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# CONSOLIDATION THROUGH CRACKDOWN: UNDERSTANDING HOUTHI RULE IN YEMEN

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September 2024 marked a decade since Houthi militants marched on Yemen's capital, Sana'a, and gradually succeeded in displacing the internationally recognized Government of Yemen (GoY), initiating an internationalized civil war. It also capped nearly a year of relatively limited violence between Yemeni factions, even as there was a dramatic escalation of armed conflict between Houthi militants and forces outside of Yemen, including both the United States and Israel.<sup>1</sup> In this dramatic context, critical transformations in Houthi-controlled regions of Yemen have largely fallen below the radar of international news coverage and analysis. When Yemen *has* been the subject of international news coverage and policy analysis, the focus has largely been on the Houthis' disruption of Red Sea shipping and their efforts to strike Tel Aviv, or on U.S. and Israeli retaliation. On TikTok and YouTube, by contrast, ill-informed but wide-reaching accounts have romanticized "hot Houthi pirates" and treated the rebel group as interchangeable with "Yemen." What both traditional and social media have largely overlooked are recent and dramatic developments on the ground in Houthi-controlled areas of the country that both reflect the movement's entrenchment and simultaneously deepen it further. These

changes will further undermine regional security and worsen conditions for millions of Yemeni civilians.

The most striking example of this is an under-remarked but dramatic campaign initiated at the end of May 2024 against a wide range of civil society actors.<sup>2</sup> In the span of only a few weeks, dozens, perhaps hundreds, of staff employed by international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), humanitarian aid agencies, and domestic civil society organizations (CSOs) were rounded up, detained, and interrogated in what Human Rights Watch has described as a campaign of enforced disappearance.<sup>3</sup> Recorded confessions extracted during interrogations were broadcast across Houthi-controlled media platforms, widening the circle of civil actors that the Houthis claimed were implicated in spying for Israel and the United States via their present or past employment.

The timing of this campaign coincides with the Houthis' campaign to disrupt Red Sea shipping and their extension of missile attacks on Israel, affording the campaign a wartime logic that few Yemenis will dispute publicly. On July 17, Houthi authorities cemented the crackdown by announcing

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that INGOs would no longer be allowed to hire or appoint local staff without permission from the Supreme Council for the Management and Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and International Cooperation.<sup>4</sup> In effect, this means that an entire sector—one responsible for work vital to the well-being of tens of millions of Yemeni civilians—has ground to a halt.

The Houthis' newest campaign against civil actors is not simply a continuation of existing modes of repression. Insofar as the campaign relies on the movement's coercive capacity and its ability to successfully frame its actions by means of a well-developed media strategy, this Brief argues that the campaign is a manifestation of the consolidation of their rebel rule. The timing of the campaign must be understood in the context of the country's ongoing institutional and economic fragmentation, particularly with respect to the Houthis' efforts to secure control of Yemen's banking sector, and of the flow of foreign currency into the country.

The specific nature of the movement's targets suggests that this campaign will further shrink what little space exists for Yemenis to communicate and cooperate across different parts of the country's fractured political landscape, while deepening Yemenis' dependence on the Houthi apparatus. Among other things, targeting CSOs and INGOs further securitizes research and knowledge production and erodes the capacity of Yemeni civil actors to engage in forms of everyday peace building and humanitarian assistance across territorial lines—and it will have lasting implications for Yemeni society as a whole.<sup>5</sup>

## THE WORST CRACKDOWN YOU HAVEN'T HEARD OF

Little reporting on the crackdown on civil society and international organizations in Yemen has reached the international media. This is in part because global (and especially Anglophone) media coverage of Yemen tends to focus more closely on the dynamics of armed conflict: months of Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping, retaliatory airstrikes by a U.S.-led coalition of states, Houthi drone and missile strikes on Tel Aviv, and Israeli counterstrikes on the Houthi-controlled port of Hodeidah and other Houthi interests. But attention to the group's domestic campaign against INGOs and CSOs also lags because of the longstanding repression of the media over the decade-long conflict.<sup>6</sup> In a context in which it is difficult for Yemeni journalists to report safely and foreign reporters have largely long since departed, details can be hard to confirm, rumors run rampant, and fear is ever-present.

There has also been relative silence on this issue on the part of international organizations whose local staff have been targeted—perhaps driven by fear that negative reporting will worsen the prospects for detainees. Based on past practice, there is no reason to expect that detainees will have access to basic human rights protections while in Houthi custody.<sup>7</sup> They face the possibility of torture and sexual violence, and have largely been denied the ability to communicate with attorneys or loved ones.

The situation is further complicated by the need of international aid organizations to maintain access to areas under Houthi control in order to continue providing essential relief. The political compromises made by aid organizations in exchange for access were already a documented source of contention even before this crackdown, with critics documenting the politicization of aid and its role in entrenching Houthi control over North Yemen.<sup>8</sup> Controversially, after more than a year of failed negotiations with Houthi authorities, the World Food Program withdrew services from Houthi-held areas in December 2023, a move met with criticism by more than a dozen other international aid organizations.<sup>9</sup>

In this context, whether and how to respond to the Houthis' campaign against international organizations and Yemeni civil society organizations—in coordination across the associational sector, as individual organizations, or as individuals—has presented a serious challenge.<sup>10</sup> Human Rights Watch was the first, and among the only, international organizations to issue a statement on the campaign, doing so nearly a month after the campaign was initiated.<sup>11</sup> For several weeks, the United Nations limited itself to commenting on only those thirteen detainees who were directly employed by UN agencies, while pressing forward in brokering negotiations with the Houthis on other issues.<sup>12</sup>

Inside Yemen, the country's highest-profile human rights organization, Mwatana, was quick to denounce the campaign and to publicize a joint statement by thirty-four local CSOs asserting their independence, refuting the allegations against them and their employees, and calling for rule of law.<sup>13</sup> The joint statement criticized the arbitrary nature of the detentions, affirming that the signatories are "prepared to respond to any legal complaints against our staff and to be accountable for any proven violations through a fair judicial process."<sup>14</sup> After more than three months of behind-the-scenes coordination, Saferworld issued a statement reflecting the joint position of seventy-seven Yemeni and non-Yemeni organizations, framing the detentions as a violation of Yemeni and international law.<sup>15</sup>

The focus on rule of law in the few statements made on this issue finesses an essential point: that the Houthi movement (formally known as Ansar Allah) controls a bureaucracy and a judiciary grounded in a constitutional order that has been inoperative for over ten years. A nearly yearlong uprising in Yemen in 2011 was brought to a close by the transfer of power from longtime president Ali Abdullah Saleh to his vice president, Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi, as part of an externally brokered transitional process. The transitional framework, designed by Yemen's neighbors in the Gulf Cooperation Council and endorsed by the

United Nations, featured a National Dialogue Conference meant to tackle a range of divisive issues and grievances. This was positioned as a precursor to the drafting of a new constitution that would reconfigure the fragile state as a federal republic and redistribute power across its institutions and regions.<sup>16</sup> Yet even as this process was underway, the Houthis advanced into Sana'a and changed the facts on the ground. Without accounting for the derailment of the constitutional process and Houthi control over and subsequent reconfiguration of both bureaucracy and judiciary, appeals to rule of law themselves risk normalizing contested claims to sovereignty amid Yemen's ongoing civil war.<sup>17</sup>

## REBEL RULE SINCE THE "21 SEPTEMBER REVOLUTION"

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Many of the areas currently under the control of the Houthis have now been so for a decade or more. Areas of the far north are not only home to a greater concentration of Zaydi Muslims than other parts of the country, but these areas are also where the Houthi movement itself and an antecedent Zaydi Shi'i revivalist movement originated. It is in the north that a Houthi-led insurgency survived several rounds of asymmetric armed conflict against the Yemeni armed forces and the government's tribal allies between 2004 and 2010.

Houthi forces subsequently extended their practical jurisdiction over much of the far north during the chaotic transitional period between the Yemeni uprising of 2011 and the final collapse of the externally brokered transitional process in 2014. Most of the group's additional territory came under Houthi control between the group's September 2014 march on Sana'a and the expansion of its military campaign southward in the winter and spring of 2015. Comparatively populous and developed areas of the country such as the governorate of Ibb and much of the governorate of Taiz brought a much more diverse, urban, and educated population under Houthi control than when their authority was limited to areas of the far north around Sa'ada.

Though the Houthi movement controls less than half of the physical territory of Yemen, up to 70 percent of Yemen's population live in areas under its jurisdiction. To exert control over a heterogeneous population with limited political sympathy for their movement aims, Houthi officials have relied on a combination of existing bureaucracy and new institutions. This is particularly notable in urban areas and communities with robust civil society organizations and a tradition of *madani*<sup>18</sup> politics. Though the bureaucracy of the Yemeni state has remained largely intact, it has been

partially restaffed by loyalists and augmented by unique governance and military structures introduced to facilitate Houthi rule. This reorganization and augmentation of the bureaucracy in the context of rebel governance may obscure what people mean (and perhaps what they hope for) when they invoke the concept of “rule of law,” as coalitions of Yemeni CSOs have done in their rejection of the current campaign. When CSOs claim, for example, that “[a]ll our activities and programs comply with international charters, principles, and Yemeni national laws” and that they “operate in full compliance with Yemeni laws and judicial authority,” they simultaneously invoke an idealized legal system grounded in a bygone constitution and strengthen the ability of those who currently control judicial institutions to further weaponize them.<sup>19</sup>

Central to the Houthis’ new and extraconstitutional political institutions has been the Supreme Political Council, effectively a collective executive that appoints and oversees members of the government who, in turn, supervise relevant government ministries. A restaffed Parliament composed of members of Ansar Allah, members of the former president’s General People’s Congress, and some other allies of the Houthis pass laws that the Ministry of Justice stands ready to enforce. The Ministry of Social Affairs has remained a powerful instrument of regulation of civil society organizations, as it was under the pre-war regime of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh and during the transitional period. This gives Houthi-aligned officials the ability to license and supervise CSOs. In 2019, Houthi authorities also introduced a Supreme Council for the Management and Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and International Cooperation (SCMCHA), the body which now will exercise authority over staff appointments across civil society, including in INGOs.

Another consequential and extraconstitutional innovation of Houthi rule includes the *Zaynabiyat*, a women’s auxiliary force that allows the movement to extend surveillance and coercion to rigidly gender-segregated public life. This force has been implicated in direct acts of violence against women and girls, has facilitated forms of sexual violence, and has reportedly been mobilized to recruit child soldiers.<sup>20</sup> In establishing the *Zaynabiyat*, Yemeni scholar Kamilia Al-Eriani has argued, the Houthis contravene established traditions of privacy in Yemen’s conservative society and even upend established Zaydi legal codes by extending surveillance into “spaces constituted historically and Islamically as *hurma*—a concept rooted in *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) that gives private spaces a sanctuary status and forbids public intrusion into them.”<sup>21</sup>

In addition to its gendered enforcement arm, Houthi authorities have introduced new laws and policies that have contributed to a sharp deterioration in women’s and girls’ rights. Access to education and to health care services has been strained by imposed segregation, and there has been an increase in child marriage as a negative coping mechanism in the face of economic collapse.<sup>22</sup> In 2022, Houthi authorities introduced travel restrictions that have further curtailed women’s mobility and labor market participation by requiring women to secure the permission of a *mahram*, or sanctioned guardian.<sup>23</sup>

In 2023, authorities imposed new restrictions on the nature of women’s covering, specifying appropriate materials, lengths, and more as a matter of law.<sup>24</sup> Formal restrictions like these are compounded by women’s and girls’ disproportionate vulnerability to allegations of sexual impropriety: The Houthi authorities have exploited this by routinely charging women whom they detain for political reasons with prostitution, knowing that the charge in and of itself will have a damaging effect even if the charges are later dropped. Women report this as a significant constraint on their ability to contribute to CSO work.<sup>25</sup>

Even as strong social norms already contributed to considerable *de facto* gender segmentation in North Yemen and throughout much of the country, the Houthis’ new policies carry the force of law and new institutions enable their enforcement, cementing practices that impose both direct and indirect burdens on women who are active in CSOs and INGOs.<sup>26</sup> Directly, the policies impose practical burdens on women whose work requires travel and may include “gender mixing.” And because so much of the work of civil society involves gathering data and generating information about Yemeni society as well as delivering services to and empowering vulnerable groups, these changes are indirectly limiting the capacity of Yemeni civil society. They restrict the ability of civil actors to access information or deliver services as part of their job, and to communicate knowledge about the war’s impact and Yemeni societal needs to partner organizations elsewhere.

This approach is consistent with the Houthis’ broader approach to regulating media and information, as it entails formal and informal censorship of journalists and researchers, on the one hand, along with promotion of its own narrative frames through extensive use of social, broadcast, and print media. Houthi messaging characterizes the group as resisting a history of Zaydi marginalization, protecting the sanctity and social values of Yemeni society, and opposing global forces of imperialism embodied by both the United States and Israel. This is reflected,

certainly, in the group's slogan (*al-sarkha*, collective outcry), which has remained unchanged since 2002.<sup>27</sup> But it is also woven throughout official and unofficial Houthi media, distributed through its broadcast station, *al-Masirah*, and articulated through revised curricula introduced by the Houthi-controlled Ministry of Education.

Changes in curricula are particularly impactful in normalizing militarism and rationalizing armed conflict. Beginning in the 2021–22 academic year, references to political participation, civil society, and the rights of women were deleted from school curricula in Houthi-controlled areas.<sup>28</sup> Primary-school textbooks teach basic subjects through examples featuring weapons and combat scenarios, while middle-grade history lessons describe the marginalization of Zaydis in Yemen alongside the suppression of Palestinian rights by Israel, fusing the two as a part of a comprehensive narrative of resistance to injustice.<sup>29</sup>

Beyond promoting its own narrative frames, Houthi authorities also monitor and censor journalists and researchers whose work is perceived as challenging them. The Committee to Protect Journalists reports that “the Houthis have assaulted, detained, and threatened journalists in the areas under their control and killed several with mortar and missile fire.”<sup>30</sup> Even before the current campaign, such efforts to regulate the collection and dissemination of information had an impact on people working in civil society roles. Research and knowledge-production practices in CSOs and INGOs often rely on information gathering through interviews, focus groups, and surveys, along with messaging campaigns designed to promote organizational goals. Though these practices are not identical to those of journalists, it is clear that the repression of journalists has had an impact on knowledge production more broadly.<sup>31</sup>

## THE MATERIAL CONTEXT OF THE CSO CAMPAIGN

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Though it may not appear obvious at first glance, this summer's crackdown on civil society actors has its roots in the country's economic fragmentation. Before 2014, the Yemeni government employed 30.6 percent of Yemen's labor force. A liquidity crisis in 2016 and the decision to relocate the Central Bank of Yemen to Aden led to a temporary suspension of all public sector salaries and pensions, with their later reinstatement only partially subject to considerable contention.<sup>32</sup> Though the Houthis collect public revenue through taxes and customs

on shipping through the port of Hodeidah, they have demanded that the internationally recognized Government of Yemen (GoY) fully restore public salaries in Houthi-held areas and do so by directly transferring foreign currency to them.<sup>33</sup>

This issue has bedeviled negotiators for years. Yet, as the Middle East Institute's Fatima Abo Alasrar notes, “[t]here is no indication that the Houthis are willing to disburse public sector revenues to pay public sector salaries.”<sup>34</sup> The World Bank estimates that Yemen's economy has contracted by more than half over the course of the war, contributing to a grueling humanitarian crisis and the development of what are effectively parallel economies in different parts of the country.<sup>35</sup> In 2020, the Houthis introduced a ban in Houthi-held areas on currency issued by the Central Bank in Aden, further undermining any kind of national economy.

The consequences of this divided economy have fueled a humanitarian crisis of generational proportions. World Food Program data show that the number of households that rely on public sector salaries is proportionally greatest in governorates in the North under Houthi control.<sup>36</sup> Although all conflict actors have been implicated in the politicization of humanitarian assistance, diversion of aid and coercion of whistleblowers in Houthi-held areas has been so pronounced that some aid agencies, including UNICEF and Save the Children, have halted programs in Houthi-held areas. The congruence of territorial and economic fragmentation in Yemen has produced observable social and political fragmentation that will be extraordinarily difficult to overcome.<sup>37</sup>

The banking sector remains emblematic of this fragmentation, and is also a driver of the campaign against civil society. In 2023, Houthi authorities initiated a blockade on oil exports, which precipitated another liquidity crisis, along with rapid devaluation of the Yemeni rial. In response, in April 2024 the GoY ordered all banks in Yemen to relocate their headquarters to Aden within sixty days or risk being denied the ability to accept international wire transfers and incurring other penalties. It was in this context that the Houthis launched their campaign against civil society, a last-ditch effort to maintain at least some control over the flow of foreign currency by first detaining staff and terrorizing their families and then by introducing new regulations that promise to subordinate much of the associational sector.

On July 23, 2024, about six weeks after the first arrests of INGO and CSO staff, the Office of the Special Envoy of



the Secretary-General for Yemen (OESGY) announced a breakthrough in negotiations between representatives of the Houthi movement and the internationally recognized Government of Yemen.<sup>38</sup> This agreement rolled back the mandate to move banking out of Houthi-held areas, in exchange for allowing more frequent commercial flights out of Sana'a airport. By one reading, this was the first major diplomatic accomplishment in several years, and lightened travel restrictions for at least some Yemenis. Read differently, however, it conceded major financial gains to the Houthis and failed to address in any way the group's unprecedented campaign against civil society. It seems entirely possible that the Houthis unleashed this campaign precisely with an eye toward shaping the negotiations over the banking sector. They have clearly secured important objectives through the agreement announced by the OESGY, and have now put in place, through the SCMCHA, measures that will further sever civil society in Houthi-held areas from wider Yemeni and international organizations.

## **COUNTERING FRAGMENTATION: INGOS, CSOS, AND "THE NATIONAL"**

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The current campaign against civil society organizations erodes civil society's capacity to generate knowledge and coordinate services at a critical time, and promises to impose steep costs on Yemeni civilians. Armed conflict within Yemen has slowed substantially since 2022, enabling a range of government, nongovernment, and international agencies to begin the difficult work of addressing the effects of the war economy and its catastrophic humanitarian legacy. But this summer's crackdown has targeted precisely those organizations and actors best positioned to do this work. While it has already been difficult to direct international attention to the domestic dimensions of conflict in Yemen, the expansion of armed conflict between Houthi and Israeli forces and the risk of a wider regional war will undoubtedly make it even harder. The risk is that when the region-wide dust settles, the capacity of Yemen's civil society sector will have been sapped, and international organizations will struggle to mount evidence-based projects on a national scale. This would lock in some of the war's territorial, economic, and political fragmentation and further isolate North Yemen and a majority of the population.

As suggested above, what makes the "success" of the crackdown on Yemeni INGOs and CSOs staff so perilous is the specific role that civil actors and organizations play in countering the fragmentation produced by a decade of conflict in Yemen. Some of the more prominent Yemeni CSOs play a vital role as participants in the UN-sponsored

peace process, an essential counter to the perspectives and priorities of Yemen's armed antagonists. CSOs do vital work in their local communities, and produce the knowledge necessary for INGOs to do their work by conducting needs assessments and delivering programs. Yemeni CSO staff, whether working at local Yemeni organizations or in larger INGOs, also do the hard work of research and analysis necessary for effective responses to the numerous interlocking security, social, and economic crises that stem from protracted armed conflict. In areas that have been relatively stable, such as Hadramawt and, to a lesser degree, Aden, CSO staff apply their skills in the service of medium-term economic development and building inclusive institutions, even with all the uncertainty that exists about Yemen's political future.

INGOs deserve special mention here. Certainly they vary considerably in their aims and methods, and some develop much better relationships with Yemeni partner organizations than others. But in general terms, INGOs provide material and nonmaterial resources necessary to reconnect Yemeni civil actors and local CSOs across the fragmented landscape of a country at war. They do so by bringing people out of Yemen—to Amman or Istanbul, to Berlin or London—to meet, share perspectives and insights, and build shared agendas. They also provide communication platforms that make possible ongoing relationships between civil actors separated by a decade-long war that has made physical movement difficult and dangerous. For better or worse, if a concept of "the national" still exists in Yemen, it does in part because of the INGO sector and its partnerships with local organizations. This, ultimately, is what is at stake in this sector-wide crackdown that has received such little attention in media and policy analysis. Deeper fragmentation and the consolidation of Houthi control will likely both extend regional insecurity and intensify domestic grievances—and the current campaign against civil society is a means to those destructive ends.

## **ENDNOTES**

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1. According to Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED), 2023 saw [the lowest level of intra-state military engagement](#) in Yemen since the start of the conflict and [the incidence remains low](#) in 2024.
2. Human Rights Watch, "[Yemen: Houthis Disappear Dozens of UN, Civil Society Staff](#)," June 26, 2024.
3. Mwatana for Human Rights, "[Immediate Release of All Detainees by the Ansar Allah \(Houthi\) Group Authorities Demanded](#)," June 9, 2024.
4. This was reported based on the image of a directive that circulated on social media and in some Yemeni

- news sources, but it has not been independently verified. For a copy of the directive, see South24 Center for News & Studies, "[Houthis Preparing to Install Loyalists in International Organizations](#)," July 22, 2024.
5. The Houthis are not alone in securitizing research and knowledge production in Yemen. I have documented this process and the risks that researchers face in the peace-building sector at the hands of several different conflict actors in many parts of the country. Stacey Philbrick Yadav, *Yemen in the Shadow of Transition: Pursuing Justice Amid War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023, chap. 5).
  6. Justin Shilad, "[A 'Slow Death' for Yemen's Media: The Country's Journalists Report through Displacement and Exile](#)" (Committee to Protect Journalists, June 17, 2021).
  7. Amnesty International, "[Yemen: Released and Exiled: Torture, Unfair Trials, and Forcible Exile under Huthi Rule](#)," May 27, 2021.
  8. Sarah Vuylsteke, "[Revisiting the Sana'a Center's Humanitarian Aid Reports: Then and Now](#)" (Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, June 15, 2023).
  9. Norwegian Refugee Council, "[NGOs Express Grave Concern over Suspension of Food Assistance in Yemen](#)," December 8, 2023.
  10. Since the beginning of the crackdown and throughout the summer, I participated in approximately a dozen biweekly meetings with international and Yemeni staff who work directly or in partnership with impacted organizations from outside of Yemen, or have close colleagues who have been detained. The atmosphere was one of full-blown crisis. Fear of making things worse hung over every conversation, weighed against the fear of doing too little.
  11. Human Rights Watch, "[Yemen: Houthis Disappear Dozens of UN, Civil Society Staff](#)," June 26, 2024.
  12. UN News, "[Yemen: UN Chief Demands Release of Aid Workers Held by Houthis](#)," June 11, 2024. When the UN Special Envoy to the Secretary-General for Yemen Hans Grundberg reported to the Security Council on July 21, however, he expressed much broader concern regarding the crackdown.
  13. Mwatana for Human Rights, "[Civil Society Organizations Affirm the Legitimacy, Lawfulness, and Independence of Their Operation](#)," June 12, 2024.
  14. Ibid.
  15. Saferworld, "[Statement: Solidarity with Humanitarian, Development, Peace and Community Workers Detained in Yemen](#)," September 5, 2024.
  16. For a useful primer on the sequence of events and structure of the various working groups, see George Anderson, "Yemen's Failed Constitutional Transition," in *Territory and Power in Constitutional Transitions*, ed. Michael Anderson and Sujit Choudhry (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2019, 318–23).
  17. Houthi authorities are very keen to be seen as the sovereign government of Yemen. For a discussion of this in relation to the Red Sea campaign, see Stacey Philbrick Yadav, "[The Houthis' 'Sovereign Solidarity' with Palestine](#)," *Middle East Report*, January 24, 2024.
  18. This term, translated as "civil," is often used to distinguish systems that are grounded in constitutional authority, as opposed to tribal or, for some, religious authority.
  19. Mwatana for Human Rights, "[Civil Society Organizations Affirm the Legitimacy, Lawfulness, and Independence of Their Operation](#)."
  20. United Nations Security Council, Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict, "[Conclusions on Children and Armed Conflict in Yemen](#)," S/AC.51/2020/1, April 8, 2020.
  21. Kamilia Al-Eriani, "The Houthis and the (In)Visibility of Piety: Reorienting Piety in North Yemen," *Jadaliyya*, May 11, 2021.
  22. The United Nations Population Fund (World Population Dashboard: Yemen) [estimated the prevalence of child marriage at 30 percent in 2023](#). Though this is actually close to the rate reported in the last available household survey data from 2013, UNICEF reports that the incidence has, in fact, nearly doubled in the context of the conflict. Sarah Ferguson, "[Helping Girls Escape Early Marriage in Yemen](#)" (UNICEF USA, June 26, 2020). Regardless of the precise numbers, numerous reports on Yemeni women's peace-building efforts relay concerns over the impact of economic collapse on child marriage and the recruitment of child soldiers. See, for example, Iman al-Gawfi, Bilkis Zabara, and Stacey Philbrick Yadav, "[The Role of Women in Peacebuilding in Yemen](#)," Center for Applied Research in Partnership with the Orient (CARPO), Brief 14, February 27, 2020.
  23. Amnesty International, "[Yemen: Huthis 'Suffocating' Women with Requirement for Male Guardians](#)," September 1, 2022.
  24. This law was immediately met with (largely online) resistance, as women across the country, documenting local traditions of (modest) covering in vibrant colors and variable styles, rejected the Houthis' claim to be protecting Yemen's "Islamic identity." Doaa Mohammed, "[Women in Color](#)" (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and Carnegie Middle East Center, January 31, 2023).
  25. Women active in peace-building work complain that they are often discredited this way, and they hold the "unprofessional" Yemeni media partly responsible for circulating such allegations. al-Gawfi, Zabara, and Yadav, "The Role of Women in Peacebuilding in Yemen," pp. 9–10.

26. Sally Qahtan, "[Houthi-Controlled Areas are an Open Detention Center for Women](#)" (Mwatana for Human Rights, January 16, 2024).
27. Burhan Ahmed, "[Houthi Media: A Study in Ideological Warfare](#)" (Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, June 5, 2024).
28. Manal Ghanem, "[Curriculum Changes to Mold the Jihadis of Tomorrow](#)" (Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, Yemen Peace Forum, November 5, 2021).
29. Malek Saeed, "[Look Out! Your Son Could Be the Next Martyr: Changes to North Yemen's School Textbooks](#)" (Yemen Policy Center, January 2023).
30. Shilad, "[A 'Slow Death' for Yemen's Media.](#)"
31. Two examples from my own participation in collaborative research projects with Yemen-based researchers illustrate this impact. The first involved the sensitive use of language and what might be considered "self-censorship." A research partner indicated that we could not describe gender-based differences in inheritance laws as "grounded in Islamic law" or deriving from Islam in any way without attracting attention from Houthi authorities. Because the point was not essential to our argument, we adopted vague language describing "socially conservative practices." A second example is methodological and was more chilling to me. Yemen-based partners who conducted focus group interviews in non-Houthi areas reported that they could conduct only one-to-one interviews in Houthi-controlled areas, because participants could not safely discuss conflict dynamics in front of others for fear of being reported to the authorities.
32. Mansour Ali Al Bashiri, "[Economic Confidence Building Measures: Civil Servant Salaries](#)" (Rethinking Yemen's Economy, No. 11), Center for Applied Research in Partnership with the Orient (CARPO), March 18, 2019.
33. The GoY attempted to resume payment based on the 2014 civil service employment rules, but the civil service has been restaffed with Houthi loyalists.
34. Fatima Abo Alasrar, "[The Dilemma of Public Sector Salary Payments in Yemen](#)" (Middle East Institute, February 23, 2023).
35. World Bank Group, "[The World Bank in Yemen: Overview,](#)" January 25, 2024.
36. Al Bashiri, "[Economic Confidence Building Measures.](#)"
37. Stacey Philbrick Yadav, "[Fragmentation and Localization in Yemen's War: Challenges and Opportunities for Peace,](#)" *Middle East Brief*, no. 123, Brandeis University, Crown Center for Middle East Studies, November 2018.
38. "[Statement by the Office of the UN Special Envoy for Yemen,](#)" Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, July 23, 2024.

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