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1998

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Recommended Citation

Carapico, Sheila. "Pluralism, Polarization, and Popular Politics in Yemen."*Political Liberalization & Democratization in the Arab World*. Ed. Bahgat Korany, Rex Brynen, and Paul Noble. Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner, 1998. 241-66. Print.

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Pluralism, Polarization, and Popular Politics in Yemen

Sheila Carapico

Among the nations of the Arabian Peninsula, Yemen is the most populous, the poorest, and the most politically liberal. It is the only republic where sovereignty theoretically rests with its 16 million inhabitants, not with a monarch. The constitution promulgated in 1991 and amended in 1994 guarantees many basic rights and liberties to all adult citizens, including rights to vote, run for office, and join political parties. Since Yemeni unification in 1990, two rounds of contested, multiparty parliamentary elections in 1993 and 1997 involved women as well as men in the political process as voters, candidates, volunteers, and reporters. Yemenis enjoy relatively greater freedom of movement, expression, and association than most Arabs. Within the Yemeni political arena there is a wide range of legitimate political opinion, from the socialist left to the Islamist right, that cuts diagonally across the particularistic claims of region, tribe, sect, social status, or gender. Indeed, this political pluralism is more a property of society than of the state.

As Volume 1 of *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World* makes clear, scholars debate the applicability of democratic theory to Arab countries. In the wider comparative discourse on this topic, one almost intuitive hypothesis is that great leaders such as Mikhail Gorbachev, Nelson Mandela, Václav Havel, Mahatma Gandhi, or Thomas Jefferson initiate democratic ideas, rules, and practices. A second argument is that liberalization flows from exogenous influences: aid, models, investment, culture contact, "conditionality," constructive criticism, and even intervention. Third, some contend that the state apparatus or state-class, in other words the ministries, parliaments, and courts acting as an organic whole, must establish the legal-institutional framework for peaceful, competitive politics. Fourth, the leading premise in classical democratic theory is that social forces, often including middle-class professionals, students, small business owners, skilled workers, and farmers, effectively organize to

force the government to implement meaningful reform. A fifth potential line of reasoning—that revolutionary change could transform the region—is rarely considered nowadays.

There is vociferous debate over the application of the first four theories to the Arab world. The region's strongest, most dynamic, long-lived, and charismatic leaders—Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser, Muammar Qaddafi, Saddam Hussein, Hafiz al-Asad, Yasir Arafat, and in neighboring Iran, Ayatollah Khumayni—have symbolized the antithesis of Western liberalism. So one might hope for enlightened leaders but not bet on them. International influence might work, and there are programs based on this premise in Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Yemen, and other countries. But even high standards of living and membership in what students of international relations know as the Kantian "pacific union" (the Western military alliance against "rogue" states) have not brought enlightened governance to the Gulf monarchies. Also, despite Western influence and the "moderation" of several contemporary leaders, notably Jordan's King Hussein and Egypt's President Husni Mubarak, most scholars are pessimistic about the prospects of reform within stable polities where the state-class lives on rents and the state apparatus consists disproportionately of the national security establishment. Finally, the liveliest scholarly debate is over the potential for social forces in the Arab world to imagine, articulate, and finally institute good government. For although we have some excellent critiques of the Orientalist stereotype of retrograde cultural antipathy to liberalization, we have few studies that consider the wide spectrum of political movements that have swept the Arab region in the twentieth century.

Yemen is a special case, a country whose two halves were unified at the end of the Cold War and whose experience thus in different ways echoes that of reunified Germany and Vietnam, the newly independent postsocialist states of Central Asia, and the fledgling national administrations of Eritrea and Palestine. The new Yemeni polity is unquestionably more liberal and democratic than either of its predecessor states, for unification heralded competitive parliamentary elections, political parties, newspapers, voluntary associations, court battles for freedom of the press, and even more open access for foreign researchers. The question is, what is the force for this process of democratization, halting and endangered though it might be?

The answer, for purposes of this chapter, is as follows. First, the Yemeni president shows little appreciation for the nuances of democratic governance. Second, the influence of the international community has been at best ambivalent, with modest Western encouragement offset by the hostility of neighboring Gulf monarchies to Yemeni unity, much less democracy and women's rights. Third, the behavior of the state-class that controls the public coffers and the military security apparatus follows a pattern

observed in other Arab polities, namely, status quo maintenance. This leaves, by deduction as well as by evidence, the argument that civil society generates pressures for constitutionalism, representation, and tolerance. For civilians to generate a civilizing influence does not imply their unanimous a priori endorsement of liberal Enlightenment ideals; rather, civic potential lies in the very breadth and diversity of models and ideologies alive in the body politic. For within Yemen's contemporary political society, a wide array of historically rooted political tendencies vie for seats in parliament and for influence in the courts, the schools, the intellectual imagination, and public opinion.

What: Democracy Envisioned

When the two Yemens united in May 1990, pluralism was built into the new system wherein the leaders of what had been the Yemen Arab Republic (the YAR, or North Yemen) and the People's Democratic Republic (the PDRY, or South Yemen) agreed to share power equally in the "transition" parliament, council of ministers, and presidential council. A constitution drafted by the nation's best jurists, adopted in popular referendum in 1991, offered a significant bill of rights and promised a democratic form of government. In addition to universal adult suffrage, the constitution guaranteed "freedom of thought and expression by speech, writing, or pictures within the law"; "equal treatment" without discrimination due to "sex, color, racial origin, language, occupation, social status, or religious beliefs"; and the presumption of "innocent until proven guilty." Political rights, including freedom of association "inasmuch as it was not contrary to the constitution," were also affirmed. The Parties and Political Organizations Law guaranteed ballot secrecy and entitled all adults to run for office and form or join political parties. Democracy was thus defined in terms of multiparty elections and guarantees of basic political rights and civil liberties. A range of parties and candidates campaigned in the 1993 and 1997 parliamentary elections, which international observers saw as flawed but fundamentally free and fair.

Yet many aspects of the constitution remained open to debate: the nature of executive authority, the competence of local government, the role of the military in politics, the legal character of the family, and the relationship of legislated to religious law. The country's top leadership, those with the least to gain and the most to lose from democratic governance, lightly dismissed the accords that had brought them together, proposing amendments to the constitution soon after its ratification and acting in disregard of its provisions. Under these circumstances, and after a long, divisive, rancorous exchange of ultimatums between the Northern and Southern leaders,

civil society generated its own proposals for a social contract. As the unity accords collapsed, a National Dialogue Committee of Political Forces, armed with resolutions from scores of local and scholarly conferences, produced an Accord of Contract and Agreement, signed in Aden on 18 January by members of the committee and in Amman, Jordan, on 20 February 1994, by the president, vice president, and speaker of parliament. It stipulated limitations on executive powers, depoliticization of the military, administrative and financial decentralization, greater independence for the judiciary, downgrading of the Ministry of Information to an office or committee, and other reforms.

The national dialogue amounted to a pro-democracy movement, albeit one eclipsed by the civil war in the summer of 1994 and subsequent silencing of many dissident voices. In the interim, however, the wide range of political opinion within Yemen revealed itself openly for the first time. Although the top leaders of the three major parties were not themselves democratic and did not abide by the democratic process, among the rank and file, in the press, and in public forums citizens and political elites did engage in civil debate. The range included a well-rooted socialist legacy; a centrist party that is something of a cross between Mubarak's and Saddam Hussein's ruling organizations; a variegated Islamist movement influenced by the three major Islamic sects of southern Arabia; and other affinities for constitutional monarchy, Arab nationalism, and Western liberalism.

Party Pluralism

Unlike other "democratizing" systems, united Yemen inherited two ruling parties, each determined to retain power in the enlarged polity.[1] Temporarily, they balanced one another through control of information, security, and public assets in what seemed at first to be a bipartisan order. The ultimately victorious ruling party of the North, the General People's Congress (GPC), defies ideological characterization. After the overthrow of the last imam in 1962, North Yemen had been ruled mostly by republican officers—the last of whom, 'Ali 'Abdullah Salih, gained the helm as an unlettered lieutenant colonel in 1978 after the assassination of two predecessors in the previous year. The GPC was founded in the 1980s as an "umbrella for all political forces" within the regime and became the quasi-governmental organization of armed and civil services members until unification, when it constituted itself as a party. Its leader, who two weeks before unity warned that pluralism would be "dangerous," described the military as a democratic institution.[2] Although he led the country through its first competitive multiparty parliamentary elections and tolerated considerable freedom of press, expression, and association, he favored presidential appointment over election of legislators and administrators and

maintained power partly by appointing fellow clansmen from the Sanhan tribe of the Hashid Confederation to top military commands and partly by dispensing material favors and political sinecures. In addition to Sanhan, however, the GPC's inner circle contained educated technocrats from every major social group, some of them articulate spokesmen of the "Chicago school" recipe for paternalistic authoritarianism in the name of structural economic reform. It is, then, a liberal party in the economic sense, favoring private property and open doors, but also a party whose posters display military hardware and major state engineering projects as symbols of republican power. Since the 1994 civil war, the GPC has fashioned itself as the party of national unity.

Yemen had, and perhaps still has, the Arab world's strongest, most authentic, and most enduring socialist legacy. After the rest of the region gained independence, Aden remained a Crown Colony (like Hong Kong), the hub of British military operations throughout the Middle East as well as commercial shipping between Europe and Asia. Southern Arabia became the site of a bitter liberation struggle based in the Aden syndical movement but also deeply influenced by wider Arab nationalist and early neo-Islamist currents. After London's decision to withdraw east of Suez, revolutionaries drove the semifeudal British vassals from the rural Southern Arabian protectorates and established a state based on Marxist-Leninist principles.[3] This state, later called the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, was ruled by what became the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), which dominated the ranks of the bureaucracy and armed services. Socialism also gained something of a following in the populous southern uplands of North Yemen in the 1970s, among peasants and students favoring unification with the South; it was this progressive movement in the "middle regions" that the GPC was founded to suppress. Although in the late PDRY period, South Yemenis seemed ready to vote against the ruling YSP, after 1990 many of them romanticized the PDRY, recalling law and order, jobs, stable prices, a form of local autonomy, and more freedom for women than in any other Arab country.

In fact, the top leadership of the PDRY had been a querulous lot, exchanging power in bloody shoot-outs every few years, and at the time of unification was deeply divided between those who came to power in the 1986 intraparty bloodbath and those who fled. Most revolutionary-era leaders were abroad or dead. Still, in the late 1980s, during glasnost in the communist world, there was a serious critique of democratic centralism, a loosening of restrictions on the press, electoral reform, and tolerance of nonpartisan political organizations.[4] After unification, the YSP articulated the most progressive, modern agenda of the three major parties. Despite the left-liberal ideological orientation of the party as a whole, however, the post-1986 leadership maintained a stronghold on the central committee,

refused to accept the results of the 1993 elections, and ultimately launched an ill-considered irredentist movement. Although as a result of their strategic errors the party is now defeated and divided, there is still a rank and file of hundreds of thousands of Yemenis of socialist or social democratic orientation, a constituency for social welfare, women's rights, syndicalism, cooperatives, and secularism.

The third major party, on the right of the political spectrum, is the Northern-based Islah (Reform) Party, encompassing the mainstream Yemeni wing of the neo-Islamist movement from Afghanistan to Algeria. There is nothing traditional about this stridently "fundamentalist" movement. Through the 1960s, the Zaydi imams of North Yemen and the Shafa'i sultans who governed parts of the South had insisted that Islam confers special political privileges and responsibility on *sayyids*, the aristocracy of descendants of the Prophet. The earliest waves of neo-Islamist thinking in the first half of the twentieth century, influenced by the Arab enlightenment, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Muslim innovators from Pakistan, Sudan, and Indonesia, challenged *sayyid* domination and religious interpretations. In context this was radical egalitarianism, part of revolutions against the traditional theocracies. This tendency, which gained credibility among the tribal and non-*sayyid* majorities, faded into the peasant and bourgeois revolutions of the 1960s. Unlike some countries where aging 1970s leftists subsequently embraced the radical right, Yemen's recent-vintage neo-Islamist movement flourished among the large Yemeni community in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, which comprised the exiled colonial-era South Yemeni elite and a million-strong workforce of economic migrants.

The neo-Islamist current resurfaced in the 1980s as part of a deliberate policy decision to foster the religious right against all forms of communism and socialism, similar to the policy of Israel in the occupied territories, the United States in Afghanistan, and Arab governments such as Egypt and Algeria. Proselytized inside Yemen through religious "institutes of learning" modeled on the schools in Pakistan that ultimately produced the Taliban (who in 1998 controlled most of Afghanistan), the neo-Islamist movement was encouraged by the Salih regime as part of his campaign against the unificationist left in the Southern uplands. In the mid-1980s, this puritanical Wahhabi Islamist element found a very political partnership with the famous shaikh of the Hashid tribal federation, Abdallah Bin Hussein al-Ahmar, a hero of the North's republican revolution, broker of the 1970 truce between republicans and royalists, friend of Saudi Arabia, early supporter of Salih, and spokesman for cowboy tribalism—but no Islamist. The third element in the reform coalition was some ardently anti-communist merchants who had lost property in the Southern revolution. Together, and with public and private Saudi financial backing as well as connections to the city of San'a's security establishment, they helped defeat

the North Yemeni left by driving many of its leaders, including Marxist faculty, south into the PDRY. In an era of strict censorship, Yemen's first neofundamentalist organ, *al-Sahwa,* began publishing in 1986. Islah, which organized as a party after unification, is a thoroughly modern party, critical of many Yemeni religious and folk traditions, but a conservative, anticommunist party valorizing private property, family values, capital punishment, gun ownership, and close relationships with neighboring monarchies. It does not encompass the whole Islamist movement, for to its right are some militant extremists who call themselves *salafi*s (puritans), Afghan-Arab, or advocates of jihad (holy war) on the peninsula.

In addition to the three main political organizations, 40 other parties surfaced after unity, some representing historically viable ideological perspectives, others one-person efforts to secure a following, all running as "outsiders." It should be noted in this context that although many former renegades, political prisoners, and exiles were allowed to participate in politics after unity, some very prominent people, including the families of the imam and sultans and the leaders of defeated factions of the YSP, remained abroad. Still, the surfacing of tendencies reminded folks of local history. There were several strands of 1960s-style Arab nationalism. The Yemeni Ba'th Socialist Party, very active in the revolutionary era, still had some partisans for its brand of republicanism, among them some prominent Yemeni nationalists with positions of power in the San'a government as well as Iraqi-trained officers and intellectuals. Pan-Arabism was also represented by several factions of what had been a formidable Nasserite movement in both Yemeni revolutions, defeated in the 1970s and 1980s by the left and the right, respectively, in the PDRY and the YAR.

Several parties based their appeals on a combination of Yemeni traditions and regional models. One was a traditionalist Islamist group, al-Haqq (the right), whose *sayyid* leadership sought a revival of Zaydi theocracy. Headed by a charming, respected, elder republican quranic scholar from a famous family, al-Haqq challenged Islah's neofundamentalist wing, especially in the Zaydi heartland near the Saudi border where there was a heated contest over control of religious institutes and foundations.[5] Its model seems to be a cross between the imamate and the Islamic Republic of Iran. A second party also composed mainly of Zaydi *sayyids,* the Federation of Popular Forces, bearer of the banner of the significant 1948 constitutional movement within the imamate and a 1965 constitutional proposal, portrayed the contemporary Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan as an appropriate modern governance model for Yemen. A third party that claimed to represent an Islamic vision harkened back to one of the prerevolutionary South Yemeni parties, the League of the Sons of Yemen (*Rabitah Abna' al-Yaman,* or RAY), whose English-educated leaders remained in Saudi Arabia throughout the PDRY era, advocating restoration (and separation) of the

federation of sultanates of Southern Arabia along the model of the United Arab Emirates. Both San'a and Aden dubbed all three "royalist."

Finally, the liberal tendency in Yemeni politics was articulated by one or two of the smaller parties, including the Unity-Nasserite Party and the Unificationist Gathering (*Tajammu' al-Wahdawi*) popular among some intellectuals and professionals who had become disenchanted with the YSP; by up to 1,000 independent intellectuals, including at least half of the 50 women who ran for parliament in 1993; by many journalists, attorneys, and other educated professionals across the party spectrum who organized the constitutional debates and the "peace movement"; and by a small but growing segment of the Western-educated merchant class who run franchises for international corporations. In associating political liberalism with both education and Westernization, it is necessary to distinguish the three. Only a fraction of the Yemeni intelligentsia, mainly from the generation educated in colonial Aden, know English well, for the majority were educated at Arab or East European universities. Just as some Oxford students remained true to their education while others embraced Marxism, students in Cairo or Prague became immersed in the intellectual trends in those places, and those flow into the discourses in San'a and Aden universities.

The nonruling parties, several of whom formed an Opposition Coalition, and independents, who were over three-quarters of parliamentary candidates, tended to interpret democracy as a system in which figures outside the three major parties have a say in decisionmaking, as might be the case in a proportional electoral system. The smaller parties whose role in formal governing institutions was minor or nonexistent emphasized the need to strengthen the institutions of civil society.[6] And, indeed, although their voice in government was limited, in extragovernmental forums they represented a kind of "missing middle."

Social Groups

Ascribed status certainly affects political attitudes and activities, but not necessarily in the expected ways. Enough of the top offices in San'a are controlled by men who are Northerners, Zaydis, and Hashid tribesmen for all others—women, Southerners, Shafa'is, members of tribes other than Hashid, *sayyid*s—to see themselves as grossly underrepresented. Members of tribes affiliated with the Bakil and Madhaj confederations thought that their larger numbers should give them more voice in the presidential and ministerial councils and more military commands, relative to Hashid. The Shafi'i (Sunni) majority who predominated along the Red Sea coast (the Tihama), the southern uplands regions of Taiz and Ibb, and the southern and eastern governorates (formerly in the PDRY) all resent the disproportionate power of Zaydi tribespeople. Southerners typically associated

democracy with a high degree of decentralization, perhaps a federal arrangement, but within the North too, several regions continued to press historical claims for local autonomy.[7] Even the *sayyid* nobility, who tended to be better educated than other groups, claimed that since the revolutions that stripped them of their former privileges they were unfairly excluded from high public office. A couple thousand professional women felt ostracized from public life by a masculinist political culture; Southern women felt stripped of their rights by the repeal of socialist legislation. Afro-Yemenis, including the traditionally low-status *akhdam* (street sweepers) and the so-called *muwalidin* children of African mothers and Yemeni fathers (the latter often well educated), were victims of bigotry and discrimination.

Even at the height of the democratic experiment, during the 1993 electoral season, cynicism prevailed among a public conditioned to mistrust the state as a source of violence and perfidy. The 1994 armed confrontation hardly allayed these misgivings. Women in particular tend to regard government with great suspicion. My inquiries about elections, pluralism, human rights, and the like were often rejoined rhetorically with a counter-question: "Do you believe that?" The majority condition support for their rulers on diminution of security surveillance; less resort to arms; curtailing of corruption and cronyism; truthful television and radio reporting; and, more generally, an environment where honest working folk can earn a decent living. Taxi drivers, who are a very well-organized group in Yemen as well as a perennial source of folk commentary, expressed some bemused admiration for the idea of "a peaceful transition in power." The real issues for most families were jobs and services, and many who voted did so for the party most likely to deliver to them—the GPC or YSP where they ruled, Islah through its charitable wing. Despite alienation from politics as usual and a viable potential to "withdraw" into primordial forms of association such as tribe, sect, status group, and the "harem," however, many people were also drawn to party membership, to volunteer as poll workers, and to vote in parliamentary elections. Moreover, ascribed traits like gender, tribe, and region do not predict partisan affiliations: women, Bakil, Shafa'is, and other groups are divided in party loyalties, and most parties garner some support among diverse segments of the population. Note, for instance, that Islah conducted the first nationwide women's voter-registration drive for the 1993 elections.

Why: Dictators, Donors, and Democrats

Three sets of pressures conspired to launch Yemen on the rocky road toward political liberalization.[8] First, international and economic circum-

stances favored unification, the necessary precondition for liberalization of either or both systems, but did not generate direct pressures for democratization. Second, both sets of leadership were in danger of collapse in 1989 and acted to save their positions in a way that led them to share power with each other, and then, to balance the other, with third parties. Finally, societal pressures starting with the unified Writers' Guild, the Aden press, and Northern intellectuals gained considerable momentum after unification, during the Gulf War, and in the lead-up to the elections, culminating in conferences and the National Dialogue that pushed leaders to uphold their promises to share power. These pressures, unfortunately, seemed to leave only two alternatives: genuine reform or civil war.

Indirectly, international conditions favored unification and thus liberalization. Gorbachev's perestroika encouraged a certain "opening up" in the PDRY, both economic and political. A few years later, the end of the Cold War eliminated the Soviet assistance so essential to the PDRY's survival and the military arsenals of both Yemens and reduced Western interests in inter-Yemeni tensions. Aid from Warsaw Pact, Western, and Arab sources had plummeted even before the Gulf War cut Yemen off from most of its remaining benefactors. Simultaneously freed of Cold War tensions and driven by economic pressures to maximize returns from oil discovered along their common frontier (and from their grossly underdeveloped farm, fishing, industrial, and services sectors), both San'a and Aden had new incentives for merger.[9]

But the net balance of external pressure was against, rather than for, political pluralism. The main external funders of the YAR and the PDRY, respectively, Saudi Arabia and the USSR, were hardly advocates of liberalization. And the West, particularly the United States, did not wholeheartedly endorse the introduction of pluralism in Yemen. Saudi Arabia was less than enthusiastic about Yemeni unity to begin with, and its abhorrence increased after the Gulf War and in light of what it regarded as the dangerous precedent set by the elections.[10] During the Gulf crisis, when the newly unified Yemen maintained a "neutrality" that looked to Riyadh like ingratitude, it not only cut assistance but revoked work permits for Yemenis in the kingdom, sending up to a million people home and precipitating a deep economic recession. Twice, later, Riyadh issued letters to international oil companies warning them against working in Yemen. No secret was made of Saudi disdain for Yemen's electoral processes, and it was often alleged, as the al-Haqq Party leader stated, that the kingdom was "pouring lots of money into Yemen to promote its own version of Wahhabist Islam," supporting in particular "various tribo-religious sectors" and "pseudo religious schools" in order to sustain "Saudi hegemony over Yemen."[11]

In the midst of U.S. policy proclamations about democratization and human rights, Yemen's "wrong" position on the Gulf War[12] weighed more

heavily in Washington's policy toward Yemen than elections and an improvement in human rights conditions.[13] Although the United States and the European Community offered some assistance to the Supreme Elections Committee, training for independent election monitors, and financing for international observers and balloting materials in 1993, the Western influence on the process was minimal. The U.S. reaction, in particular, was qualified by fear that pluralism could destabilize the peninsula; although major donors Germany and the Netherlands, along with France, more warmly welcomed the electoral process, because of their active aid programs they also took greater pains to avoid the appearance of involvement in domestic politics. There was, in short, less outside lobbying for political liberalization in Yemen than in Egypt or Jordan and far less journalistic and scholarly scrutiny.

Neither of the two ruling cliques comprised enlightened democrats, either before or after unification. Both had come to power through violence, less by initiating coups than by taking cover under fire; both lacked legitimacy; and both were losing their external backing. The PDRY barely survived its last intraparty bloodbath in 1986 and was part of a dying breed of states of socialist orientation. Inside the YAR political tensions were simmering under the tight lid of security, while external relations with neighboring monarchies were slowly burning off. Dissidents from each polity sought refuge in the other's capital. Both states were tottering on the edge of bankruptcy. Unity was a very popular political cause and the only possible basis for nationalist appeals. In short, contingent power sharing was a power maintenance strategy for both regimes, each hoping to buy time and each confident of its ability to dominate the new state: the YSP by virtue of its superior organization, and the San'a regime via its larger army. Despite their promises to abide by the will of the people, between them they maneuvered to delay the elections, override the constitution, undermine contrary political movements, retain their separate pre-unity praetorian guards, and deploy these when conventional political tactics failed. Moreover, San'a and Aden each seemed loathe to negotiate their differences through constitutional mechanisms, resorting instead to unilateral threats to withdraw from the union (by the YSP) or eliminate opponents by force (from San'a).

The argument advanced here, therefore, is that this sort of diagonal pluralism is a force, probably the main force, for democratization. Few parties are democratic by virtue of an a priori commitment to the U.S. Bill of Rights, but to the extent that they negotiate in the public arena, compete in the marketplace of ideas, advance alternative visions of the nature of legitimate governance, and counter governmental authoritarianism, they constitute a force for civility. The game is not a tug-of-war between dictators and democrats but a grand negotiation for space, a process of compromises and

concessions among a plurality of interests and concerns. In the immediate aftermath of unification, the pluralism stemming from a bipartisan balance of power also represented the best hope for mediating the political differences between two ruling parties, for if left to themselves it was clear they would rather play gladiator than chess. However, instead of just the two players, there were additional contenders: Islah, not an insignificant actor if less than neutral by virtue of its historical ties to the Salih regime; the opposition parties with limited institutional representation, who could seize the initiative in this free-for-all game of kickball; and the diagonal forces of tribe and region, who in effect left the stands to join the fray on the political playing field but withdrew once the action moved to the battlefield. It was pluralism run amuck, not only not playing by the rules but uncertain of what game was being played. The balance between competition and chaos was delicate. Yet the very turbulence offered an unusual and at least potentially historic opportunity for the myriad "third" forces, bolstered by something approaching popular consensus, to advance proposals for rules of the game, for a social contract.

How: Modes of Political Competition

The Republic of Yemen's "social contract" is still very much open to negotiation. As in so many countries, rulers' concessions to liberalization have been contingent on their political advantage: Regimes have signed and then superseded a series of agreements to abide by the rules of civility, established democratic processes only to supersede them, and issued laws that apply to others but not to themselves. As in the colonial, theocratic, and Cold War states that preceded it, the state-class has repeatedly resorted to violence and capricious legislation in a vain effort to rein in societal forces. Not surprisingly, under these circumstances, the formal electoral and parliamentary institutions were only one arena for politics; when state institutions failed, the center of action shifted to extra-governmental arenas. The state does not provide a legal-institutional framework for civil society; to the contrary, civil society counteracts the military state.

The first major postunity crisis, in the fall of 1992, whose result was postponement of the elections, surely indicated the end of the honeymoon between the two former presidents. The GPC and its allies claimed the Southerners wanted to retain parity of representation in parliament and the Presidential Council in spite of having only a quarter of the population, and thus both the GPC and the Southerners hoped to avoid elections. Progressives countered that the GPC never intended more than token balloting and the shallowest facade of democratization. The nonruling parties, non-Hashid tribes, professional syndicates, and independent political figures asserted that only constant public pressure could impel the leadership to

implement the constitution. There were other indications of something amiss, especially a string of assassinations and attacks on leftist political figures.

Yet there was also popular pressure to make the liberal experiment work. The series of mass conferences during the transition and pre-election period were both an expression of diagonal pluralism and a strong pressure to hold elections. Tribal and regional mass conferences in 1992 each issued written demands for the rule of law, pluralism, economic development, and a degree of local autonomy. At least 20 parties, 40-some syndicates and popular organizations, and independent political personalities convened a National Conference in September 1992, which issued a series of resolutions and a Code of Political Conduct. The Code's Preamble called for "free, peaceful and democratic dialogue among various segments of society, the political parties, the popular organizations, and public personalities" to "enable all the political and social forces to participate in the political decision-making process." Democracy, it continued, "whatever else it means," implies "the real contribution and participation of individuals and groups in the dynamics of society to arrive at good solutions."[14]

The National Conference defied the efforts of both San'a and Aden to delay, co-opt, and eventually upstage the popular event. Well publicized in the opposition press but ignored by state media, the conference issued resolutions insisting on pluralism, separation of powers, public safety, and fair multiparty elections.[15] This and other conferences, both rural and urban, involving tens of thousands of people, were among the transition period's most important political developments, forcing the regime to adopt its own Code of Political Conduct, accept the principle of local elections, and adopt the rhetoric of electoral and human rights. Without unduly romanticizing the nature of these gatherings, it is fair and accurate to say they launched a nationwide debate involving men (mostly) in and beyond the three major parties.

There were also several spontaneous outbursts of popular frustration. What began as a strike by Taiz taxi drivers prompted by a precipitous rise in petrol prices in December 1992 spread into generalized urban demonstrations of outrage over collapse of the value of the riyal, inadequate services, mounting unemployment, government corruption, political assassinations, and postponement of the elections.[16] Along with strikes and threatened strikes by groups ranging from garbage collectors to judges, the near-riots reminded the government of the power of popular wrath, and prompted the leadership to order that elections go forward.

The 1993 Elections

Once the 10-day 1993 official campaign period was launched, campaigning was intense and bargaining complex. Candidates, their supporters, and

party activists canvassed private parties, held public rallies, published platforms, and plastered walls with handbills. At the same time, deals were struck to withhold or withdraw a candidate here in favor of another there; military camps were redeployed to constituencies where soldiers' votes could affect the outcome; and in at least a handful of cases parties or candidates resorted to violence, theft of ballot boxes, or other illegal means of securing an election-day victory.[17] One such incident occurred in Habur, a district of Hajjah province in the North where local tribes were affiliated with Hashid, but partisan loyalties were decidedly mixed. A university student son of Shaikh al-Ahmar, running on his family name and the Islah banner but no local or political experience, challenged a local, 40-something Socialist. During the elections the local YSP party office was attacked with rocket-propelled grenades, and armed associates of the al-Ahmar family carried off the ballot boxes.

Such shenanigans in relatively few districts notwithstanding, the atmosphere of anticipation among both citizens and party leaders as the counting began confirmed that the results were not entirely a foregone conclusion. When the preliminary results were released on 1 May, the GPC had won 123 constituencies; Islah came in second with 62 seats; the YSP took 56, mostly in the former PDRY; independents had 48; the Ba'th won seven; three Nasserite parties each gained one seat; al-Haqq had two; and two remained to be decided. However, these returns resolved the neck-and-neck race for second place in a purely statistical way, since the uncertain affiliations of independents left the real balance of power unresolved. The YSP announced that in addition to party members elected, 13 socialist independents won with its support, and an additional 17 genuinely independent deputies-elect shared its "vision of the future." Some journalists calculated that Islah had some 30 supporters elected under the GPC banner, plus three independents. Many political actors and observers were also keenly aware that the outcome did not perfectly reflect the popular vote: 28 percent for the GPC, 18 percent for the YSP, 17 percent for Islah, 29 percent for independents, and the remainder for 10 smaller parties led by the Ba'th (with 3 percent) and the Unity Nasserite Party.[18]

In many African and West Asian countries, electoral results amount to ethnic or tribal censuses, for people support politicians from the same community or clan. In Yemen, apart from the fact that the GPC ruled in the North and the YSP in the PDRY, partisan identification cannot be reduced to parochial or regional affiliations. Of all the parties, Islah had the most "national" appeal, finishing well in virtually every province nationwide, with the YSP a close second. Within Hashid and Bakil and individual tribes within and beyond these confederations, and in regions including the Southern uplands and the Hadhramawt, indeed in most villages and many families, people voted for different party and independent candidates.[19]

In any case, no party won a clear national majority, and the division of seats mandated a coalition government. Al-Ahmar of Islah became speaker of parliament, joined in the leadership by one each from the GPC, YSP, and Ba'th. The Socialist prime minister formed a Council of Ministers representing all three major parties. President Salih remained president. This left the difficult and delicate division of seats on the five-person Presidential Council among the three coalition partners.

Constitutional Conferences

In lieu of resolving this issue constitutionally, the president's office proposed far-reaching amendments to the constitution that would replace the Presidential Council with a strong president. Simultaneously and provocatively, the GPC offered to merge with the YSP. The amendments proposal from the ruling party raised a new constitutional debate that was only resolved in the end by force. The Socialist vice president, who by this time had retreated home to Aden, countered with eighteen conditions for his participation in the government. The GPC, then the Opposition Coalition, issued its own list of conditions, widening the debate still further. From this moment, there was a sharp disjuncture between the preparations of military commanders for war and the mediating efforts of civil society.

The mediation project had three levels. At the top, a very elite group of prominent politicians outside the government invited representatives of the three coalition partners to join a National Dialogue Committee of Political Forces. The National Dialogue committee comprised three members from each of the leading parties, one from each of a half-dozen prominent lesser parties and the opposition coalition, and several independents, or a total of 27 men, all with national reputations, selected to represent every major region and social group from within the body politic.[20] The weight of this committee needs emphasis, for it included, among others, the best-loved republican shaikhs of Hashid and Bakil, one of the authors of glasnost in the PDRY, persons who had been exiled on both sides of the border, the most reasonable of the prominent Islamists, university professors, current and former ministers, civil society activists, and nationalists of impeccable credentials. The effort had considerable credibility and was linked through its members into partisan, professional, and regional networks.

On the second level, the intelligentsia—faculty, legal scholars, journalists—seized the opportunity to present research and proposals in a densely packed calendar of seminars, symposia, and round tables. There were detailed, interesting sessions on local government, the line between censorship and libel, women's rights, parliamentary systems, *shari'a* (Islamic law), and a range of other topics. Excerpts and full transcripts of academic papers and debates were published in the many cheap weekly newspapers

that flooded urban kiosks, thus influencing wider discourse and ordinary conversation. Journalists and attorneys, enjoying newfound possibilities for non–civil service careers, animated their syndicates to defend the press from a string of charges brought by the Ministry of Information.

Mass regional conferences—often colorful, folksy, disorganized, and contentious—considered both local and national issues. Hajjah stressed the twin issues of local government and local development.[21] The al-Bayda' Meeting for the Defense of Democracy, Unity, and Justice focused on the concentration of military units in residential areas along the border region.[22] Meetings in tribal areas like Khawlan and Sa'dah called for an end to local blood feuds. Many demanded better health, education, and social services. Yet the written resolutions issued at the end of each meeting also reflected common, national themes: public safety, removal of the military from population centers, elections for local administration, judicial independence, a serious plan to limit government corruption, and the building of modern state institutions. These issues in turn were incorporated into the accords issued by the National Dialogue Committee on 18 January 1994. However, the accord went beyond popular expectations in its specific proposals. It called for limiting executive powers, fully merging and depoliticizing the armed forces, and redrawing provincial and administrative decisions. Public reaction was ecstatic: Politicians had finally produced a document expressing the popular will.

Both San'a and Aden resisted pressure from the National Dialogue Committee, popular conferences, the press, and further mass demonstrations late in 1993, maneuvering to avoid signature of the accord and finally signing it abroad, in Amman, Jordan, on 20 February 1994. That same evening the first military clash of what was to be the civil war occurred in Abyan, a place near Aden where both armies were stationed in close proximity.

At this crucial juncture, civil society swung into action once more. More conferences affirmed the work of the National Dialogue Committee and its proposals. Urban scholars, attorneys, and other professionals held weekly seminars to examine each section of the document. The Sa'adah, San'a, and Lahij meetings, follow-up activities from the Ibb meeting, a conference of tribes in Hadhramawt, and other gatherings in the provinces called for prompt, full implementation of the accords, and the Shabwah meeting condemned military actions and endorsed the accords.[23] Even the unsuccessful Aden conference adopted as its slogan, "There is no alternative but to submit to the judgement of the dialogue as a means of achieving security and stability."[24] Bakil gathered thousands of armed men clamoring for the accord, economic development, and the arrest of high-profile swindlers.[25]

Members of the National Dialogue Committee now met in San'a,

Aden, Taiz, and elsewhere to plan a strategy to disable preparations for war through popular action. They devised a program of regular, peaceful, sit-in protests that began in early March under the slogans, "No to War, No to Separation, Yes to the Document." These protests were unprecedented not only because of the involvement of children, the coordinated use of simple symbols like white flags and armbands, and simultaneous action in cities and towns throughout the country, but also in the extent to which the GPC, the YSP, and other parties and organizations each tried to associate themselves with a movement that clearly represented majority public sentiment.[26]

The Civil War of 1994

Yet the armies, still under command of their pre-unity leaders, continued to square off, exchanging fire in a series of noisy clashes throughout the spring. While the San'a and Aden airwaves and press aired increasingly vituperative mutual recriminations, and foreign emissaries engaged top officers in "joint" discussions, preparations for war were unmistakable. Direct, army-to-army combat erupted on the evening of 4 May, when soldiers filled the darkened streets of San'a, and rocket fire spread down the backbone of the country in the wee hours of 5 May. By the time 16 "separatists" declared a provisional Democratic Republic of Yemen in the territory of the former PDRY on 21 May, Southern forces were on the defensive.[27] The popular uprising they presumably anticipated failed to materialize. When the secessionist political and military commanders escaped from South Yemen to neighboring Oman in early July, their troops surrendered and the shooting ceased. Besides the top echelons of the post-1986 YSP leadership, the heads of two smaller parties fled after the war: the RAY, the obvious conduit of Gulf assistance to the Socialists, and an early advocate of reseparation; and a Northern officer-shaikh in charge of one of the Nasserite factions who had been trying to overthrow Salih since his rise to power in 1978.

The response of the international community to both the elections and the war was predictably ambivalent, for both were viewed against the backdrop of Gulf security considerations. Riyadh now viewed its former client with trepidation, as a large, lawless representative of the sort of Arab republicanism that has threatened Arab monarchies since the 1950s. The Saudi government abhorred the 1993 elections and female suffrage as "unIslamic," while its London-based opposition, in an Arabic journal whose English masthead is *al-Jazeera al-Arabia* (the Arabian Peninsula) ran an article entitled, "The Message of the Yemeni Elections to the Kingdom," praising, among other things, the participation of 700,000 Yemeni women.[28]

Because of the new state's refusal to back its Desert Storm alliance, the United States all but eliminated its modest assistance program and issued a rather lukewarm statement on the 1993 elections. Some of the documents produced by U.S. elections monitors also showed a Cold War bias. The International Republican Institute's background briefing, for instance, reported that the GPC "is made up of local leaders" and that its "strength" comes "from the popularity of its members at the local level," although the party "suffered the most from the creation of new parties." The YSP, by contrast, was identified with a Marxist-Leninist, communist past, a "critical weakness," and had "lost a great deal of its active membership since abdicating its monopoly on power."[29] The subdued U.S. reaction to Yemen's elections contrasted with U.S. enthusiasm for polling experiences in Kuwait.[30] The Europeans, especially the Netherlands and Germany, were relatively more positive.

When the marriage of convenience between San'a and the Adeni YSP leadership went sour, Riyadh and other Gulf governments were quick to capitalize on the impasse by encouraging the separatist aspirations of some Southern leaders. Top YSP figures toured the Gulf in the spring of 1994 and led their hosts to believe they were importing weapons. It seemed that the house of Ibn Saud, in particular, fancied a weak, divided Yemen.[31] In the meantime, the Jordanian and Omani monarchs each invited the Yemeni president and vice president to high-level talks, and U.S., French, and British military attachés tried peace-maintenance techniques with army commanders. U.S. negotiator Robert Pelletreau arrived in early May, when the die was already cast, and caught the last commercial flight out before San'a airport was bombed. During the war, Washington called for a cease-fire, as did European governments, but no visible steps were taken to halt the fighting.

Saudi patronage of the separatist movement discredited the mutineers and was one reason they marshalled so little popular support. Civilians moved out of the way of the somewhat desultory rocket exchanges, and large numbers of Southern troops surrendered without a fight. Yet once the war began, and even after it ended, San'a's armed and security forces and their plainclothes agents waged a low-intensity war against critics. Southern Adeni Socialist establishments were looted, and civil service files burned; in San'a and other Northern cities, the offices, newspapers, and homes of officers of the YSP and several other, neutral, parties, were firebombed. Journalists were detained without warrant during the war and mugged in broad daylight afterwards. Hundreds if not thousands of Socialist bureaucrats were laid off. Radical Islamists attacked Shafa'i mosques and secular hair salons. Individuals, including female professionals and the Kuwaiti chargé d'affaires, were harassed. Record numbers of Yemenis applied for asylum in countries including Canada, Germany, Britain, and the United

States. The YSP, the Ba'th, and a couple of smaller parties were split into two or more factions each, with ineffectual leadership.

The constitution, suspended for 90 days during the wartime state of emergency, was amended after the war in the ways proposed by the GPC, to replace the executive council with a strong president, establish an appointive upper house of parliament, and eradicate socialist secularism as a basis of law.[32] Other legislation tightened up party registration, instituted a Wahhabi personal status code reducing women to legal wards of male relatives, imposed a criminal code allowing such sentences as crucifixion and eye gouging, and further centralized local administration.

After the war tens of thousands of Northern soldiers and administrators were stationed in the South, where they represented a sort of occupation army indoctrinated by the neo-Islamist anticommunist ideology that zealots learned in Afghanistan.[33] Southern women endured the sanctioned harassment of soldiers, unless they accepted a proposal to be a second wife. Many people lost their jobs, and privatization tended to mean sale of local assets to carpetbaggers and scalawags. Saudi Arabia, however, offered another opportunity in the contested, oil-producing regions of Shabwa and Hadhramawt: Vehicle licenses and even passports were readily available to Yemenis in these regions.

All of this was accompanied by economic austerity wrought by the cumulative effects of unpaid Cold War–era debts, the Gulf War, plunder of PDRY assets, and endemic corruption within the public sector. Pressed by foreign creditors through the Paris Club and advised in particular by the Netherlands government and the World Bank, San'a agreed to wide-reaching economic reforms in 1995–1996 that included privatization, streamlining the public payroll, and the removal of energy and staple food subsidies. The austerity measures and the resulting slide in the value of the riyal (which lost an average of 100 percent a year for six years) prompted street demonstrations of the sort seen in 1992 and again in 1993, wherein unemployed youth filled urban streets. The protests in San'a, Taiz, and other cities in the spring of 1996 resembled so-called IMF riots in other countries, while in the Hadhramawt candlelight vigils called attention to electrical brownouts and marches denounced police molestation of local women. Although tight security curtailed the sorts of freewheeling intellectual seminars and mass regional conferences that enlivened the 1990–1994 democratic interlude, a sort of pro-democracy movement persisted.

The 1997 Parliamentary Elections

By 1997, the government was motivated to hold multiparty elections as scheduled on 27 April to enable the GPC to consolidate its majority in the 301-seat parliament, to legitimize its rule in the eyes of citizens and the

world at large, to assert Yemen's identity as a republic on an island of monarchies, and to bolster its claim to represent the popular will of the whole nation.

The world community, especially the European Union (EU), had a certain stake in the elections, as indicated by millions of dollars in elections-related assistance, dozens of missions to train for and observe participation, and a new cooperation agreement signed by Yemen and the EU barely a week before the elections. Pleased with the effects of austerity in reducing arrears on about U.S.$9 billion in debt (over half to the former USSR), creditors also allowed a relaxation of interest rates in advance of polling. The Netherlands government, broker of the debt-restructuring package, financed civil society programs, an electricity project for Hadhramawt, and many other activities. Unified Germany, in some respects having taken Yemen under its wing, also bankrolled initiatives to strengthen both the regime and its institutions. By the same token, in early April the European Parliament called on San'a to rectify documented human rights abuses, and the Joint International Observer Group in Yemen criticized the open presence of as many as 60,000 security forces deployed for the election.[34]

Washington conditioned its posture on the rocky state of Yemeni-Saudi relations, which had deteriorated badly from 1990 through 1995 but improved somewhat in time for the elections. San'a had accused Riyadh of arming the separatist movement and opposition-party-in-exile (known only by the acronym MAWJ), whereas Riyadh hinted that Yemen harbored Saudi dissidents and tolerated drug- and gun-runners. As a 1934 agreement demarcating the boundary in the far west, near the Red Sea, came up for renegotiation, the monarchy pressed obscure territorial claims on its southern frontier, in the far east near the Empty Quarter, through a variety of means.[35] By 1997, however, extension of the 1934 treaty, lucrative concessions to Saudi-Yemeni investors including the Bin Mahfuz family, and promises by the Yemeni government to crack down on anti-Saudi activities and publications led to a thaw in bilateral relations. Saudi Prince Sultan was rumored to have congratulated Shaikh al-Ahmar on keeping both his parliamentary seat and the speakership.

The 1997 elections provide a good excuse to use the analogy of the half-empty or half-full glass. Yemeni dissidents derided the entire exercise as a mere demonstration election, pointing out that the role of parliament in lawmaking was in any case marginalized and that an upper house was in the process of being appointed. Moreover, the environment was far more restricted than in 1993, with only two of the three main parties running and only half the number of smaller parties. Only four parties won seats. The elections occurred in the context of worsening human rights circumstances criticized by Amnesty International, and 11 or 12 people lost their lives in election-related violence. The GPC controlled television, radio, the daily

newspapers, all printing presses, security arrangements, and what Americans call "the pork barrel" (graft). Many of the other parties were under new leaders and their papers under new editors. Socialists and their allies boycotted the election because of the so-called coordination agreement between the GPC and Islah, rumored to guarantee 160 seats to the GPC and 80 to Islah, with about 60 constituencies left to the others. Consequently, turnout as a proportion of eligible voters was lower than in 1993, especially among Southern males.

The process of registering 4.6 million voters and over 2,300 candidates, the polling-day experience, the ballot count, and the outcome stood up reasonably well to the scrutiny of international monitors, however, and this legitimized the experience. Some U.S. observers considered the relatively trivial retail irregularities a sort of backhanded evidence of the absence of wholesale rigging. Women were a larger share of the electorate than before, 30 percent; ran on every party banner except Islah's; and again won two seats, both in the South, the only two female parliamentarians on the peninsula. The GPC's 187 deputies, though a comfortable majority and reportedly padded with over three dozen independents in its camp, was not the suspiciously overwhelming landslide ruling parties win in some other countries, such as Egypt. Islah, now the most serious rival to the president's organization, won 53 seats, nine fewer than in 1993, mainly along the Saudi frontier, the former inter-Yemeni border region, and in places with a legacy of opposition to the GPC. Independents and other parties won a respectable 54 seats, apparently guaranteeing some opposition within the Chamber of Deputies. Donors were pleased to see the business community well represented. A member of the *Akhdam* strata was elected as such. The response of international monitors was similar to that of 1993, with the American National Democratic Institute issuing a qualified positive report; many Western journalists applauded the mere fact of holding multiparty elections in the Arabian Peninsula and took special note of female participation.[36]

In the end, Islah—having in the interim boasted of being the first party of Islamist orientation to enter government through the ballotbox—complained that the ruling party reneged on its agreements. Leading neo-Wahhabis suffered embarrassing defeats. The GPC's simple majority in parliament enabled it to constitute the Council of Ministers. Yet, in a magnanimous gesture, an independent became prime minister. One portfolio went to a non-GPC member—and this one, *Awqaf* (Islamic endowments), to al-Haqq, an obvious slap in the face to the religious wing of Islah because it symbolically restored administration of Islamic endowments to Zaydi *sayyids*. In advance of the elections, and after announcing his candidacy for the first national executive elections in 1999, Salih exercised his newly given constitutional authority to appoint 59 men to the Consultative

Council or Senate, chaired by a GPC stalwart. The appointments were very wisely made to include a wide spectrum of prominent personalities. By the summer of 1997, parliament and the ministries were the province of GPC loyalists, as they had been before unity. As elsewhere in the region, it seemed that now that the left was in full retreat, an administration could move to reduce the influence of the ideological right. (See Table 11.1.)

Table 11.1 Results of 1993 and 1997 Yemeni Parliamentary Elections, 301 Constituencies

Party	1993	1997
General People's Congress	123	187
Yemeni Reform Grouping	62	53
Yemeni Socialist Party	56	0
Yemeni Ba'th	7	2
al-Haqq	2	0
Nasserite-Unity	1	2
Nasserite-Democratic	1	0
Nasserite-Correctionist	1	0
Independents (nonpartisan)	48	54

Source: Supreme Elections Committee (San'a).

Conclusion

The evaluation of democratization thus depends on the timeline and universe of comparison. Compared with classical Western idealism that some Yemenis do apply, it is pretty bad; against the record of neighbors like Sudan, Somalia, Bahrain, and Iraq, it is pretty good. The trajectory is uneven and unstable, with mixed policies of liberalization and corporatism reflecting the diverse domestic and international pressures on a regime whose main objective is to remain in power. Outside pressures will almost certainly continue to privilege Saudi security and investor confidence over political liberties, and as long as opponents can be dismissed as communists, Ba'thists of Iraqi persuasion, Shi'ites with Iranian connections, or Islamic fundamentalists, the West will tolerate a "reasonable" level of oppression.

San'a knows the risks of underestimating the country's diverse social and political forces. For despite intimidation of independent and opposition parties and publications, political movements in Yemen have a certain longevity, and there are many legacies and alternative centers of legitimacy

to be dealt with. The president, whose genius has always been for cultivating influential critics, demonstrated a keen appreciation for this fact in appointing to the Consultative Council not GPC cronies but prominent independents such as several members of the National Dialogue Committee, including the two initiators and at least one Socialist; some prominent Islamists defeated in the election; the longtime ambassador to the United States and former prime minister, an old Ba'thist; and the editor of the *Yemen Times* who had won an international press award after several detentions and beatings. Beneath the parliamentary level, the government needs to cope with the real, rooted tendencies within its own educational and court systems, which include valuable professionals trained in a range of Islamic, socialist, Arab nationalist, and Western settings, and with the capacity of women, Zaydis, Bakil, Hadhramis, and others to withdraw into "promordial" circles not fully penetrated by the state.

One of the contradictions in Yemen is that almost everybody has guns, but only forces commanded by the ruling cliques seem to be using them. Tribes acting as such do sometimes engage in a form of banditry known as "cutting the road," and it is a serious problem for oil companies and tourists in the east and southeast that local men hijack cars and sometimes take foreign hostages. These forms of banditry are so ritualized that the Associated Press ran a humorous account, and instances of physical harm are rare.[37] Despite some very deep resentments and good opportunities, however, tribesmen armed with kalaznikovs and bazookas have not engaged in extended armed rebellion since colonial days. To the contrary, even for the sheep ranchers, small farmers, and military reservists who constitute "the tribes," the preferred modes of political expression have been the mass conference and the ballot box. In cities, where thousands of men, women, and even children gather unarmed for political events, security agents perpetrate most of the criminal and political violence. Yet the regime's capacity to rule by the sword is not unlimited, for as small individual tribes show when they detain foreign guests or their all-terrain vehicles, the state can barely police its own oil fields. Yemen provides an interesting case where a popular militia may need to protect communities from the central government.

What does the case of Yemen, so different from others in the region, tell us about prospects for democratization in the Arab world? A few things, perhaps. First, the range and variation of political orientation are quite wide, encompassing various national, Arabian, pan-Arab, and internationalist ideologies. The ebb and flow of political currents is considerable, and each wave molds the contours of the landscape. Gravity is not the only political force. Second, in the context of political pluralism a constitutional debate has been under way for more than two generations, one that is not simply about tradition and modernity or about secularism and Islam or

about tribe and nation but about all these things and more. The discourse of this debate well and truly blends classical Arabic concepts like *shura* (consultation) with terms that came to Arabic from the Greek philosophers, including *dimuqratiyya* (democracy) and terms translated from contemporary usage abroad, such as *huquq al-insan* (human rights). Third, although participation in the institutions and opportunities offered by government is one option, withdrawal and rebellion are also possibilities for a politically weary and wary citizenry. Compared with other regional states whose superstructures rest on a legacy of colonial institutions and the fiscal foundation of oil rents, then, as an adolescent state whose hegemony over civil society is by no means guaranteed and whose geographic boundaries have yet to be mapped, Yemen may be the one country where a regime can be forced to move, incrementally and unwillingly, to incorporate the real pluralism of its society into the practice of statecraft. For, lastly, although Yemen is certainly one of the region's "softest," most fragile state structures, its recent experience also serves as a reminder to the whole Arab world that just as rulers' concessions to democratization are contingent, so too are the loyalties of a public whose aspirations for state civility are continually thwarted.

Notes

1. On their rivalry, see Michael C. Hudson, "Bipolarity, Rational Calculation, and War in Yemen," in Jamal S. al-Suwaidi, ed., *The Yemeni War of 1994: Causes and Consequences* (Abu Dhabi: Saqi Books, 1995), pp. 19–32.

2. On the history of contemporary Yemeni parties, see Ilham M. Manea, *Al-ahzab wa-l-tanzimat al-siyasiya fi-l-Yaman (1948–1993)* [Parties and Political Organizations in Yemen, 1948–1993] (San'a: Kitab al-Thawabit 2, 1994). For the party platforms, consult Rashad M. Al-Alimi and Ahmed A. Al-Bishari, *Al-Baramaj al-Intikhabiyya l'al-Ahzab w'al-Tanzimat al- Siyassiyya fi al-Jumhuriyya al-Yamaniyya: Darasa Maqarana* [The Electoral Programs of the Parties and Political Organizations in the Republic of Yemen: Comparative Studies] (San'a: Athawabit Books, 1993).

3. On the PDRY revolution, see Fred Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans* (Middlesex, UK: Penguin Books, 1979); and Halliday, *Revolution and Foreign Policy: The Case of South Yemen 1967–1987* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

4. For other background, see Charles Dunbar, "The Unification of Yemen: Process, Politics, and Prospects," *Middle East Journal* 46, 3 (Summer 1992), pp. 456–476.

5. Shelagh Weir, "A Clash of Fundamentalisms: Wahhabism in Yemen," *Middle East Report* 204 (July–September 1997), pp. 22–23, 26.

6. See, for instance, the interview with Muhammad Rawah Sa'id, of the Federation of Popular Forces, *Yemen Times*, 30 September 1992, p. 3.

7. On the history of center-periphery relations, see Sheila Carapico, *Civil*

Society in Yemen: The Political Economy of Activism in Modern Arabia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

8. For further background on the unification agreement, see Robert D. Burrowes, "Oil Strike and Leadership Struggle in South Yemen: 1986 and Beyond," *Middle East Journal* 43, 3 (Summer 1989), pp. 437–453; Gregory Gause, "Yemeni Unity: Past and Future," *Middle East Journal* 42, 1 (Winter 1988), pp. 33–47.

9. Sheila Carapico, "The Economic Dimension of Yemeni Unity," *Middle East Report* 184 (September/October 1993).

10. Mark Katz, "Yemeni Unity and Saudi Security," *Middle East Policy* 1, 1 (1992), pp. 117–135.

11. Interview with Ahmad Muhammad Bin 'Ali al-Shami, *Yemen Times*, 1 July 1992, p. 3.

12. For some further details, see Sheila Carapico, "Elections and Mass Politics in Yemen," *Middle East Report* 185 (November/ December 1993).

13. On these conditions, see George Lerner for *Middle East Watch*, "Yemen: Steps Toward a Civil Society," 4 November 1992 and 10 November 1992.

14. An English translation of the "The Code of Political Conduct" appeared in *Yemen Times*, 23 September 1992, p. 10.

15. Renaud Detalle, "The Yemeni Elections Up Close," *Middle East Report* 185 (November/December 1993).

16. Eric Watkins, "Yemen's Riots Prompt Talk of Reform," *Middle East International* 444 (19 February 1993), p. 18. For analysis, see Abdu Sharif, "Yemeni Unification: Perspective on Economic Crisis and Political Conflict," presentation to the International Symposium on Economic Cooperation and Reunification, Pusan, South Korea, 29–30 September 1995.

17. See the Islah exposé of electoral malpractice by Hamud al-Hitar, "Primary Report on the Yemeni Elections Issued by EPC of the Unity and Peace Conference," Unity and Peace Conference (UPC) Election Protection Committee (EPC), 5 May 1993.

18. For analysis of the electoral process, see Iris Glosemeyer, "The First Yemeni Parliamentary Elections in 1993: Practicing Democracy," *Orient* 34, 3, pp. 439–451.

19. For further discussion, see Paul Dresch and Bernard Haykel, "Stereotypes and Political Styles: Islamists and Tribesfolk in Yemen," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 27, 4 (November 1995), pp. 405–431.

20. *Al-Hayat*, November 23, 1993, pp. 1, 4; *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 16, 1993, p. 1.

21. *Al-Multaqa al-jamahiriyya al-awal abna' muhafaza Hajjah* [The First Popular Conference of the Sons of Hajjah Governorate], conference resolutions, January 1994. See also *Sawt al-'Ummal*, February 3, 1994, p. 5.

22. *Sawt al-'Ummal*, January 20, 1994, p. 1; *al-Mustaqbal*, February 6, 1994, p. 2.

23. *22 May*, 16 February, 1994, p. 3.

24. *Sawt al-'Ummal*, 17 February, 1994, p. 1.

25. See also Sheila Carapico, "Yemen Between Civility and Civil War," in Augustus Richard Norton, ed., *Civil Society in the Middle East*, vol. 2 (New York: E. J. Brill, 1996), pp. 287–316.

26. See press accounts in newspapers that heretofore rarely covered the same events: *al-Thawra*, 11 March 1994, p. 1; *al-Wahda*, 9 March 1994, pp. 1, 2; *al-Shura*, 6 March 1994, pp. 1, 2; and also *al-Ayyam*, 9 March 1994, pp. 1, 2.

27. See Chuck Schmitz, "Civil War in Yemen: The Price of Unity?" *Current History* (January 1995), pp. 33–36. On military maneuvers, see David Warburton, "The Conventional War in Yemen," *Arab Studies Journal* 3, 1 (1995), pp. 20–44; Joseph Kostiner, *Yemen: The Tortuous Quest for Unity, 1990–1994* (London: Chatham House, 1996).

28. Fu'ad Ibrahim, "Risala al-Intikhabat al-Yamaniyya ila al-Mamlaka" (The Message of the Yemen Elections to the Kingdom), *al-Jazira al-'Arabiyya* 29, 3 (June 1993), pp. 23–25.

29. International Republican Institute, "1993 National Elections in the Republic of Yemen: Political Background Briefing," January 1993, pp. 7–10.

30. Ahmed Noman Almadhagi, *Yemen and the United States: A Study of a Small Power and Super-State Relationship 1962–94* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996), p. 153.

31. For further analysis, see Robert D. Burrowes, "The Yemeni Civil War of 1994: The Impact on the Arab Gulf States," pp. 71–80; and Mark N. Katz, "External Powers and the Yemeni Civil War," pp. 81–93, both in al-Suwaidi, ed., *The Yemeni War of 1994: Causes and Consequences* (Abu Dhabi: Saqi Books, 1994).

32. *The Constitution of the Republic of Yemen and Yemen Human Rights Organization Basic Statute*, Yemen Human Rights Organization Publication no. 1, San'a, January 1995.

33. Including, inter alia, the sermons of 'Abd al-Majid al-Zindani to Northern troops in April 1994 and a wartime *fatwa* from Abdullah al-Daylimi giving them "permission" to the women of Aden. See Sheila Carapico, "From Ballotbox to Battlefield: The War of the Two 'Alis," in *Middle East Report* 190 (September–October 1994), p. 27.

34. See Economist Intelligence Unit, *Yemen Country Report*, first quarter 1997.

35. Petroleum Finance Market Intelligence Service, *Yemen: Border Disputes and Relations with Saudi Arabia* (Washington, D.C.: Petroleum Finance Company, May 1992).

36. National Democratic Institute, "Statement of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) Pre-Election Assessment Delegation," San'a, 23 March 1997; and "Preliminary Statement of the NDI Observer Delegation to the April 27, 1997 Parliamentary Elections in the Republic of Yemen," San'a, 30 April 1997.

37. Anthony Shadid, "Yemen Called Kidnap Capital," Associated Press, *AOLNewsProfiles@aol.net*, 25 April 1997.