

Yemen

Ethnicity in Yemen

Power relations

Time period: 1946–1949 / 1950–1989: General Overview: Before 1962 North Yemen was a medieval kingdom run by a Zaydi Imam. The wars that occurred prior to this date were done to ensure the Imam’s authority over the tribes.

North Yemen tribes are divided into two confederations: Hashid and Bakil. They are Shi’i Zaydis and represent the minority in the population. The majority are the Shafi’i muslims who are more dominant at the coast, center, and south of North Yemen. North Yemen was ruled by military elites who belong to the Hashid tribe. This tribe has been the dominant political power. Bakil is powerful but more so in its local bases. The Shafi’i, better educated, are dominant in the business sector, and they also fill important posts in the civil service. Again, it is often not possible to provide accurate estimation of each group’s size. Countries of the Arabian Peninsula are very aware of their ethnic problems, and therefore decline to provide any figures of their ethnic groups. In the North Yemeni case, it is often “said” that the Shafi’i group represents the majority, i.e. around 60-70% of the population, while the Zaydi’s are considered a minority in the population 30-40%.

The significant change between the time periods 1946 – 1949 and 1950 – 1989 is the mass emigration of the Jewish population in Yemen.

Time period: 1990–1994: General Overview: In 1990, the territory of the Yemeni state expanded to almost its seventeenth-century extent when the northern Yemen Arab Republic merged with the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen to the south to form the sovereign Republic of Yemen (cf. ³⁶³⁶, 295). Following a national referendum on the constitution in 1991, the first national, multi-party elections were held in 1993 (cf. ³⁶³⁷, 2). According to this democratically legitimated constitution, the political power in the Republic of Yemen is shared by the president, the House of Representatives (301 seats) and an appointed 111 member Shura Council (cf. US State Department). A short Civil War in 1994 has altered the conditions of democratic possibility, however, transforming a democratic partnership into authoritarian northern-dominated rule that continues to this day (cf. ³⁶³⁸, 3).

³⁶³⁶ [Weir, 2007]

³⁶³⁷ [Wedeen, 2008]

³⁶³⁸ [Wedeen, 2008]

Group Selection: With the unification of the two states in 1990, two tribal people, differing with regards to their religious denomination, have been merged under one framework, the Republic of Yemen: the Shiite Zaydi sect, mainly found in the north and north-west (Northerners), and the Sunni Shafi'is, mainly living in the south and the southeast (Southerners) (cf. ³⁶³⁹; ³⁶⁴⁰). Drawing this distinction is especially relevant in light of the fact that the Southern Shafi'is, as has been reported, supported the Northern Shafi'is during the Civil War of 1994. As this has led to tensions within the overall society and especially towards the politically better organized and dominant Zaydis (e.g. President Ali Abdallah Saleh is Zaydi), the period after the Civil War distinguishes not only between Northerners and Southerners anymore, but differentiates the groups according to their religious denomination as well.

³⁶³⁹ [US State Department]

³⁶⁴⁰ [CIA World Factbook]

Political Status: The electoral innovations of the early 1990s did not challenge or undermine the existing tribal structures and their inequalities. In the delineation of the 301 constituencies, state and tribal geo-political conceptions remained congruent. What had been a democratic and relatively balanced partnership before the Civil War of 1994 (both groups as senior partner), transformed into an "authoritarian northern-dominated" (³⁶⁴¹, 3) rule. This overall picture was confirmed in the elections of 1997 and 2003 (cf. ³⁶⁴², 306). Still, Southerners have enough weight and influence in the executive to call them "junior partner". Therefore, the Northern Zaydis are coded as senior partner, and the Shafi'is, both the Southern and Northern, are coded as junior partner.

³⁶⁴¹ [Wedeen, 2008]

³⁶⁴² [Weir, 2007]

In 1994, Southern leaders seceded and declared the Democratic Republic of Yemen, but it was not internationally legitimized. President Saleh resumes control over all of Yemen. Al Qeda presence gains momentum during the 1994-2004 period.

Time period: 1995–2013: Note: Although the coding for ethnic groups remains constant for this period, there are many complicated conflicts and political developments occurring during this period, which are explained in this section)

Al-Houthi: In 2004, Zaydi cleric Hussein Badr Eddin al-Houthi launched a rebellion against the Yemeni government in Sa'ada, in attempt to reestablish Zaydi dominance in the north and contest the newly-unified Yemen's policies of cooperation with the GPC regime. Al-Houthi was killed by government forces, and the rebellion was continued under his son's leadership. The Houthis have a long history of Zaydi cultural advocacy, but officially distinguished themselves under the name Houthi after al-Houthi's 2004 assassination. They are a group "difficult to definitively characterize as military, religious, or political in nature" (³⁶⁴³) and have been classified by some as a political movement (³⁶⁴⁴), and as an ethnic group with strong Zaydi Shiite support. Others classify the group as inherently religious, not political, and a reaction to increasing Salafi presence in Zaidi-dominated Saada. Houthi formation is considered a polit-

³⁶⁴³ [Islamopedia Online, 2012]

³⁶⁴⁴ [Zimmerman Harnisch, 2010]

ical faction of the Zaydis as part of the development of the Zaydi ethnic group, and not distinguished formally in the coding. (more explanation regarding the Houthis under 'Extra Information')

Between 2004-2010, the Sa'ada Wars took place (armed conflict between the Houthis and the central government), displacing some 300,000 people. At heart, the conflict is a "power struggle between federal and local actors" ⁽³⁶⁴⁵⁾. The conflict became somewhat inter-tribal with the employment of several tribes by the government in their forces. Prior to 2007, long-term violence in Yemen was dominated by inter-group, ethnic and religious violence, and incidence of violence was predictable based on groups' geographical composition ⁽³⁶⁴⁶⁾. From 2007 onwards, the nature of violence in Yemen evolved from being ethnically and religiously-based, to also being driven by the effect of global increases in food prices in 2007 on an already impoverished population ⁽³⁶⁴⁷⁾.

³⁶⁴⁵ [Salmoni, 2010]

³⁶⁴⁶ [Gros, Gard-Murray Bar-Yam, 2012]

³⁶⁴⁷ [Gros, Gard-Murray Bar-Yam, 2012]

The 2009 'Operation Scorched Earth', Saleh's attempt to eliminate the Houthis, elevated the conflict to higher levels of casualty and American and Saudi involvement.

Time period: 2010-2013: General Overview: In 2011 a revolution resulted in a violent power struggle between supporters of Ali Abdullah's Saleh's regime over the last 30 years, and those who oppose him, mainly the Houthis ⁽³⁶⁴⁸⁾. After a call to end the violence by the UN Security Council in 2011, Saleh officially transferred his powers to Vice-President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi in February 2012. Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi was to oversee a transition to full democracy following the revolution. The Houthis boycotted the one-party elections and take control of al-Jawf governorate and travel routes surrounding Sa'na.

³⁶⁴⁸ [Ferguson, 2012]

After February 2012, opportunities for reconciliation and conflict resolution emerged. Meetings between oppositional leaders proposed the possibility for Houthi participation as "a political party and political power, not as a militia or insurgency" ⁽³⁶⁴⁹⁾. However, the solutions remained on paper and tensions remained and violence continued between Shafiis, Houthis, and the general Yemeni population, particularly those displaced by the conflict. It is likely that the region including Saada, Amran and Sanaa will wholly fall under Houthi control.

³⁶⁴⁹ [Zimmerman Harnisch, 2010]

Yemen is undergoing a political transition process amidst a conflict between "the state and a marginalized minority on the periphery of power who are accustomed to autonomy" ⁽³⁶⁵⁰⁾. Military forces as well as general economic resources are being stretched thin by the conflict, and is pushing the Sana governate towards affiliations with local Sunni Arab militants, and encouraging the rise of further extremist actors ⁽³⁶⁵¹⁾. It is unclear who is in charge of certain parts of southern Yemen, and to what extent the increasing involvement of al Qeda fighters will impact the conflict and the potential for reconciliation.

³⁶⁵⁰ [Salmoni, 2010]

³⁶⁵¹ [Salmoni, 2010]

Extra information / Other minority groups: Jewish: The Jewish population become social and political pariahs at the beginning of the 19th century and this pattern continued for the next decades. Yemenite Jews (coded: Jewish) are a minority group, scattered around the country with some concentrations in the north, with no political representation (coded: powerless). Between 1949 and 1950, the majority of Yemenite Jews migrated to Israel through Operation Magic Carpet (around 50,000). By 2013, the majority of remaining Jews in Yemen have migrated to Israel, and remaining numbers steadily declined over the years particularly in response to active Houthi violence and discrimination from 2004 onwards. Less than 0.001 proportion of Jews remain in Yemen in 2013.

Al-Akhdam: The Yemeni Al-Akhdam is a historically politically, socially, and economically excluded and exploited minority group (coded discriminated). Like the rest of the Yemeni population, they are Arabic-speaking Muslims, but do not share membership with the other main tribes of traditional Yemeni society. The most plausible theory explaining their origin in Yemen and their history of isolation is that they are descendants of Ethiopians conquerors who were defeated in and expelled from Yemen around the sixth century ⁽³⁶⁵²⁾. While records state the group's presence pre-1946, its population size is inconsistently reported. The official government census in 2004 states their population size as 153,133 (0.01), while unofficial sources claim 500,000 - 3.5 million persons self-identifying as Al-Akhdam (0.02 - 0.15) ^(3653, 2). The Al-Akhdam live geographically scattered across the country, mainly in the outskirts of major cities. No official discrimination exists, but many Akhdam claim that the group's attempts to engage with public services such as schools and hospitals, this access is blocked.

³⁶⁵² [IRIN News, 2012]

³⁶⁵³ [ISDN, 2013]

Al-Houthi: The Houthis are mostly active in Sa'ada and Amran provinces of northern Yemen, and control the northern Saada governorate and surrounding pockets. Their grievances include economic and social marginalization, governmental corruption, alignment of the state with the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, as well as excessive Wahhabi influence on state policy and schools ^(3654, 2010). They follow the belief that only descendants of the Prophet can be rulers of the State, and thus do not recognize President Saleh as a legitimate ruler, despite his also being a Zaydi. The Houthis claim to seek autonomy from the Yemeni state for the Zaydi Shiite population to resolve its grievances ^(3655, 2010). Government officials argue that their conflicts are actually rooted in class struggle between the modern Zaydis (like Saleh) and their traditional counterparts (Houthis) ⁽³⁶⁵⁶⁾.

³⁶⁵⁴ [Zimmerman Harnisch, 2010]

³⁶⁵⁵ [Zimmerman Harnisch, 2010]

³⁶⁵⁶ [Zimmerman Harnisch, 2010]

***Note: The Houthis are not distinguished as a separate ethnic group from the Zaydis in the coding. In light of a lack of official and consistent information, which makes it difficult to reach a strong conclusion about the group's nature, we consider them a political faction of the Zaydis, and as part of the development of the Zaydi ethnic group. This is because the group's major developments

(formal establishment in 2004, organized protest, declaration of grievances, etc.), all appear to have been primarily politically driven. Their identity and self-identified differences from the modern Zaydis (e.g. their rejection of President Saleh despite him also being a Zaydi) primarily revolve around political and economic grievances, which does not fit with our working definition of ethnicity.

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Political status of ethnic groups in Yemen

From 1946 until 1949

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Sunni Shafi'I (Arab)	0.69	JUNIOR PARTNER
Zaydis	0.29	SENIOR PARTNER
Jewish	0.01	POWERLESS
Al-Akhdam	0.01	DISCRIMINATED

From 1950 until 1990

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Sunni Shafi'I (Arab)	0.7	JUNIOR PARTNER
Zaydis	0.29	SENIOR PARTNER
Al-Akhdam	0.01	DISCRIMINATED

From 1991 until 1994

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Southerners	0.55	SENIOR PARTNER
Northerners	0.44	SENIOR PARTNER
Al-Akhdam	0.01	DISCRIMINATED

From 1995 until 2013

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Southerners	0.55	JUNIOR PARTNER
Zaydis	0.24	SENIOR PARTNER
Sunni Shafi'I (Arab)	0.2	JUNIOR PARTNER
Al-Akhdam	0.01	DISCRIMINATED



Figure 828: Political status of ethnic groups in Yemen during 1946-1949.

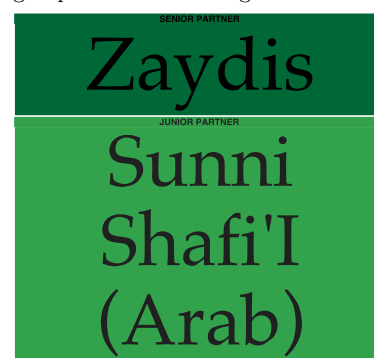


Figure 829: Political status of ethnic groups in Yemen during 1950-1990.

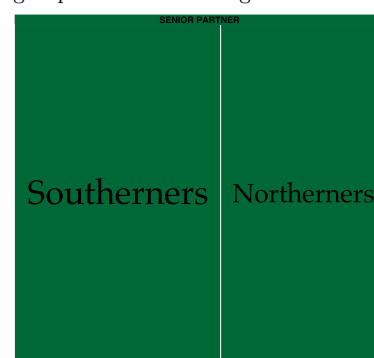
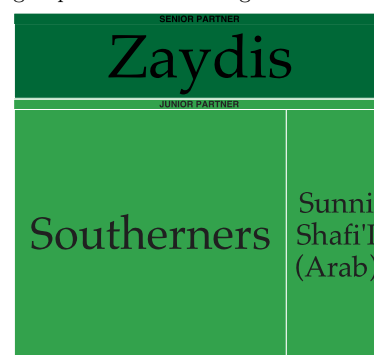


Figure 830: Political status of ethnic groups in Yemen during 1991-1994.



Conflicts in Yemen

Starting on 1948-03-15

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Yemen (North Yemen)	Opposition coalition		1948-03-15			
Government of Yemen (North Yemen)	Royalists	Northerners	1962-10-31	Explicit	No	No
Government of Yemen (North Yemen)	NDF	Sunni Shafi'I (Arab)	1979-03-31	Presumed	Yes	Yes
Government of Yemen (North Yemen)	NDF	Northerners	1979-03-31	No	No	No
Government of Yemen (North Yemen)	AQAP	Southerners	2009-11-03	No	Yes, from EGIP	No
Government of Yemen (North Yemen)	AQAP	Sunni Shafi'I (Arab)	2009-11-03	No	Yes, from EGIP	No

Starting on 1972-02-21

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of South Yemen	Government of Yemen (North Yemen)		1972-02-21			

Starting on 1994-02-21

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Yemen (North Yemen)	Democratic Republic of Yemen	Southerners	1994-02-21	Explicit	Yes	No