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The Yemeni Parliamentary Elections

A Critical Analysis

Ahmed Abdel Kareem Saif

Published By
Gulf Research Center
2004

Yemen Studies 2

Gulf Research Center

187 Oud Metha Tower, 11th Floor

303 Sheikh Rashed Road

P.O.Box 80758, Dubai

United Arab Emirates

Tel: +971 4 3247770

Fax: +971 43247771

email : info@grc.ae

www.grc.ae

First Issue, Jan 2004

Gulf Research Center

United Arab Emirates

ISBN 9948 400 88 7

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Introduction

This research aims to investigate the pattern(s) of the elections in Yemen. In doing so, huge materials were gathered and analyzed most of which were collected through interviews with different politicians and civil activists and questionnaires distributed on MPs. The field work however was conducted by the author during intermittent periods of time.

Following unification, the international arena and domestic balance of power fostered a multiparty system. However, the struggle for power and the party organizations did little to help promote the role of Parliament.

This study, therefore, explores the elections and sees the functions of the Yemeni Parliament and evaluates the extent to which it shapes politics. The Republic of Yemen has had three Parliaments since May 1990. During the 1990s the country was affected by important domestic and international events, such as the Gulf War, which resulted in the repatriation of around a million workers from the neighboring oil-rich countries, the eruption of the civil war in 1994, and the introduction of the economic structural adjustment programs. All these had great social, economic and political repercussions.

Political Sphere

The short period since the establishment of the Yemeni Parliament in 1990 does not permit extensive analysis; nonetheless, Yemen has had three consecutive parliamentary elections in 1993, 1997 and 2003. During the respective elected councils the Parliament has functioned in an unstable political environment. Political life has been characterized by a struggle for power, see-sawing between co-operation and large-scale war. Depending on the level of tension between different parties, power distribution and the impact on the Parliament, the Yemeni executive swings between semi-efficient, relatively autonomous and ineffective.

During the first parliament that followed the unification in 1990 the balance of power between rivals provided Parliament with reasonable room to maneuver and the two ruling parties: the General People's Congress (GPC) and the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) tried to reach a compromise over many issues. In the process, they delegated considerable authority to Parliament and 58.4 per cent of the MPs held that it had higher autonomy and 20.8 per cent declared that it had a reasonable degree of autonomy. The Parliament, therefore, emerged as a powerful institution, to the extent that it was prepared to withhold confidence from the government in 1991 for raising diesel prices, whereupon the government retreated.[1]

The elections of 27 April 1993 changed the power-sharing formula between the GPC and the YSP. The YSP

[1] Interview with Yasin Sa'id Numa'n, Speaker of the Parliament 1990-83 (former Prime Minister of the PDRY 1986-90), Abu Dhabi, 12 December 1998.

consequently fell back into third position, behind the GPC and its ally, the Islah party, in the number of occupied seats in the Parliament. To maintain the united Yemen framework, the three parties agreed to form a coalition government. Because of its military power the YSP was given more ministerial and administrative posts than Islah, the second party.

Nevertheless, the YSP was dissatisfied with the election results and became more vulnerable. Given these results and the assassination attempts against its activists,[(2)] the YSP assumed this was the beginning of a process to marginalize it by gradually stripping it of power. The YSP therefore advocated constitutional reforms and a new perception for state building as a strategy to bring its rivals down to its level.

A deep conflict emerged which, because of the gap between differing perceptions of the course for the future development of Yemen and the declining balance of power between the ruling parties, resulted in failure to create a joint platform for co-operation. The YSP's only solid support for its position was its control over the army in the south. As time went by, a bitter struggle erupted for governmental, economic and military power.

This rivalry had its impact on Parliament. Although this Parliament was more representative than the previous one, it appeared less powerful. 48.3 per cent of MPs believed that it had considerable autonomy and 40.3 per cent report it had

[(2)] According to Ali Salim al-Baydh, the YSP Secretary General, 150 members of the YSP had been assassinated by late 1993. Quoted in Gerd Nonneman, *'The Yemen Republic: From Unification and Liberalization to Civil War and Beyond'*. Chapter For in Haifa A. Jawad (ed.), *The Middle East in the New World Order,* London: Macmillan, 1997, 2nd edn., p. 79.

reasonable degree of autonomy, having been affected by the disputing parties controlling state administration. The Parliament failed to resolve the political disputes and war seemed inevitable. It eventually broke out on 5 May 1994. By 7 July 1994 the GPC and its allies had swept through the south and destroyed the military and security capabilities of the YSP.[3]

As the situation deteriorated, Parliament found itself crippled by its lack of power. It is worth noting however that Parliament remained the only functioning, unitary institution (including the YSP's MPs) during the civil war, at a time when all other state institutions had polarized to the two parties. Parliament lost its relative autonomy during and shortly after the war. Most YSP MPs continued their duties but Operated in a state of fear and lost their organizational coherence. They dealt with different issues individually and incongruently.[4] The GPC and the Islah parties therefore found it easy, to pass their desired constitutional amendments. On 28 September 1994, Parliament approved these amendments (1994 Constitution). On 1 October 1994, according to the amendments, the Parliament abolished the Presidential Council in favor of a one-man presidency and Ali Abdullah Salih was re-elected by the MPs as the President of the Republic for a five-year term.

After fending off the YSP threat both the GPC and the Islah began rethinking their formula of power distribution. They approached each other cautiously. Overtly, they claimed to be close allies but in reality they were competing to build up their

[3] For details on the war see the BBC, World Broadcasting Summary (WBS) April 27-July 7, 1994. Also see Joseph Kostiner, *Yemen: the Tortuous Quest for Unity 1990-94,* London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1996, pp. 79-85.

[4] Interview with Yasin Sa'id Numa'n, Op. Cit..

power. Fortunately, this allowed the Parliament to resume some of its power.

Another phase started with the 1997 parliamentary election resulting in a sweeping victory for the GPC. Despite the majority Parliament, it showed some degree of autonomy, originating in the decreasing threat of the GPC, the fluid nature of the GPC organization, lack of internal discipline and the feeling of MPs that they owed nothing to their party to be parliamentary MPs because they won their seats based on their social status rather than on GPC support. Amongst MPs, 47 per cent believe that the Parliament has little autonomy while only 22.8 per cent believe it has a reasonable degree of autonomy. This led Parliament to arrive at unpredictable decisions as long as the core interests of the ruling establishment[5] remained unaltered.

The current phase has started with the latest parliamentary elections on 27 April 2003, which again resulted in a landslide victory for the GPC; 241 of the 301 seats and Islah second with 41 seats and YSP with 7 seat and the independents and other small parties (Ba'ath and Nasserite) sharing the remaining seats.

Electoral and Party Systems

The Electoral System

General Election Law No. 27/1996 has adopted the first-past-the-post (FPP) system with single-member

[5] The ruling establishment is not the ruling party but a complex of the president and his close circle in addition to the high ranking military officers and great tribal chieftains.

constituencies.[6] All electoral affairs are organized technically by the Supreme Election Committee (SEC), a body charged with the preparation and conduct of all elections. This system predicates that the candidate who obtains the most votes wins and all votes for the other candidates are effectively wasted.[7] The 1993, 1997 and 2003 parliamentary elections showed that the FPP system favors the largest parties.

Supporters of this electoral system contend it suits Yemen's circumstances. With the high rate of illiteracy, voters can recognize and choose their candidates on a personal basis. This also provides transparent, easy, and straightforward elections. Moreover, this gives room for independents to be represented in Parliament.[8] Findings suggest that 69.8 per cent of the MPs support the existing electoral system by which they were chosen.

Opponents contend that such a system in a traditional society such as Yemen's would increase the importance of kinship preferences, which would deepen the sub-national identity at the expense of party electoral programs. This downgrades the level of Parliament's professionalism. This system also puts small parties at a distinct disadvantage, depriving them of representation in Parliament. Opponents call for proportional representation (PR) instead, claiming that it minimizes personal and financial influences, allows political parties to form coalitions, gives priority to programs, and

[6] In this regard it does not differ from General Election Law No. 41/1992.

[7] Robinson, Chris, *Voting Behavior and Electoral Systems,* London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1998, pp. 63, 65.

[8] Interview with Sultan al-Barakani, leader of the GPC's parliamentary bloc, London, 24 August 1999.

enables parties to choose the most qualified, not the most socially influential, candidates.[9]

With regard to representation however, the existing FPP system shows shortcomings. For example, in the 1997 election, at constituency level, 116 MPs won with less than half (some as few as 23 per cent) of the total votes in their constituencies. At the national level in the 2003 elections, all MPs won 55 per cent of all constituency votes cast and 33.5 per cent of all registered eligible voters.

To highlight the state of the parties in Parliament after the 2003 election, it has been found that as regards the ratio of seats to votes, the GPC received 71 per cent of seats based on achieving 43.2 per cent of total votes. By comparison, the Islah party won 13 per cent of seats and 23.4 per cent of the votes.[10] It is obvious the FPP system enables large parties to win every seat with a simple majority, leaving the minority totally underrepresented. In this sense, elections could be free but not fair. Based upon a simple majority, a candidate could win by a slight edge, with as little as 23 per cent of the vote in a constituency.[11] Having gained a landslide victory, the GPC seeks no change in the electoral system. The only hope left for small parties lies in a concentration of support in certain regions rather than distribution and competition across the entire country.

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[9] Interview with Abdul-Rahman al-Jifri, Head of the RAY (League of the Sons of Yemen) party and President of the National Front for Opposition, London, 10 July 1999.

[10] These figures are calculated before considering the move of independent MPs to affiliate with political parties.

[11] Two GPC candidates won seats in Parliament in the 1997 election by 23 per cent of the vote in constituencies number 143 and 212.

The FPP system produces a majority government. In the three elections held in Yemen small parties won 12, 5 and 4 seats in the 1993, 1997 and 2003 elections, respectively. In a nascent democracy such as Yemen's however, this system probably provides a stable majoritarian government that allows for a certain degree of co-operation between Parliament and the government. In the short run this is possibly desirable to allow democratic institutions to consolidate and institutionalize further.

Party System

After the unification in 1990 Yemen had over forty political parties, later decreasing to fifteen in order to meet the requirements of Law No. 66/1991 governing organization and political parties. Among the fifteen parties, nine pre-date the existence of the Parliament.

The prominent feature is the fluid state of most of these parties. The parties are weakened by the traditional context, fragmented social structure, paternalism, and personification of politics that affects the parties' organization and cohesion. In the historical evolution of the parties, severe repression pushed them underground, which has also contributed to weakening inter-party democracy and to the absence of a rational mechanism for decision-making.

Nevertheless most large parties in Yemen did not originate in legislative bodies. They had their roots in local organizations or in the nationalist movement. These parties, mainly the GPC and the YSP, thus emerged as single and dominant, benefiting from their links with the foundation of the state. They have thus retained a known electorate cemented by state patronage to reinforce their strength. During the interim period (1990-93) both the GPC and the YSP used their control of the state to reward their supporters with jobs and

money. After the 1994 war, the GPC continued to benefit from this advantage. By comparison, most of the newly created parties had to start from scratch and appeal to a floating electorate,[12] resulting in marginalization of the small parties, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Parliamentary Seats by Party

Party	Parliamentary Elections 1993		Parliamentary Elections 1997		Parliamentary Elections 2003	
	Seats	%	Seats	%	Seats	%
GPC	123	40.9	187	62.1	241	80
IND.	47	15.6	56	18.6	8	2.7
YSP	56	18.7	B	B	7	2.3
Islah	63	20.9	53	17.6	41	13.6
ANB	7	2.3	0	0	-	-
ASB	NE	NE	2	0.7	2	0.7

[12] The Islah party, founded in 1991, is an exceptional case. It is organized along tribal and religious lines and had a well-established organization (Muslim Brethren) within the GPC during the pre-unification era. It also benefits from huge financial affluence provided by Saudis and is protected by influential tribal figures. Its financial capabilities and religious and tribal appeal all provide the Islah with a broad electorate.

Haqq	2	0.7	0	0	-	-
CN	1	0.33	0	0	-	-
DN	1	0.33	0	0	-	-
PUNO	1	0.33	3	1	2	0.7
Total	301	100	301	100	301	100

Keywords: B (boycotted); NE (did not exist then); and Candid. (Candidates)

Table 1 suggests a highly volatile party system that reflects the fact that voters changed their preferences between the two consecutive elections. This illustrates to what extent are the levels of party loyalty, people's awareness of the political process, party organization, and a degree of democratic consolidation. Electoral volatility is measured by half the sum of the absolute percentage difference between the votes received by each party in two consecutive elections.[13] Therefore, the electoral volatility in Yemen is 25.61 per cent.[14]

Historical evidence shows a negative relationship between democratic consolidation and electoral volatility. In West European elections between 1885 and 1985 average

[13] Toka, Gabor, 'Party Appeals and Voter Loyalty in New Democracies'. In Richard Hofferbert (ed.), *Parties and Democracy,* Oxford: Blackwell, 1998, p. 168.

[14] The formula of electoral volatility in Yemen is:([62.1-40.9] + [18.6-15.6] + [18.7-0.00] + [20.9-17.6] + [2.3-0.00] + [0.7-0.00] + [0.7-0.00] + [0.33-0.00] + [0.33-0.00] + [1-0.33]) / 2 = 51.23/2 = 25.61%

volatility was 8.6 per cent.[15] The lower it is, the more likely that the electoral arena is well established. The high volatility of the Yemeni party system demonstrates a fractionalized party system. The volatility value increased slightly under the effect of the YSP's boycotting the 1997 election; nonetheless it remains high, as shown in 2003.

With regard to party organization, this explains the relationship between the behavior of MPs and party organization. So far, only eight parties have been represented in the last two parliaments. Five parties are leftist (the three Nasserite parties, the Ba'ath, and the YSP), two are Islamist (al-Haqq and the Islah) and from the right is the GPC. Apart from the three biggest parties (GPC, YSP, and Islah), all other parties have been represented, *in toto*, by only seventeen MPs in the last two Parliaments. The MPs of the small parties are very disciplined and show strong commitment to their parties' policies. Their small number means that their parties and the media put extra pressure on them to be genuine representatives for their parties. Thus, the behavior of those MPs' does not systematically reflect the organization of their parties.

On the other hand, the three big parties show different trends. The MPs representing these parties viewed intra-party discipline as follows; 53 per cent of the GPC call for much higher levels of discipline; 56 per cent of the YSP call for much less; and 60 per cent of the Islah express their satisfaction with the present level of discipline. In all parties, the majority of MPs said there are no sanctions against them available to

[15] Toka Gabor, 'Party Appeals…', Op. Cit., p. 168.

their parties in case of deviation from party policy. At most they receive blame.[16]

The fluid structure of the GPC is explained by the fact that it has no definite ideology. It was founded as a political umbrella that covers different political trends and factions. After unity it continues with the purpose not to represent but to govern. In this sense the GPC is a catchall party and as a ruling party it controls the state-owned media, through which it communicates with its electorate. Another factor contributing to the low level of its discipline is the background of its MPs. They are mainly from amongst the long-standing politicians and powerful tribal leaders. Many social figures were recruited to the GPC after they won their seats as independents. Members of the GPC, therefore, ask what their party can do for them, not what they can do for their party. Usually, state financial aid distributed by the GPC goes to the party bureaucracy, not to the party in Parliament. Because of this, the GPC's MPs evacuated the floor on 1 November 1998, protesting the GPC president's decision to provide ministers but not MPs with new cars. The loose organization of the GPC dictates its MPs' actions, which are characterized by individual preferences and discretion. As a GPC's MP points out, the GPC's government does not consult its MPs on policies, so the MPs do not feel obligated to support them in Parliament.[17] However, the position of the president as head of the GPC

[16] Paradoxically, all political parties in Yemen have internal regulatory by-laws which address the relationships between a party and its MPs. Sanctions mentioned in these by-laws vary from blame to expulsion. Most of the MPs said they did not know whether there were sanctions or not and if there are any sanctions, they are ineffective.

[17] Interview with Ahmed al-Kuhlani, a GPC MP and the rapporteur of the Standing Committee for Public Services, Sana'a, 17 December 1998.

limits the MPs from going too far. On vital issues, the president makes personal contact with the MPs to ensure their loyalty.[18]

By contrast, the YSP appears at the other end of the spectrum. Attitudes of its MPs tend toward relaxing the strict internal discipline. As a mass party ruled South Yemen centrally for about three decades, it is accustomed to the top-down commands. Patterns of recruitment also reinforced this tendency whereby strong loyalty to the party outweighs other issues. It depends mainly on peasants, workers and other deprived strata of society. Given the fact that the then single party controlled all syndicates, promotion was dependent on loyalty to the party and to the factions within it. After unity, YSP members have adhered more to their party as they perceive it to be the only guarantor of their political future in a more diverse and complicated arena than the South used to be. The close link between the GPC and the Islamic-oriented Islah party makes the YSP more vulnerable. After the 1993 elections therefore, the MPs of the YSP showed strong commitment to their party in order to counterbalance the majority bloc of rivals and the same is expected given the YSP's small bloc in the 2003 Parliament. It is a struggle for the MPs of the YSP to maintain their privileges as a former ruling party and a partner in the new state that required a highly disciplined cadre.

The Islah party falls at the mid-point between the GPC and the YSP. As a relatively newly emerged party it benefited to a great extent from the struggle between the other two parties. Though it overtly sided with the GPC for social, political and ideological reasons, this was not without political favors. The Islah represented tribal and Islamic interests, so its

[18] Interview with Sultan al-Barakani, leader of the GPC's parliamentary bloc, London, 24 August 1999.

MPs come mainly from these two factions. The tribal MPs behaved as those in the GPC and mainly for the same reasons, whereas the Islamist MPs behaved similarly to those of the YSP, for the same motives. This explains the reasonable level of discipline within the party. The relationship between the party and its MPs is characterized by individual discretion on the general issues and by commitment to the party's policies on the clearly Islamic issues.

Variation in the relationships between parties and their MPs presupposes different procedures for agenda-setting. In the light of the aforementioned relationships it is logical to find different degrees of participation for MPs in agenda-setting, in accordance with their responses to their parties' policies. Findings show that 61.8 per cent of MPs say the politburo and party leaders have the most say in party policy and 20 per cent refer that to party convention. This emphasizes Michels' *'iron law of oligarchy'*, which states that an organization is dominated by its leadership.[19]

In the same vein, though from a different perspective, Von Beyme believes the balance of power between the central party organization and the parliamentary party has shifted to the disadvantage of the latter.[20] Empirical studies, however, do not support Michels' and Von Beyme's positions that all

[19] Michels, Robert, Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy, Dover, 1959 [1911], p. 418. Quoted in Michael Rush, Politics and Society: An Introduction to Political Sociology, Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992, p. 62.

[20] Von Beyme, Klaus, *Political Parties in Western Democracie*s, Aldershot: Gower, 1985, p. 320. For comparison see also Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State,* London: Methuen, 1964 [1951], pp. 182-90.

parties would develop dominance by extra-parliamentary parties. There is still substantial scope for other possibilities.[21] Other research concludes;

'Doctrinaire parties experienced a high degree of centralization and involvement with low levels of complexity and factionalism in their organization and fared poorly at the polls while maintaining strong cohesion in the legislature and engaging in many activities. On the other hand, parties that we call 'mobilizing' tend to do well in elections, while engaging in several non-campaign activities although showing little legislative cohesion. Organizationally, mobilizing parties tend to be highly complex but not very centralized, and they have little factionalism and low levels of membership involvement.'[22]

Different MPs' behavior, then, goes beyond party leadership domination and points to the effect of other factors. Al-Saqqaf argues that the main factor influencing MPs in Yemen is the media.[23] Despite that, 66.4 per cent of the MPs said the media are not important. The media, however, probably influence MPs indirectly through influencing party election manifestos yet, two other factors are still important in relations between MPs and their parties. The first is the MPs' personal experiences and attitudes. The second is the type of

[21] Gibson, Rachel and Robert Harmel, 'Party Families and Domestic Performance: Extraparliamentary vs. Parliamentary Group Power'. In Richard Hofferbert (ed.), *Parties and Democracy*, Op. Cit., p. 227.

[22] Janda, Kenneth and Tyler Colman, 'Effects of Party Organization on Performance during the 'Golden Age' of Parties'. In Richard Hofferbert (ed.), *Parties and Democracy,* Op. Cit., p. 210.

[23] Interview with Abdul-Aziz al-Saqqaf, member of the Consultative Council and Chief Editor of *Yemen Times*, Sana'a, 20 December 1998.

the issues raised: the more the issues are clear and have a direct effect on the people, the more MPs are responsive, regardless of their parties' points of view.

Nomination is certainly not the exclusive preserve of the party at the center. There are no rules or law in Yemen establishing criteria for nomination. All parties seek nominees who have the best chance of carrying their constituencies. The YSP has changed its selection, as happened with the other left-to-center parties, that modified their criteria for nomination from loyalty and ideology to the ability of a nominee to win a constituency. In general, because of the traditional society based on kinship networks, only 57.7 per cent of the MPs said they represented a political party. To a great extent therefore, nomination is based on social and personal characteristics.

Linked to this is the incumbency rate, which was 21 per cent in the 1993 Parliament and 42 per cent in the 1997 Parliament and 49 per cent in the 2003 Parliament. The latter had a higher rate for two reasons. First, most of the MPs elected to the 1993 Parliament were new because the MPs of the 1990 Parliament were appointed and among them only 12.9 per cent had been re-elected. The second factor is the absence of the YSP in 1997 because it boycotted the election, providing a space for others for to be re-elected in the 1997 elections. Finally, the diminishing of rival divisions has minimized the need of the GPC to intervene in selection in 2003. Overall, 42.3 per cent of the incumbents belonged to the GPC, 25.4 per cent to the YSP, 15.2 per cent to the Islah, 13.5 per cent were independents and 1.8 per cent were from each of the Ba'ath and Nasserite parties.

For those who were denied re-nomination, it never happened because of their stand on a question of policy. A considerable number of nominees are chosen at local level because of their status, which makes parties endorse their

nomination. Many MPs also competed as independents and later, different parties competed to affiliate them. The 2003 election however showed a sharp decrease in this phenomenon, which is attributed to the clear cut domination of the GPC. The GPC is the most successful in recruiting independent MPs because of the privileges it provides as a ruling party. Weak control over nomination deprives parties of a powerful instrument for imposing ideology and policy conformity on MPs.

Parliamentary Campaigns and Elections

The Supreme Election Committee (SEC) decided on the exact boundaries of constituencies, based on the population census estimate of December 1992, which puts the population at 14,256,724. Considering administrative and tribal borders, the SEC came up with 301 constituencies, each to accommodate an average of 47,365 inhabitants, allowing for a variation of plus or minus 5 per cent.[24] To ease polling, geographic proximity, population density and the availability of centrally located public buildings are again taken into consideration to choose election centers. Finally 2017 election centers were identified for all 301 constituencies.[25]

The SEC organized this task through 4052 committees distributed throughout the country, and these rosters are to be updated every two years. The elections had been handled under the supervision of the SEC by 7262 (in 1993), 13,850 (in 1997) and 25,528 (in 2003) field polling committees.

[24] The SEC, Final Report of Technical Committee for the 1993 Parliamentary Elections, Sana'a, 1993.
[25] General Election Law No. 27/1996, Article 11.

The statistics from the voting rosters in Table 2 show that the proportion of those who are eligible to vote has increased from only 43 to 70 per cent. Nonetheless, within the 18 governorates the percentage varied from 30 per cent in al-Mahrah to 60 per cent in Aden. There was also extreme abstention or refusal among women that also show considerable local variation: in some conservative provinces, such as al-Jawf, as few as 1 per cent voted while in more progressive urban areas such as Aden the figure was 41 per cent.[26] High rates of illiteracy, culture, religion, the new practices of democracy in Yemen and people's distrust of the regime's democratic orientation all diminished the registered numbers.

[26] The SEC, *Final Report*…, Op. Cit., p. 17.

Table 2: Rosters

	1993			1997	2003		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Total	Male	Female
Eligible Voters	6,282,939	3,076,056 (49%)	3,206,883 (51%)	6,976,040	8,097,000	3,975,000 (49.1%)	4,122,000 (50.9%)
Registered	2,688,323 (43%)	2,209,944 (72%)	478,379 (15%)	4,637,700 (66.4%)	5,726,175 70%	3,435,705 86%	2,290,470 55%
Actual Cast	2,271,185 (84%)	NA	NA	2,827,369 (61%)	4,294,631 75%	NA	NA

NA: Data are not available

As Table 2 suggests however there was an improvement in registration between the three elections, up to 70 per cent. This indicates a positive change in people's attitudes towards democracy but the irony is that there was a decline in the number of those who actually cast their votes, from 84 to 61 per cent and to a slightly improved 75 per cent. This is because some parties had boycotted the 1997 election. The 1994 war also contributed to the portrayal of the system as biased to northerners. In addition, people felt frustrated seeing the system tilted in favor of one dominant party.

In the same way, the number of candidates decreased partisans (in 1997 was due to boycott), independents, women, and men, as shown in (Table 3).

Table 3: Candidates for Parliament

Election	Partisans	Independents	Total	Male	Female
1993	1,025	1,945	2,970	2,929	41
1997	643	1,399	2,042	2,019	23
2003	1,072	464	1,536	1,520	16

The Opposition parties had been complaining that there were serious problems in the voter registration process, which disadvantaged localities with strong support for the opposition. Issues raised included; allegations of using multiple registrations; registration of underage persons; and moving military forces around in order to register them in certain constituencies to falsify election results. These allegations were repeated over the three elections as well as in the presidential elections of 1999.

The high number of independent candidates reflects the fragmentation of the political party system. Local notables were usually unopposed and some of them enlisted in order to negotiate a rewarding withdrawal.[27]

[27] Detalle, Renaud, 'The Yemeni Elections Up Close' *Middle East Report*, no. 185, vol. 23, no. 6 (1993), pp. 8-12, p. 8.

The big parties also contributed to this, hoping that the distribution of votes among independents would benefit their candidates, who were supported by activists and enjoyed abundant financial support. The GPC looked for persons well-rooted in their communities, with party affiliation taking second place. Therefore, tribal leaders, important merchants and high officials represented its main candidates. The YSP counted mainly on its disciplined cadre, regardless of their origins. The candidates of the Islah were the tribal notables in the rural areas and Islamic activists in the cities represented. Al-Haqq and the League of the Sons of Yemen were both represented by the Sayyid and other prestigious families. The nationalist parties were represented mainly by professionals and activists, though in some cases social notables were nominated.

The party system and electoral struggle hardly helped the candidates representing new modernizing trends or marginalized segments in Yemeni society. This entails the under-representation of workers, peasants and the more humble strata of the society. Representation of these groups decreased in the 1997 election due to the YSP boycott and in the 2003 election due to the massive hegemony of the GPC. The notables prevailed: great tribal figures, big entrepreneurs, the new aristocracy in the south, Islamic activists, clerics and professionals strongly linked to the ruling GPC. With only two women elected in each of the first two Parliaments and only one in the current (2003) Parliament, the three Parliaments reflect the political and social powers but not the composition of the society.

Most of the parties drew up programs and presented them on radio and TV. Recent research on party election manifestos offers an effective means of gauging the general tendency of party programs and to whom parties appeal. The method followed in these studies calculates the percentage of sentences a party devotes to each category in its manifesto.

This provides a measure of party emphasis on the issue domain represented by that category.[28] This method is designed to measure change in issue content over time across parties and nations. With only three parliamentary elections in Yemen, this method cannot give reliable results. There will have to be several consecutive elections before it is possible to measure change over time. To overcome this obstacle, adding to manifestos the party Charters and political parlance would help bring into focus the general tendencies and changes since 1990.

The GPC's manifesto for the 1993 election consists of its constant principles calling for adherence to the 1962 and 1967 revolutions, Islam, and patriotism. It also appeals to people to preserve unity and democracy.[29] Conversely, the 1997 and 2003 manifestos ignore the constant principles and appeal for political and economic liberalization as well as for moderate political attitudes.[30] The GPC's parlance rests on images of the president at those groundbreaking and ribbon-cutting ceremonies of private and public construction projects, which heavily aggrandize the president's achievements and his medial attitudes. Loose organization, lack of ideology and

[28] Budge, I., D. Robertson, and D. Hearl (eds.), *Ideology, Strategy, and Party Change: Spatial Analysis of Post-War Election Programs in Nineteen Democracies*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1987. Quoted in Ali Carkoglue, 'The Turkish Party System in Transition: Party Performance and Agenda Change'. In Richard Hofferbert (ed.), *Parties and Democracy,* Op. Cit., p. 132.

[29] Alimi-al, Rashad and Ahmed al-Bishari, *Al-Baramij al-Intikhabiyya li-l-Ahzab wa-l-Tanzimat al-Siyasiyyah fi-l-Jumhuriyyah al-Yamaniyyah: Dirasah Muqaranah* [Party Manifestos in Yemen: A Comparative Study], Sana'a: al-Thawabit, 1993, p. 9.

[30] The GPC, *Al-Barnamaj al-Intikhabi* [The Electoral Manifesto], Sana'a: The GPC, 1997.

being in power for a long time have all tempered the GPC's political discourse, inclining it toward compromises, though its practices are probably different. Since the 1994 war, unity, legitimacy and modernization have dominated the GPC's discourse.

By contrast, the YSP had a relatively more coherent ideology and wider popularity, but deeply fragmented leadership. It adopted a social-democratic line and presented itself as the party of law and order and modernization. Its manifestos' priorities were to establish order and security, stand against corruption and to improve free services to the poor.(31) The YSP boycotted the 1997 election call for guarantees for conducting free and fair elections but its manifesto for 2003 election resumed the same discourse.(32) After the 1994 war, the YSP literature and political discourse concentrated on political reform, reconciliation, and democratic institutionalization. It also moved to the middle in terms of the market economy and tempered its attitudes towards Islam.(33)

The Islah party presented itself in 1993 as a conservative party of Islamic and traditional values. Its program focused on the idea that Islam should again regulate social, economic, and political activities. Its main slogan was:

31 Alimi-al and al-Bishari, *Al-Baramij al-Intikhabiyya*….., Op. Cit., pp. 15-20.

32 The YSP, *Bayan al-Dawrah 34 al-Istithnaiyyah li-l-Lijnah al-Markaziyyah* [The Declaration of the 34th Extraordinary Session of the Central Committee], Sana'a, 1-3 March 1997.

33 The YSP, *Al-Tagrir al-Siyasi wa-Mashrou'i al-Barnamaj al-Siyasi* [The Political Report' and 'A Proposal of Political Program]. Both documents were submitted to, and approved by, the Forth General Congress, the first round, Sana'a, 28-30 November 1998.

'The Qura'n and the Sunna supersede the constitution and the law"

Its manifesto did not mention democracy or a multiparty system, instead, it appealed for a consultative democracy or *al-shura*, which is an Islamic concept.[34]

Although the Islah repeated its Islamic rhetoric in the 1997 and 2003 elections, it presented the longest detailed manifesto in an attempt to refute frequent accusations that Islamists are based merely on vague and ambiguous slogans. The manifestos detailed sector after sector, all measures mixed between liberal and Islamic social aspects. It also paid a great deal of attention to foreign affairs, especially to relations with Saudi Arabia and Sudan and to Palestinian rights.[35] The Islah, however, shows pragmatism. It has benefited from its proximity with the GPC. It exploits authority advantages without burdening its responsibilities. Its political discourse is thus characterized by a combination of Islamic rhetoric and the advocacy of traditional values, taking care not to transgress certain limits that affect the supra-partisan strategic coalition between the Islah leader *Shaykh* al-Ahmar and the President (the leader of the GPC) or to provoke the US by praising Islamic violence or *Jihad* in such a way that might be interpreted as terrorism.

The other party manifestos presented variations on the same key themes: support of democracy and unity; strengthening the judiciary; economic development; denunciation of corruption and terrorism; and improving

[34] Alimi-al and al-Bishari, *al-Baramij al-Intikhabiyya*….., Op. Cit., pp. 25-31.

[35] The Islah, *Al-Barnamaj al-Intikhabi* [The Electoral Manifesto], Sana'a, 1997.

regional relationships.[36] In the elections of 1997 and 2003, these small parties modified their manifestos in accordance with domestic political and economic changes. The Ba'ath was the only party to concentrate on supporting Iraq excessively and this accounted for most of the rhetorical style in its manifesto.

General Characteristics of Party Manifestos

In general, party manifestos featured the following characteristics. The first is the clear impact of the world-wide move towards democratization and market economic policies. With regard to democracy, all manifestos supported this orientation. The GPC and the Islah (in 1993, 1997 and 2003) and the YSP (in 1993 and 2003) did so rhetorically however and only paid lip service to consolidating this approach. Meanwhile the other small parties combined that method with suggested measures to limit executive dominance over other authorities. The parties, on the other hand, differed in their responses to the adoption of the market economy which was followed in 1995 by economic structural adjustment and privatization. The GPC is the only party that enthusiastically supported this scheme. Other ideological parties, the Islamists (Islah, al-Haqq, and Union of Popular Forces), the leftists (YSP) and the nationalists (Ba'ath and Nasserites) called for selective economic liberalization, providing protection to some sectors, and the establishment of a social security net to alleviate the heavy impact of economic transformation. The Islamic parties have been driven by their credo of Islamic

[36] For details on these manifestos see Ahmed al-Bishari and Rashad al-Alimi, *al-Baramij al-Intikhabiyyah li-l-Ahzab wa-l-Tanziymat al-Siyasiyyah al-Yamaniyyah li-Intikhabat 1997* [Parties' Manifestos for the 1997 Parliamentary Election], Sana'a: al-Thawabit, 1998.

social justice and the prohibition of monopoly. The leftist and nationalist parties have appealed to their electorates, most of whom would be seriously affected by economic liberalization. It also seems difficult for them to go along with a trend completely in favor of what they had long appealed against.

The second characteristic is the domination of the unity issue in all of the manifestos. Yet, the parties have different definitions of the word ***'unity'*** for different ends. There is a clear dichotomy between the ruling parties and the others. Opposition parties, including Islamists and nationalists, have used unity in populist discourse. Islamists appealed for unity to remove the atheists (YSP) in order to create an expandable Islamic model. Nationalists, by contrast, presented Yemeni unity as ushering in pan-Arab unity and viewed themselves as the vanguards. On the other hand, GPC and YSP used unity for domestic politics to mobilize people against each other in their struggle for power, in particular before 1994. The GPC embraced unity ***per se,*** therefore, secession is not acceptable and all the attached problems are to be resolved later. The YSP perceived unity as a mean of prosperity and stability that requires further institutional settings; failure to create such settings makes unity meaningless.

This perception drove the YSP to declare secession in 1994. The most important point here is that the two different approaches of the two ruling parties are in essence aimed at consolidating one party's power and weakening the other in a zero-sum struggle. The GPC victory in the civil war of 1994 put unity and legitimacy at the top of the GPC's manifesto and political discourse.

The third characteristic is the parties' external relations especially with Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Libya, and Sudan. There is a again a clear dichotomy between those in power and the rest. The opposition is free from restrictions imposed by inter-

state interests and diplomatic protocol. The Ba'ath devoted considerable space in its manifesto to supporting Iraq; the Nasserite parties did so for Libya; al-Haqq and the Union of Popular Forces did the same for Iran; and the Islah party for Sudan and Saudi Arabia. All these parties mobilized street demonstrations accordingly. In comparison, the GPC as ruling party was bound by realism. It was balanced between the need of the state for regional financial aid and international political support on the one hand, and the momentum on the street towards hostility against the US on the other hand.

The fourth characteristic is the proximity to power, which divides parties into center and periphery and is reflected in the party manifestos. It has been observed that, as a party close to the center, its manifesto and discourse are tempered by maintaining a margin to express different attitudes. For example, there are two opposition coalitions, the first, the National Opposition Council (NOC), is close to the government and consists of ten tamed parties. The second, the genuine opposition, consists of four parties and is called the Supreme Co-ordination Council for opposition (SCC). The Islah and the League of the Sons of Yemen are affiliated to neither of these two blocs, although the Islah leans toward the former and the League toward the latter. The discourse of the NOC concentrates mainly on policy issues, while that of the SCC concentrates mainly on those of a constitutional and institutional nature.

The fifth characteristic is the influence of the elite and factions that causes manifestos to deviate from popular demands and creates an ideological leapfrog phenomenon. The struggle for power is reflected in these manifestos by the dominance of constitutional aspects in the 1993 election and institutional ones in the 1997 and 2003 elections. Factions within a party also had their impact; for example, the Islah manifesto mobilized support for two conflicting regimes

simultaneously, Sudan and Saudi Arabia. Moreover, manifestos were full of aggrandizement of leaders and party history at the expense of issues and policies. The ideological rhetoric of political competition among parties indicates primarily an elite orientation rather than a concern for popular demands. This however, mirrors the political behavior of the Yemeni electorate. The strong networks of kinship and patron-client relationships and the impurely democratic institutional framework of the Yemeni party system, have characterized the fluid transitional political, social and economic structure.

Election Participation and Voting Behavior

Several factors contribute to the degree of election participation. According to Michael Rush, electoral turnout varies according to education, occupation, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, residence and the surrounding environment.(37) There are two categories to look at. The first is the actual numbers of votes cast in relation to numbers of those who are eligible to vote (Table 2). The participation goes down to 36.14 per cent, 40.5 per cent and 53 per cent for the 1993, 1997 and 2003 parliamentary elections respectively. Levels of education, conservative religious and traditional habits, new democratic procedures, and absenteeism outside the country contribute to this. The other category is the actual votes cast in relation to those who have registered on the electoral rosters (Table 2). The participation here was a relatively high; 84 per cent in 1993 and 61 per cent in 1997 and 74 in 2003.

Both categories however suggest declining political participation. In the first category, the increase in the number

(37) Rush, Michael, *Politics and Society: An Introduction to Political Sociology,* Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992, p. 117.

of eligible voters between the two elections is 10 per cent while the increase in participation is only 4.4 per cent. Participation in 1993 (36.14%) is therefore higher than in 1997 (40.5%). The other category shows a straightforward decline from 84 per cent to 61 per cent.

On the one hand, the high participation in 1993 is probably explained by the fact that a turning point had been reached. In the light of the political environment of the time, characterized by a struggle between two different approaches, led by the two main parties, the people participated in the hope of contributing to their favorite trend. People were also motivated by widespread political discussion in public meetings and the media that exaggerated positive expectations. On the other hand, the declining participation in 1997 reflects the alienation of part of the electorate as a result of the 1994 war. The boycott of the elections by four parties also contributed to this. Finally, the relative regression in democratic practices by the GPC has decreased hopes and expectations, leading some voters to refrain from participation.

Table 4: Change in Political Participation as %

	1993-97	1997-2003
Eligible Voters	+ 9	+ 86
Number Registered	+ 58	+ 81
Actual Voters	+ 80	+ 60

The interesting observation is that participation in rural areas, in particular for men, was higher than in urban areas. In the 1993 election the average turnout in the countryside reached 88 per cent, against 81 per cent in the cities. In the 1997 election it was 64 per cent in the countryside and 58 per cent in the cities.[38] In Yemen's traditional society this shows a strong sense of identity amongst the people in rural areas, stronger than amongst their counterparts in urban areas. The rural voters usually resist any change that may strike or threaten their identity and existing social arrangements.

Electoral behavior in Yemen is anchored in the social structure, unlike the well-established democracies, that have seen the decline of electoral cleavage in politics and the rise of issue voting. Borrowing Knusten and Scarbrough's tri-dimensional definition on electoral cleavage incorporates

[38] See the SEC, Final Report of the Technical Committee for the 1993 Parliamentary Election, Sana'a, 1993, p. 25; the SEC, The Report of Technical Committee for the 1997 Parliamentary Election, Sana'a, 1997, p. 38; and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), The 1997 Parliamentary Election in Yemen, Washington, DC, 1997, appendix 17.

socio-structural (demography), normative (value) and organizational (party) elements.[39] It seems that demographic identity predominated in the 1993 election. The distribution of seats was in accordance with the pre-unification geographical division. The GPC won 117 seats in the north and only 3 seats in the south. The YSP won 41 seats in the south and only 15 seats in the north, and the Islah won 62 seats, all in the north. Structural (demographic) cleavage however, was not purely the electoral preference, as the 1993 election is widely believed to have been distorted by two factors. The first is that both the GPC and the YSP had used mobile military camps to alter the results in some constituencies. The second factor is that there were several indications of a possible agreement between the two parties to direct the election towards what they considered a stable division of power.[40]

In the 1997 and 2003 elections the structural (demographic) cleavage decreased to its minimal level and normative (value) cleavage predominated. The defeat of the YSP in the war deflected electoral preferences. A relaxation in the power struggle after the war allowed the electorate to re-arrange their preferences according to values, traditions, and patrimonial relationships. The Islah party, which did not win a single seat in the south in 1993, won 14 seats in the south in 1997 and 39 in the north. By contrast, in 1997 the GPC won 160 seats in the north and 27 in the south. Value reference evokes group solidarity and thus it is more effective in Yemen to sustain party loyalty than organizational loyalty, more evident in the 2003 election when the GPC won 154 seats in the north and 87 seats in the south. This explains why the

[39] Knusten, O. and E. Scarbrough, 'Cleavage Politics'. In J. Van Deth and E. Scarbrough (eds.), *The Impact of Values*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 492-523.

[40] Kostiner, Joseph, *Yemen: the Tortuous Quest*…, Op. Cit., p. 56.

greatest support for Islah came from the rural-tribal areas and the urban-based Islamist faction made only a minor contribution to its performance. Therefore, it may be stated tentatively that the high level of electoral volatility and the weak embodiment of political parties in the system go together with a relatively strong correlation between values and party choice in Yemen.

Finally, it is important to note that the dominant parties control the elections in Yemen: in 1993 both the YSP and the GPC and in 1997 the GPC and to some degree the Islah, whilst in 2003 the GPC managed it alone. Domination means a semi-competitive election in which the ruling party uses all advantages including state resources to influence electoral behavior.

Assessment

The case of the Yemeni elections reveals three main variables determining the executive-legislative relationships; the degree of discipline within parliamentary parties; the type of government minority/majority; and the threat imposed on the ruling parties.

1. Party Discipline

Discipline within a party in Yemen is determined by party organization and the degree of certainty of the political future of its MPs. Taking the GPC and the YSP as examples, the YSP is centrally organized and highly disciplined. In contrast, the GPC is a loose party and sanctions are seldom applied to its members. The certainty of the future of MPs can be measured by the socio-economic situation of an MP if he/she retires or abandons politics. Most of GPC's MPs are wealthy and socially powerful. This means they have a more certain future, while those of the YSP come from middle and lower social strata and their political future is linked, to a great extent, to the future of the party. Among the GPC's MPs 33 per cent said they are representing their constituencies, while all the YSP's MPs said they are representing their party.

The impact of these two characteristics reflected on the YSP's behavior in the Parliament. Although it was a partner in both governments in 1990 and 1993, it was vulnerable, so its MPs performed an anti-system opposition. That is why the issues that separated the MPs and the government were mainly constitutional. The MPs of the YSP tried to alter the system to be more certain of their future. The case was different in 1997 with the Islah party which shares many characteristics with the GPC. MPs, therefore adopted a pro-

system opposition and disputed issues that were mainly concerned with policy.

2. Majority/Minority Government

The Yemeni Parliament shows that its efficiency and autonomy increased with the formation of a minority government that lacks a clear majority in the Parliament, as was the case with the 1990 and 1993 Parliaments. It can be viewed from the angle of presidency: a fragmented presidency, concomitant with the relatively strong first two Parliaments, and a strong presidency that coincided with the weak third Parliament. This is enhanced by the number of parties in the Parliament combined with their internal cohesion. Many fluid parties means a stronger chamber. The measurement of this is the number of presidential ordinances and government bills passed. Such measurement is not very reliable however because of the continuous political crises which required frequent bargaining and compromise outside the Parliament.

3. Imposing Threats on Ruling Parties

The establishment of the Parliament in 1990 was combined with the creation of a unified Yemen that required a new formula of power redistribution. Therefore, from the outset both the GPC and the YSP perceived Parliament as a potential threat in the hands of the other party. This threat perception went along with the two party interventions in parliamentary business to neutralize the danger. As time went by, the power imbalance made the YSP more vulnerable so that it became more concerned with Parliament than the GPC did.

Intervention differs in the consecutive Parliaments. During the balanced 1990 Parliament and the first half of the

1993 Parliament, intervention took direct forms through excessive presidential ordinances and direct influence being exerted on MPs. During the current unbalanced Parliament, with the threat diminishing to its lowest level, intervention has evolved into a strategy of indirect approach by influencing the Presidium, Standing Committees and sometimes instead of intervention, the government bypasses Parliament.

In all parliaments the executive has always had the upper hand over Parliament, a fact which has greatly affected its functions. Among the MPs 76.1 per cent said the distribution of policy-making is too much in the government's favor and 81.9 per cent believed that the government dominates Parliament. The government has used different tools in order to establish its supremacy over Parliament. These tools, however, have been affected by changes to the balance of power at the executive level and by Parliament evolving from a balanced into an unbalanced chamber. In this regard, the Parliament is divided into two periods: the first extends from May 1990 to July 1994 and the second covers the years from 1994 to the present day.

In the first period there was a sort of balance at both the executive and legislative levels. The main tools the government used were the presidential ordinances and rushing bills. Presidential ordinances were limited by the ability of the Parliament to amend or reject them. Yet, the problem lies in the implementation of a presidential ordinance during the parliamentary recess that creates sequences of rights and liabilities in people's lives. Thus, when Parliament resumed its sessions and nullified the presidential ordinance, it caused turbulence in these rights and liabilities. The surge in use of this tool occurred shortly after the war, to amend previous laws and to reintroduce rejected ones.

Similarly, rushing through bills is a tool that has been greatly overused by the government. It has been found that the important bills for the government are quite often submitted to Parliament towards the end of the Legislative Round. The government then presses for the passing of the bill before Parliament goes into recess. Because of time constraints and pressure of work, the bill passes with little or no amendment.

In the second span, the government continues using the above-mentioned tools but with less frequency. The change in the balance of power for the GPC and the formation of a majority Parliament make the government resort to indirect strategies to dominate the Parliament. Having a majority in the Parliament makes things easier, both in voting on the floor and in the Standing Committees.

Conclusion

This paper examined the political, legal, and socio-economic framework of Yemen. Above all, the transition to democracy in Yemen has been a process created from above to produce a sort of democracy. The same rulers remain in control and maintain their socio-bureaucratic patronage networks, which have distorted the elections and restricted the role of Parliament by reproducing the characteristics of the old regime.

Among the real problems that threaten the democratic elections and the role of Parliament are poverty and the mismanagement of resources. The state becomes the main source of wealth and power; therefore, competition for authority has to be a zero-sum game, thus decreasing the possibility of resolving political disputes through systematic institutional processes. By the same token, culture is one of the main factors that have affected the Parliament through affecting party systems and electoral behavior. Scholars like Robert Dahl, George Kennan, and Bernard Lewis emphasize the importance of culture in establishing a sustainable democracy. Culture, however, is a factor that changes with the changing industrial economic base and political development. Culture is not stagnant nor is religion. In a favorable political and economic environment, culture is modified and changed gradually by adopting new forms and modes of behavior compatible with the surrounding environment.

About the author

Dr.Ahmed Abdelkareem Saif [41]**,** of the Yemeni nationality, has a PhD in political science from the University of Exeter, the United Kingdom. He is currently a research fellow researcher at the Gulf Research Center. Dr. Saif held many posts. He was a lecturer at the University of Exeter, deputy director of the Center for the Red Sea Studies, deputy director of the Arab Center for Euro-American Studies and consulting editor at the Economic Intelligence Unit.

Dr. Saif is the author of "A Legislature in Transition," "Democracy in Yemen," and co-author of the "Encyclopedia of the Middle East and North African Cities." His main areas of interest include parliaments and parliamentary work in emerging democracies, state-society relations in the Arabian Peninsula and Arab political systems.

[41] Research Manager at the Gulf Research Center in Dubai and Research Fellow at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter, UK.

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