appointed upper chamber to the legislature in February 2001. The popularly elected chamber of the legislature is dominated by the GPC. Despite Salih's paramount political position in Yemen, the National Assembly has, on occasion, demonstrated its autonomy from the executive branch by initiating minor pieces of legislation, delaying and revising presidential initiatives and, periodically, by publicly criticizing the President. The judiciary is nominally independent, but is weak and severely hampered by corruption, executive branch interference, and the frequent failure of the authorities to enforce judgments.

Political Participation: Factional/Restricted Competition (6)

The complex interactions between regional-based political parties, religious and tribal actors and an ever-vigilant security apparatus define politics in Yemen. Tribal violence remains a problem in Yemen and the government's writ is tenuous at best in remote desert and mountain areas. Patrimonial relations and clientelist politics represent the backbone of the political order in Yemen. President Saleh's Sanhan clansmen, for example, hold a majority of the top government posts. While Saleh may favor his own tribal group, nevertheless, he is very careful not to spark the ire of the other tribal factions within Yemen. He is quite aware of the fact that his rule is dependent on the continued support of these regional-based armed groups.

Despite the founding of the united Republic of Yemen in 1990, politics in this new country continues to reflect regional-based interests. Factional competition between political interests aligned with the "conservative" North and the "socialist" South is a constant source of instability in Yemen. Contention between these two regional blocks, represented by the General People's Congress (north) and the Yemeni Socialist Party (south), has centered on the distribution of political power in the new Yemeni State. While opposition political activity is generally tolerated in Yemen, President Salih has actively sought to weaken

organized opposition to northern-based dominance of the country through institutional barriers and political intimidation. This policy of northern hegemony triggered a brief civil war in 1994 when southern secessionists (led by the Yemeni Socialist Party, YSP) were defeated and subdued by military force. Subsequent legislative elections, held in 1997, were boycotted by the YSP and its allies. Al-Islah, an Islamist party based on factional tribal identity and closely aligned with the GPC, has served as the primary opposition force in the legislative branch. While the relationship between the GPC and al-Islah has been close in the past, it has become increasingly strained in recent years as Islamic fundamentalists have become a primary target of the government's repressive policies.

In January 2001 a group of opposition parties, led by the YSP, formed the Opposition Coordination Council ahead of forthcoming municipal elections and a referendum on constitutional amendments that sought to increase the presidential and legislative terms of office. The council said that the move was necessary in order to compete with Yemen's two strongest parties, the ruling General People's Congress and the Yemeni Alliance for Reform (al-Islah). Despite this effort to counter GPC hegemony of the political arena, seventy percent of voters approved constitutional changes in February 2001 which extended the presidential term of office from five years to seven, and that of the House of Representatives from four years to six. Polling was marred by around one hundred incidents of violence, with some reports claiming that as many as forty-five people died on election day. In some areas tanks and forces of the elite Republican Guard were deployed. Much of the violence arose out of complaints of malpractice and most involved rival supporters of the ruling General People's Congress (GPC) and the opposition Yemeni Alliance for Reform (al-Islah).

In the legislative elections held in April 2003 Yemen's ruling GPC won a clear majority of seats in Parliament. While the campaign season prior to the election witnessed significant episodes of political violence, only seven individuals were killed during the actual polling process, far less than in previous elections. Despite this promising trend, the elections were plagued by political intimidation, underage voting and vote-buying. Tensions with south Yemeni separatists continue through early 2010.

In 2004 a rebel cleric in the north of the country, Sheikh Hussein al-Houthi, formed an armed group which staged violent protests against the US and Israel. In an effort to limit the spread of these protests, in June 2004 the armed forces launched an attack against the Shia Zeidi sect in the mountainous Maran area. Over two hundred troops and rebels were killed in the summer of 2004. In September 2004 Hussein al-Houthi was killed by government troops. The violence in this region continued through May 2007 despite a temporary lull in late-2006 following a short-lived peace settlement with the government. A second peace agreement, brokered by Qatar, was reached in June 2007. Despite these agreements, fighting in the north around the city of Sa'daa has continued through early 2010, drawing in armed forces from neighboring Saudi Arabia.

Mass rallies calling for President Salih to resign emerged in late February 2011. In the face of mounting mass protests, many observers see the resignation of the President as inevitable, however, as of early April he continued to cling to power. Salih's decision to respond to this pressure with force has increasingly left him isolated as some of his closest allies, high-ranking military and tribal leaders, including the powerful General Ali Mohsen, have turned against him. However, helping the President cling to power is the fact that his relatives hold powerful government posts. Salih's son Ahmed is in charge of the powerful Republican Guard and his nephew, Yahia, heads the security forces of the country. The consolidation of power around his family has allowed Salih to withstand the rising discontent within the Yemeni political order and will likely complicate the process of negotiating a post-Salih Yemen. Salih has argued that if he relinquishes power too quickly that the country will fall into anarchy and, thus, he will only be willing to turn over power to "safe hands, not to sick, resentful or corrupt hands." For its part, the Yemeni parliament established a state of emergency in March 2011 that increased the powers of the security forces to detain suspects and prevent demonstrations. Opposition and independent MPs, as well as some members of Salih's ruling General Peoples' Congress, boycotted the vote. In addition to the poor economic and social conditions within the country, the Salih government faces a separatist movement in the south of the country, an active wing of al-Qaeda, and periodic conflicts with Shia tribes in the north.