

Fall 2018

# An Investigation of the Violation of Human Rights in Yemen

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## Recommended Citation

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An Investigation of the Violation of Human Rights in Yemen

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Honor's Project in Political Science

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12/15/2018

### **Abstract**

This research paper aims to investigate the persistence of human rights violations in Yemen from 2008 to 2018. It examines whether this persistence of human rights violations is related to Yemen's regime type, external actors such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Iran, and the United States, Yemen's state of wealth and economic growth, and civil wars. This research paper uses data from various sources to examine different propositions related to the investigation of human rights in Yemen. The findings of this paper include that Yemen's regime type, external actors such as the GCC, Iran, and the United States, Yemen's state of wealth and economic development, and civil wars have contributed to human rights violations within Yemen's borders.

### **Introduction**

The country of Yemen has been experiencing an unfortunate state of human rights for several years (Human Rights Watch 2011). The perpetual political tension between various groups within and outside of the country has been a part of the history of Yemen since its unification and this political tension has been the root of the human rights violations in Yemen. In addition to the internal conflict within the country spurred by rebel groups such as the Houthi, Saudi Arabia's leadership of the Gulf Cooperation Council's involvement in an effort to support the government of Yemen have added to the complications of the violent political conflict. Iran has been argued to play a role in the conflict in Yemen through its support of the Houthi forces (Tzemprin, et al 2015) and Iran's rivalry for supremacy in the region against Saudi Arabia has been argued to be a proxy war that has been taking place in various locations in the Gulf including Yemen (International Crisis Group 2012).

The United States counterterrorism tactics against Islamist extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) have contributed to human rights violations in Yemen. All of these internal and external actors have helped to perpetuate human rights violations that have ravaged the Yemeni people. This research paper investigates the role of Yemen's regime type, external actors such as the GCC, Iran, and the United States, Yemen's state of wealth and economic development, and civil wars in Yemen's current state of human rights.

### **Historical Overview of Human Rights in Yemen**

Contemporary Yemen became unified in 1990 after the leaders of the Yemeni Arab Republic (North Yemen) and the People's Republic of Yemen (South Yemen) agreed to unite their separate states which were in constant conflict. The newly unified country was ruled by Ali Salem al-Beidh as the president who was the leader of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen and Ali Abdullah Saleh as president who was previously the ruler of North Yemen. Although the country was unified, there was still a lot of animosity between people of origins from the two separate states centered on the largely remaining differing identities and ideologies. In 1993 Yemen experienced a civil war spurred by the dissatisfaction of southerners who had the minority representation after the 1993 elections which then resulted in the north defeating the southerner's secessionist efforts. Saleh remained in power which he centralized and distributed to an elite group of elites in Sana' and enforced with the military.

The tension created by these events continued into the 2000s and would spur armed conflicts (Williams et. al, 2017). Human rights violations before and during the 2000s took the form of government oppression and violation of various human rights. These human rights

violations include but are not limited to arbitrary arrests that were made by the Yemeni government to counteract the armed conflict that emerged in response to Selah's regime. These arrests have also included journalists and any other people who were opposed to the government. The armed conflict caused the displacement of many people due to the threat to their security and access to resources that are needed for a substantial state of living such as home infrastructure (Human Rights Watch 2011).

In 2011, Yemen joined the widespread Arab Spring revolutions taking place across the Middle East and North Africa. The revolt was against the first President of Yemen, President Ali Abdullah Saleh and it spurred the outcome of a political settlement arranged by the GCC; a political and economic coalition of six Middle Eastern countries including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman) aided by the support of the European Union and the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. The implementation of The Gulf Initiative, signed in November of 2011, was a political transition consisting of a two-phased political transition that would conclude with the final decision about the structure of the government of Yemen including the new constitution and the election of the new president under this constitution. Persistent debate on the matter deemed that Yemen would take the form a federal state. Paul Williams et. al also adds that "rather than unify Yemen, federalism helped unravel an already fragile peace. The decision to restructure Yemen into a six-region federal State was highly politicized, and the attempt to draft a federal constitution without sufficient political consensus on key transition issues further destabilized the country" (Williams et. al 2017 p. 5). These political events significantly heightened human rights violations. There were numerous civilians killed who took part in the political demonstrations

against the regime. Children were used by both the government forces and the non-governmental forces to build their forces. Freedom of expression was also attacked by the government in regards to journalists and other people who were against the regime. These various sources of conflict have caused the displacement of several people (Human Rights Watch 2015).

In 2015, one of the major issues that arose from this political transition was the Houthi attack of the presidential palace and their arrest of President Hadi. This attack spurred the resignation of Hadi after his defeat, after which the Houthi appointed a quasi-government that was recognized internationally but added to the internal instability of Yemen (Świątek, 2017). Houthi forces have been supported by Iran; Iran has provided military support such as weapons and military advisors that have been placed in Yemen (Hokayem & Roberts 2016). In an effort to resolve this issue and aid Hadi in regaining his position of power in government, as well as, returning power to an internationally recognized government of Yemen, the GCC launched attacks in Yemen. (Świątek, 2017). These attacks caused numerous civilian deaths and contributed to the retaliation of Houthi forces who not only killed several people using landmines and artillery rockets, but they also interrupted the health services by detaining people who work in these services as well as other people who oppose their occupation of various cities in Yemen (Human Rights Watch 2017).

In addition, the United States historically has been involved in the conflict present in Yemen. The United States has provided intelligence and arms support to Saudi Arabia, historically, including their involvement in Yemen. The United States counterterrorism presence has been an addition to their position of a diplomatic mediator of conflict in the area. (Świątek, 2017). The conflict in Yemen has created an opportunity for extremist groups to push their own

agenda. The Islamic State (IS) has taken advantage of the armed conflict opportunities that have stemmed from the aftermath of Yemen's change in governmental structure. In late 2014, the first IS cells were assembled by former Al Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) fighter affiliates. AQAP which is argued to be one of the most active and dangerous regional groups of Al Qaeda has also taken advantage of the 2011 turmoil that ensued during the initiation of Yemen's government transition. Their conquest of various major cities in Yemen spurred the retaliation of government forces and The United States who have militarily given support to United Arab Emirate military units. Świątek adds that "Yemen is the only place in the Middle East where Al Qaeda has a stronger position than the Islamic State; this is important from the point of view of rivalry between the two terrorist organizations." Houthi forces also oppose the AQAP and other extremist groups as well as other actors considered to be their allies. (Świątek, 2017 p. 48 ). US drone strikes have significantly violated the rights of civilians by causing many civilian deaths as well as destroying a lot of civilian infrastructures. (Human Rights Watch 2017)

The United Nations has identified pro-government forces and Houthi/Saleh forces as major actors in the conflict in Yemen. They define "pro-Government forces" as a union of actors supporting President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi, including the coalition forces which is led by Saudi Arabia and include Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Senegal, the Sudan, the United Arab Emirates and, until June 2017, Qatar. The UN also describes "Houthi/Saleh forces" as "popular committees affiliated with the Houthis and the army units loyal to the former President, Ali Abdullah Saleh" (UN Human Rights Council, 2017 p. 4 ). All of these actors involved in the conflict in Yemen continue to contribute to the poor state of human rights that has existed in Yemen since 2008 to present day in 2018.

### **Understanding Human Rights Violations**

Various researchers have investigated human rights abuses and factors that contribute to these abuses. Some studies have focused on the extent to which regime types affect human rights violations that occur within a state. Davenport and Armstrong found that there is a certain level of democracy that needs to be obtained for democracy to impact the occurrence of human rights violations; below a certain extent of values, one cannot detect a significant impact of democracy on the occurrence of human rights violation but after this threshold is passed, authority figures are subject to the constraints that the components of democratic institutions cause on their ability to repress those under their jurisdiction. They are also aware of the idea that they can appease their citizens through methods such as fair treatment and receptivity to civil desires. Davenport and Armstrong ( 2004) found that democracy decreases repression of people within a country after the necessary threshold is passed. This is said to be at the far extremity of the democratic continuum in which citizens control whether officials remain in power and authority figures are effectively held accountable for their actions. Instability in the system of accountability for authority figures can cause them to repress their citizens in an effort to maintain their power due to their awareness of the instability of the system. (Davenport & Armstrong 2004).

Davenport further investigated whether human rights violations can be reduced in non-democratic governments and he found that single party regimes are typically the least repressive form of autocratic governments; the likelihood that they would restrict civil liberties and violate personal integrity rights was significantly lower than other non-democratic regimes. This variance is affected by the amount of official participants involved in the political system being that the higher the number of officials and organizations involved in the system as

contributory and peaceful actors, the less likely that human rights violations will occur. The perception of authorities of whether they would be able to peacefully govern their populations affects the use of governing methods that violate human rights (Davenport 2007). Hafner-Burton has supported this variance of human rights violations in non-democratic regimes (Hafner-Burton 2014) while also supporting Davenport's findings that democratic nations are least likely to violate human rights (Davenport 2007).

In addition to regime type, researchers have identified economic factors as contributors to human rights violations. The economic development of nations can contribute to the decrease in human rights violations and the overall improvement of the state of human rights. Authority figures have the means to appease its citizens rather than coerce them to comply with the regime. (Davenport & Armstrong 2004). Economic improvement in addition to significant influence for Western states can cause an improvement of the state in human rights. The interconnectedness of global economies and cultures have helped to increase the desire of citizens in underdeveloped/developing nations to Western practices of human rights standards in an effort to increase their economic prosperity. States are more likely to violate human rights during economic hardships because they cannot afford to invest in human rights reform. They are also less likely to violate human rights after booms in the economy start to decrease; this lessened human rights violation is due to the desire of authority figures to appease its citizens and avoid civil conflict. (Spechler 2009). Economic development and wealth have also been said to significantly increase the respect for human rights. Countries in a good economic state experience less conflict and therefore see less need to violate human rights to control conflict (Dreher et al. 2012).

Furthermore, regime type and economic factors are not the only factors that have been found to contribute to human rights violations; civil war and internal conflict have been found to be a significant contributors. Armed conflicts have caused harm to civilians as well as their homes, schools, and health facilities due to the violent nature of armed conflict which has very little regard for human rights (Schrepfer 2018). Civil conflict both within a country (Hafner-Burton 2014) and outside of a country (Danneman, N., & Ritter, E. 2014) can incentivize governments to to abuse human rights; As long as the external civil war is close enough to a country for its government to be concerned about the spread of civil war to its own country, countries are likely to violate human rights in an effort to prevent a potential outbreak of civil war (Danneman & Ritter 2014). Internal conflict creates a cycle of violence between the state and those who oppose the government (Hafner-Burton 2014) which leads to human rights violations due to the damage caused to civilians and their infrastructure.

Additionally, research has shown that external actors have been deemed to be contributors to human rights violations. These external actors can be states that intervene in the affairs of other states in the name of national security and dominance in their region as their state interests. The United States has used counterterrorism measures in the name of national security. Literature on the case study of the United States' War on Terror after the September 11 attacks shows that there is the negative effect of US counterterrorism measures on human rights. There have been numerous casualties due to US drone strikes (Nacos & Bloch-Elkon 2018), people have been arbitrarily detained (Joyner 2004) and there has been restricted access to information about US counterterrorism tactics which help to lessen knowledge about the extent of their human rights violations (Hafner-Burton & Shapiro 2010). US Counterterrorism measures have

not only destroyed the homes of civilians as well as injured and killed civilians (Brehm 2015). The extrajudicial killings, torture, and detainment of people that are accused to being related to terrorist activity are examples of the direct violations of human rights by the United States (Peksen 2012); these human rights violations are typical of counterterrorism tactics by various states (Piazza & Walsh 2009).

Saudi Arabia and Iran have been deemed external actors in Yemen. The idea of a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Yemen fueled by their rivalry can be argued to be a contributor to human rights violations in Yemen. Saudi Arabia deems Iran to be a threat to its national security (Perkins 2017) as a nuclear power (Tzemprin et. al 2015) as well as its place of dominance in the Gulf region (International Crisis Group 2012 & Perkins 2017). However, there has been great debate about whether there is truly a proxy war between Saudi and Iran occurring in Yemen. Research has debated that the war does indeed exist and has been rooted in each country's desire to be supreme in the Gulf region (International Crisis Group 2012), their ideological differences (Tzemprin et. al 2015), Iran's opposition to Yemen's government (Hokayem et. al 2016) and the GCC (International Crisis Group 2012). Other research has argued against the idea of a proxy war between the two states and claim that Iran's involvement is limited in Yemen and is solely to empowerment of the Houthi movement as they fight to against the political cleavages that have existed between people within the country (Zweiri 2016 & Perkins 2017). Regardless of whether there is a proxy war taking place in Yemen, the involvement of both countries in the region has contributed to the human rights violations of many people in the region that is represented by civilian casualties (Hokayem & Roberts 2016) and the large range of displacement that has occurred due to armed conflict. Saudi Arabia has been overtly active in

Yemen through leading the GCC to support the Yemeni government against the Houthi (Hokayem & Roberts 2016) while Iran's role in the conflict has been very covert and repeatedly denied by Iran. (Hokayem & Roberts 2016 & Tzemprin et. al 2015).

### **Propositions about the Human Rights Violations in Yemen**

Based on the literature that I have previously discussed, I draw the following propositions:

*Proposition One: Regime type contributes to the occurrence of human rights violations in Yemen.*  
*Proposition Two: Economic factors including wealth and economic development are contributing to human rights violations in Yemen.*

*Proposition Three: Civil war is contributing to human rights violations in Yemen.*

*Proposition Four: External actors are contributing to human rights violations in Yemen.*

### **Human Rights in Yemen**

The standards of human rights have been defined by various covenants and treaties that have been formed to protect the human rights of people around the world. These standards will be addressed in this section to provide a clearer understanding of their operationalization later on in this research paper. Civilians have the right to be treated humanely during times of war and political conflict. This humane treatment includes civilian exclusion from death, injury and torture, being taken hostage, degrading treatment, and unlawful executions. (UN General Assembly 1948). All people also have the right against arbitrary arrest and detention (UN General Assembly 1948) as well as an adequate standard of living which includes access to proper housing, food, clothes, and living conditions that are continually improving (UN General

Assembly 1966). These human rights have been violated throughout the conflict in Yemen and the contributing factors will be assessed later on in this research paper.

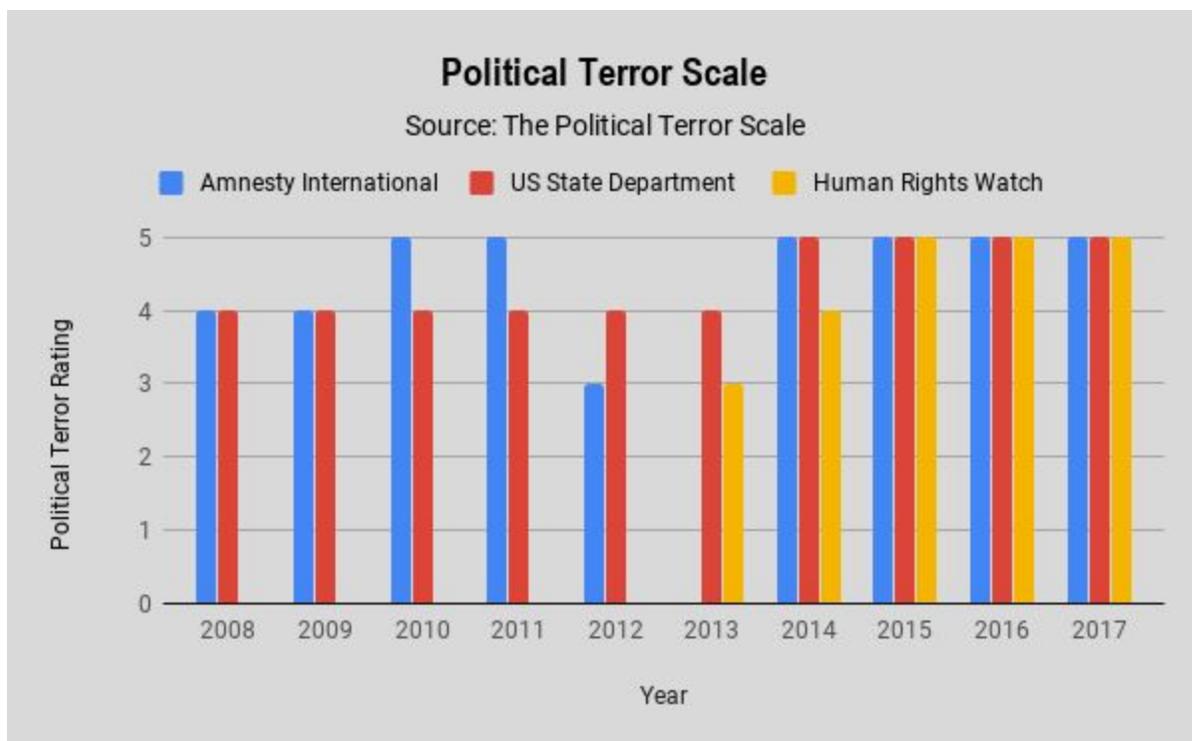
The Political Terror Scale (Gibney et. 2017) will be used to operationalize human rights in Yemen. The Political Terror Scale is a synthesis of data compiled from the Human Rights Watch, the US State Department and, Amnesty International. The scores range from one to five with one being that there were minimal occurrences of human rights violations described as,

*“Countries under a secure rule of law, people are not imprisoned for their view, and torture is rare or exceptional. Political murders are extremely rare” [and five being described as] the terrors of Level 4 [civil and political rights violations have expanded to large numbers of the population. Murders, disappearances, and torture are a common part of life. In spite of its generality, on this level terror affects primarily those who interest themselves in politics or ideas]. The leaders of these societies place no limits on the means or thoroughness with which they pursue personal or ideological goals” (Gibney et. al 2017, p. 4).*

These scores from 2008 to 2017 were graphed to show any existing trends throughout the period. Figure 1.0 is a visual representation of Yemen’s Political Terror Scale score from 2008 to 2017. The figure shows that overall, Yemen’s Political Terror Scale scores have increased during the period from 2008 to 2017 with the exception of 2012 and 2013; the Amnesty International based score decreased in 2012, however, a score of three still defines a severe level of human rights violations which include “extensive political imprisonment or a recent history of such

imprisonment, Execution or other political murders and brutality may be common. Unlimited detention, with or without a trial, for political views is accepted” (Gibney et. al 2017, p. 4). Yemen also received a score of three based on Human Rights Watch data. 2011 and 2012 marked the first years for which Yemen received a score of five from Amnesty International before this score decreased significantly in 2012. By 2015, all three sources of data produced a score of five which continued into 2017. During 2014, the data from the Human Rights Watch produces a score of four which increased from 2013 and would further increase to a score of five in 2014 before staying at that level until 2017.

*Figure 1.0*



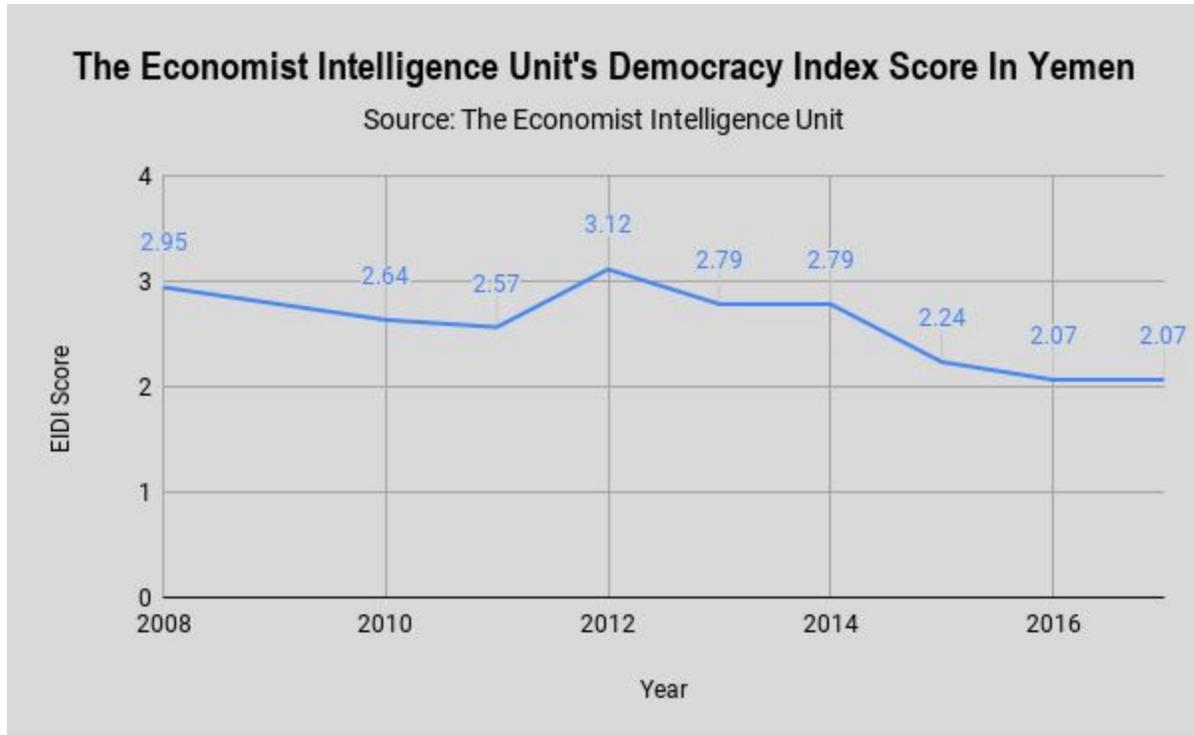
Human rights will be operationalized by qualitative data from various sources such the Human Rights Watch (2009-2018), the United Nations Human Rights Council (2017), the US State

Department (2009, 2011, 2013 2015 & 2018), and the International Crisis Group (2018), as well as various media outlets such as Peace Direct (2015).

### **Regime Type**

My first proposition addresses whether regime type contributes to the occurrence of human rights in Yemen. Regime type will be operationalized by using the Economist's Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index (2017). This index uses data gathered about countries around the world and assigns each country a score from zero to ten with zero being the most extensive form of authoritarian regimes and ten being the most extensive form of a full democracy. Scores zero to four are deemed authoritarian regimes, scores four to six are deemed hybrid regimes, six to eight are deemed flawed democracies, and scores eight to ten are deemed full democracies. Figure 2.0 is a visual representation of Yemen's scores from 2008 to 2017. Overall, it shows that Yemen's score has gradually decreased with the exception of 2012 during which Yemen's score increased from 2.57 in the previous year to 3.12; In 2014 Yemen's score remained the same as the previous year's score of 2.79 and in 2016 its score remained 2.07 into 2017. A gradual decline is depicted when Yemen's score of 2.95 in 2008 is compared to its score of 2.07 in 2017. Yemen is deemed an authoritarian regime throughout this entirety of the period from 2008 to 2017 according to its scores.

*Figure 2.0: The Economists Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index Score in Yemen*



The United States Department of State addressed that there were significant human rights violations in 2008 (2009). They describe the various ways in which the Yemeni government violated human rights. These violations include but are not limited to the following account:

*“There were reports of arbitrary and unlawful killings by government forces, politically motivated disappearances, and torture in many prisons. Prolonged pretrial detention, judicial weakness and fiat, serious corruption, and poor prison conditions were also problems. During the year excessive government force was reportedly used against participants in public demonstrations. Arbitrary arrest and detention and other abuses increased, particularly of individuals with suspected links to the Zaydi Shia al-Houthi movement in and around the northern governorate of Saada and to the series of political*

*demonstrations in Lahj governorate in the southern part of the country.” (United States Department of State 2009, p. 1)*

The violation of integrity rights in the form of unlawful killings, disappearances, and torture reflect the low level of democracy that is depicted in Yemen's score of 2.94 and predicted by findings of previous studies; particularly studies done by Davenport & Armstrong (2004) that found that non-democratic regimes are more likely to decrease human rights violations. There has been very little accountability for these human rights abuses as there is a lack of human rights institutions in Yemen as well as the failure to pass a transitional justice law that was previously recommended (Human Rights Watch 2016). This lack of accountability also supports previous research that found that a lack of accountability increases the likelihood that regimes will violate human rights of their citizens (Davenport & Armstrong 2004). Yemen's government numerous attacks on Houthi forces have caused the death of numerous civilians in Yemen. One means through which they have killed numerous citizens is through indiscriminate aerial bombings in areas populated with civilians. One of these bombings took place in 2010 on September 14th in a populous market in al-Talh and another account took place on September 16th in an area in which there was a group of displaced persons in Al-'Adi; there was a lack of investigation and a failure to address the events (Human Rights Watch 2016). These bombings took place in an effort to target Houthi forces which have been an obstacle to government stability. These events also support literature by Davenport that found that a government is likely to violate human rights if they do not perceive peaceful ways to maintain the stability of the system and effectively govern their populations (Davenport & Armstrong 2004).

In 2012, Yemen's score on the PTS (Gibney et. al 2017) based on data from Amnesty International decreased during which there was also the most significant increase in Yemen's EIDI score depicted by the score of 3.12 from 2.57 in the previous year (The Economist Intelligence Unit 2017). According to The United States Department of State, identified arbitrary killings and violent government acts on different entities and group as the most significant violations of human rights. They attributed these human rights violations to Yemen's poor judicial system that is ravaged by corruption which fails to enforce laws that protect human rights and hold violators accountable. (United States State Department 2013). This decrease in the PTS score and the increase in the EIDI score supports my proposition that Yemen's regime type (which is authoritarian regime) contributes to the occurrence of human rights abuses in the form of political terror. The constant PTS score of five from 2015 also coincides with the decrease in the EIDI score in 2014 from 2.79 to 2.07 in 2016 and 2017. This further supports my proposition through the depiction of the increased level of Yemen's authoritarian regime as it coincides with the increased PTS score; Yemen became more authoritarian and the level of human rights violations increased. The decrease of Yemen's EIDI score in 2015 can be attributed to the Houhi siege of the presidential palace during that year which caused major political instability in the system (Świątek, 2017). Overall, my proposition that regime type contributes to human rights violations is supported by Yemen's PTS (Gibney et. al 2017) scores when compared to its EIDI (EIU 2017) scores from 2008 to 2017 as well as descriptions of human rights abuses provided by the US Department of State and the UN Human Rights Council.

### **Economic Factors**

My second proposition addresses whether economic factors including wealth and economic development are contributing to human rights violations in Yemen. Wealth and economic development will be operationalized by GDP per capita by the Trading Economics website (2018) and the Human Development Index (HDI) by Countryeconomy.com. This data includes the GDP per capita and HDI of Yemen from 2008 to 2016. Figure 3.0 is a visual representation of Yemen's GDP per capita from 2008 to 2016. It depicts that, overall, Yemen's GDP has decreased since 2008 with the exception of growth in 2010 as well as 2013. There is a significant decrease in Yemen's GDP in 2011 as well as in 2015 and 2016. This significant decrease coincides with Yemen's high PTS score of five in 2015 which suggests that major economic decline occurred while the state of human rights worsened in Yemen across all three sources of data (Amnesty International, the US State Department, and Human Rights Watch). However, the economic growth experienced in 2010 is contrasted by the increase in the PTS score in 2010 based on data from Amnesty International but the economic growth in 2013 is complemented by the decrease in the PTS score in 2013 based on the data from Human Rights Watch. The overall comparison of the decreasing trend of Yemen's GDP as well as the increasing trend of the PTS of Yemen especially from 2015 to 2016 support the idea of my proposition that economic development represented by the GDP per capita in figure 3.0 as contributions to human rights violation represented in Figure 1.0.

*Figure 3.0: Yemen GDP Per Capita 2008-2016*

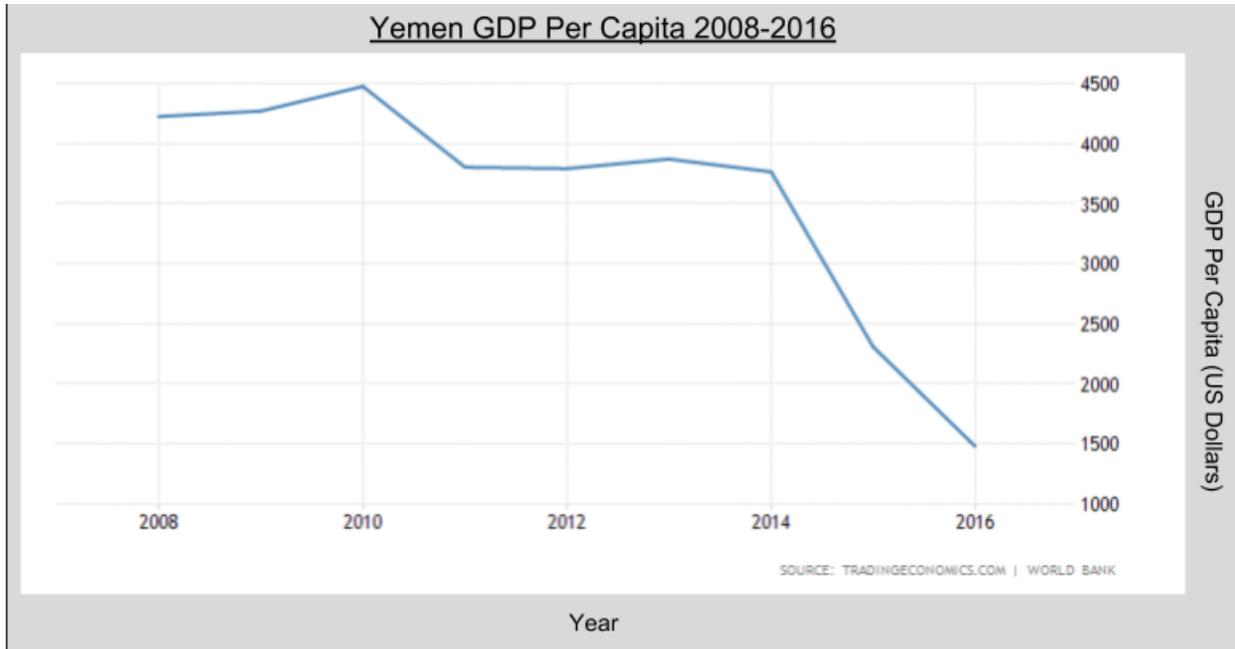
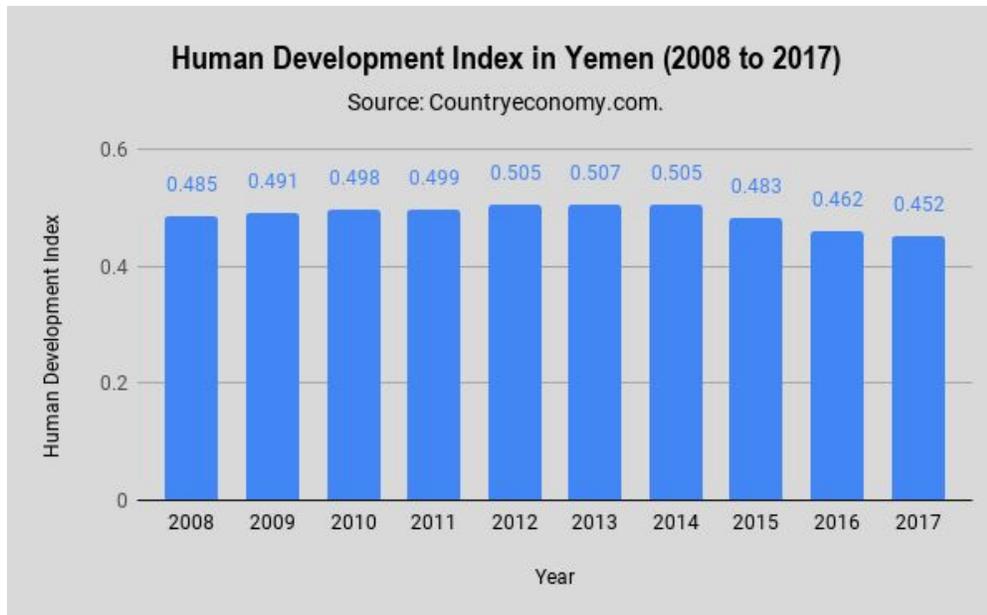


Figure 3.1 is a visual representation of Yemen's HDI from 2008 to 2016. It depicts that overall, Yemen's HDI has remained essentially constant with very slight increases in various years; the most significant of them being in 2010 when the score increased by 0.007 HDI units from the previous year which then remained relatively the same until significantly decreasing by 0.022 HDI units in 2015. This fairly significant decline continued each year into 2017. When the HDI from 2018 is compared to the HDI of 2016, there is the depiction of a fairly significant decrease by 0.033 HDI units.

*Figure 3.1: Human Development Index in Yemen (2008 to 2017)*



The UN Human Rights Council addressed the the economic state of yemen in the following account:

*“The imposition by the parties to the conflict of sieges, blockades and restrictions on movement had a severe impact on the availability of goods and services and their accessibility by the civilian population. Public and private infrastructure collapsed and access to basic services remained low or non-existent. Factories and farms were damaged and food imports restricted. The non-payment of public sector salaries for most of the past year and the economic uncertainty caused by the relocation by the Government of the central bank to Aden further exacerbated the situation. Teachers,*

*doctors and sanitation workers — and therefore schools, hospitals and city streets — were all affected. Less than half of the health facilities were functional. Many people could not purchase medicine or food, even where they were available. Those circumstances accelerated the spread of cholera and other diseases and increased the risk of famine. The population in Yemen was increasingly impoverished, hungry, displaced, sick, injured and/or dying, and people faced a desperate situation.” (Human Rights Council 2017, p. 15)*

The violation of the right to an adequate standard of living is depicted by the low access to goods and services in many parts of Yemen. This low access to goods and services have been attributed to the civil war which has caused blockades by Saudi Arabia and denial and restriction of humanitarian access by government forces as well as rebel forces (US Department of State 2011). The collapse of public and private sectors, as well as the government’s inability to pay government workers and support the public facilities such as schools, hospitals, and streets, depict the lack of economic development that has been present; they reflect the overall decline of Yemen’s economy from 2015 to 2016 (Trading Economics 2017) that is depicted by Yemen’s significant GDP per capita decrease in 2015 and 2016 as well as the significant decrease of its HDI from 2016 to 2017 (Countryeconomy.com 2017).

The description by the UN Human Rights Council (2017) provides an overview of the economic state from the last few months of 2014 to 2017 which is the period in which the report was written. The grave violations of the right to an adequate standard of living which has been affected by conflict caused by the civil war support previous research that found that governments are more likely to violate human rights during times of economic hardship.

(Spechler 2009) Research that found that countries with a good economic state is less likely to violate human rights due to a lack of conflict (Dreher et al. 2012) is arguably supported due to Yemen's very poor economic state and the high amount of conflict that exists. Although it would not be fair to argue that the economic state is causing the conflict, it can be argued that Yemen's lack of economic development is contributing to human rights violations as seen in Figure 1.0 (2018), Figure 3.0 (2018), and the description by the Human Rights Council (2017). This lack of economic development also shows is the opposite circumstance of Davenport and Armstrong's (2004) findings which claim that the economic development of nations can contribute to the decrease of human rights violations. Authority figures in Yemen perceived the need to coerce compliant behavior which has not been successful for them in regards to the continuation of major conflict in the country of Yemen. Overall, my proposition that economic development contribute to human rights violations is supported by Yemen's PTS (Gibney et. al 2017) scores when compared to its HDI, especially from 2015 to 2017, as well as the description of Yemen's economic state from late 2014 to 2017 by the UN Human Rights Council (2017)

### **Civil War**

My third proposition address whether civil war contributes to human rights violations. Civil war will be operationalized by the actions of Houthi forces as well as pro-government forces in Yemen depicted in data from the US Department of State, Human Rights Watch, and the Human Rights Council (2017). Yemen's government is supported by coalition forces. According to UN Human Rights Council, coalition forces have caused approximately 3,133 civilian casualties while Houthi forces and their affiliates have caused approximately 1,191

civilian casualties based on the data they collected from March 2015 to June 2017; coalition forces have caused almost three times as many civilian casualties the Houthi and their affiliated forces. However, Houthi forces have arbitrarily detained/arrested 831 people while pro-government affiliates have arbitrarily arrested/detained 154 people (UN Human Rights Council 2017); Houthi forces have arbitrarily detained/arrested over five times as many people as government forces.

Civilian casualties reflect the violation of their right to protection and the arbitrary arrests/detentions reflect the violation of the right against arbitrary arrest and detention. When one compares the numeric values of arbitrary arrests/detentions and civilian casualties from March 2015 to June 2017 to Yemen's constant PTS of score 5 during this time period, the numeric values perpetrated by actors involved in the civil war reflect the high PTS score that Yemen received during this time; thus, there is support for my proposition that civil war contributes to the violation of human rights, especially through the actions perpetrated by the Houthi forces as well as well as pro-government forces.

The UN Human Rights Council addresses the conflict between Houthi forces and pro-government forces in the following account:

*“From 21 May to 6 June 2017, continuous shelling between forces in Taizz city impacted civilian residential areas, resulting in the killing of at least 26 civilians, including 4 children and 3 women, and injuring at least 61 civilians, including 29 children and 9 women. Based on witness testimonies and the locations of the impact, OHCHR attributed 19 killed and 59 injured to Houthi/Saleh forces and the remaining casualties to*

*pro-Government forces. The shelling also damaged at least nine homes” (Human Rights Council 2017 p. 6-7).*

The violations of the right of civilians to protection during times of warfare is reflected through the civilian casualties described by the Human Rights Council (2017) as well as the violation to the right to an adequate standard of living reflected by the damage that was received by at least nine homes in the area of the conflict. These human rights violations is an example of the effect that the conflict between pro-government affiliates and Houthi forces have had on the people living in Yemen. This reality supports previous research that has found that armed conflicts contribute to the destruction of civilian infrastructure (Schrepfer 2018). This is seen in the destruction of the nine homes that were previously mentioned (UN Human Rights Council 2017). The data also support the notion that civil wars within countries can cause regimes to abuse human rights (Hafner-Burton 2014). The cycle of violence is also reflected in the perpetual fighting between the actors involved in the civil war in Yemen (US Department of State 2009-2018, Human Rights Watch 2009-2018 & UN Human Rights Council 2017); the account mentioned above from the UN Human Rights Council (2017) is one of many cases of the violent cycle of violence that is embodied by the civil war in Yemen. The notion that the Arab spring has also fueled civil conflict between the Houthi and the government of the time in 2011 (Williams 2017) supports research that has found that civil wars that are close enough to a country can contribute to human rights violations (Danneman & Ritter 2014). Overall, my proposition that civil wars contribute to human rights violations is supported by Yemen’s PTS (Gibney et. al 2017) scores when they are compared to the civilian casualties and arbitrary

arrests/detention carried out by actors in the civil war as well as the description of human rights violations by the UN Human Rights Council (2017).

### **External Actors**

My final hypothesis addresses whether external actors contribute to human rights violations in Yemen. External actors will be operationalized by the actions of states, groups, or individuals that reside outside of Yemen from data from the UN Human Rights Council (2017) and various other media outlets. According to Direct Peace, “The GCC/Saudi intervention was prompted by the immediate threat of a complete Houthi/Saleh take-over of the country and the prospect of having a regime closely allied to Hizbollah and Iran on Saudi Arabia’s southern border.” (2015, p. 1). This quote shows the various actors that have been contributing to the conflict in Yemen. Saudi Arabia’s leadership of the GCC has significantly impacted the conflict in Yemen. It also provides support for the idea of a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia through each of their oppositional stances in the Yemeni conflict (Peace Direct 2015). The UN Human Rights Council addresses the effect of the actions of the coalition in the following account:

*“Coalition airstrikes continued to be the leading cause of civilian casualties in the conflict, killing at least 933 civilians and injuring 1,423, since July 2016. As in past years, OHCHR continued to document airstrikes against targets that appeared to be of a civilian nature. In addition to markets, residential areas and public and private infrastructure, the past year witnessed notable airstrikes against funeral gatherings and small civilian boats. Such incidents were widespread and continued to take place, once*

*again, even after the impact of the attacks on civilians had become apparent. Directly targeting civilians and civilian objects or conducting disproportionate or indiscriminate attacks and the failure to take all necessary precautions to avoid and, in any event, minimize, the impact on civilians during air operations targeting military objectives, constitute serious violations of international humanitarian law” (UN Human Right Council 2017, p. 6)*

This description depicts the significant contributions that Saudi-led coalition has made on the state of human rights in Yemen. It depicts the violation of civilians right to protection during times of war, especially the coalition strikes in civilian settings such as markets and funerals; the direct targeting of civilians is explicitly stated as “a violation of humanitarian law” (UN Human Right Council 2017, p. 6) which clearly reflects its connection to the violation of human rights by coalition forces. The idea that Iran is supplying military support to the Houthi (Butcher 2018) provide evidence for a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Coalition forces blockades have also caused the violation of the right to an adequate standard of living by significantly decreasing the import of goods that are essential to human health such as food and medical supplies (Human Rights Council 2017). Houthi forces and Saudi Arabia have both fired ballistic missiles from each of their perspective countries. This has been one factor contributing to Saudi Arabia’s blockades (Human Rights Watch 2018)

The Counterterrorism efforts of the United States have also contributed to human rights violations. Human Rights Watch addresses an account “on 29 January 2017, in Yakla’a village, Rada’ district, Al-Bayda Governorate, [during which] a night raid by United States forces on

suspected Al-Qaida operatives resulted in the killing of at least 10 children and 5 women. The operation destroyed more than 12 homes and public buildings, including a school, a mosque and a health facility. The United States acknowledged that civilians had “likely” been killed in the raid”(UN Human Rights Council p. 12-13). This account depicts that US actions have contributed to the violation of the right of civilians to protection during times of war which is reflected by the civilian casualties as well as the violation of the right to an adequate standard of living reflected in the damage to civilian infrastructure that was mentioned in the account. The US admitting that that there is a likelihood that civilians were harmed during the raid also supports the idea of the US violation of the right of civilians to protection. However, it is evident that the United States provided limited information about the effect of their actions on human rights. This supports research that found that the US restricts the extent to which their human rights violations are made public (Hafner-Burton & Shapiro 2010). On June 8th, 2015, a man filed a lawsuit in the United States Federal Court because he lost two of his relatives due to US drone attacks. He sought the formal acknowledgment that US drone attacks killed his relatives in August 2012 (Human Rights Watch 2016) This lawsuit is another account which addresses US violation of civilian rights to protection. These accounts that reflect US human rights violations that are conducted in the name of counterterrorism support research finding that counterterrorism increases human rights violations (Nacos & Bloch-Elkon 2018, Piazza & Walsh 2009, & Brehm 2015).

The human rights violations discussed in this section supports the poor state of human rights in Yemen which is depicted in the PTS score from 2008 to 2017. Yemen’s score of three reflects the idea that there is extensive human rights that occur to a large amount of the

population in Yemen. There are various external actors that have contributed to these violations such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, the GCC, and the United States. Overall, the previously mentioned high PTS score of Yemen as well as the actions of external actors support my proposition that external actors contribute to human rights violations in Yemen.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this research paper investigates the role of Yemen's regime type, external actors such as the Gulf Cooperation Council, Iran, and the United States, Yemen's state of wealth and economic development, and civil wars in Yemen's current state of human rights. Findings include that these factors contribute to human rights violations in Yemen. These findings are also in line with a lot of previous research that has been conducted on the factors that contribute to human rights violations. Although to an extent all of my propositions were supported by evidence gathered from various sources, it is important to note that I failed to address all of the important factors that contribute to human rights violations; this failure provides an opportunity for human rights to address these other factors. These factors could include further research on the role of external actors besides the United States, Iran, the GCC, and Saudi Arabia. Future research could also broaden the time period during which the data in the study was assessed. The implications of my findings are that the human rights violations that persist in Yemen are based on a complex combination of actors who are working in conjunction with each other as well as for each of their own interest. As turmoil within in Yemen's borders continues, it is clear that

Yemen's state of human rights has a long road of improvement that lies ahead if it can overcome its perpetual state of conflict.

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