



# **Policy Planning White Paper: The Southern Question**

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**April 2022**

**POLICY PLANNING WHITE PAPER:  
THE SOUTHERN QUESTION**

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## POLICY PLANNING WHITE PAPER: THE SOUTHERN QUESTION

### Executive Summary

International observers understand that the “southern question” — how to address the political, economic, and social demands of Yemenis living in the South — is central to the future of a unified Republic of Yemen. Less well understood is whether the answer to the southern question will entail an independent South Yemen, and if so, how political support for it might coalesce. South Yemen was an independent state known as the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) prior to 1990, and longstanding internal identity conflicts were central to its civil war in 1986. The resolution of the southern question, therefore, is unlikely to be simple since there is little unity, competition and some enmity among southern political actors. The fight for equitable representation in the South could amplify historic struggles between these social, political, and identity groups.

The Amplifying Pathways to Peace in Yemen (APPY) program collected quantitative and qualitative data from 2019-2021 in Yemen, including in the eight southern governorates discussed below. (See *Annex I, Methodology*).<sup>1</sup> While the surveys did not include questions related to individual desires for a future state, they asked in-depth questions related to security, the economy, and who Yemenis preferred to be involved in peace negotiations, all of which can help identify public sentiment about leadership. Significantly, in August 2021, respondents were asked about public acceptance of leading southern secessionist political groups, providing a glimpse of the potential for fragmentation within the South, as well as possible policy initiatives to stop this process.

Recommendations for policymakers to propose to actors in Yemen include:

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<sup>1</sup> This paper uses different terms to distinguish between quotations from the qualitative data, anonymously attributed to an interviewee or focus group participant, and the results of the two large-scale quantitative surveys conducted in 2019 and 2021 respectively. In the analysis below, “respondents” refer to quantitative survey participants, “interviewees” refer to those who took part in qualitative in-depth interviews, and “participants” indicate the data is from a focus group. Focus Groups are identified by an alphanumeric beginning with “FG.” Each interviewee statement is followed by an alphanumeric code that indicates the governorate and gender of the respondent. There are no repeat interviewees across the data collection phases. Where necessary to avoid confusion, duplicative codes indicate the phase in which the interview was carried out, e.g., “WF04, Phase II” refers to the fourth Shabwa female interviewee from 2020 data collection, while “WF04, Phase III” is the fourth Shabwa female interviewee from data collection in 2021.

- Following the example of the newly constituted Presidential Leadership Council (PLC),<sup>2</sup> encourage the Southern Transitional Council (STC) and other southern factions to form political parties designed to work within the framework of a single Yemeni state.
- Update local council registries as a way of preparing for local council elections, improving local authority, and increasing legitimacy in local governance.
- Promote political unity in Hadramaut by encouraging the Republic of Yemen Government (through the Presidential Leadership Council), Saudi Arabia, and the UAE to coordinate efforts there.
- To address economic hardship in a way that promotes unity, encourage the UAE to channel aid into governorates through either local or district level authorities, or through the PLC.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> On April 6, 2022, ten years after taking office in a referendum, President Hadi transferred presidential powers to an eight man Presidential Leadership Council. Significantly, the PLC includes Aidarous al-Zubaidi, the head of the STC. While the future success and the constitutionality of this transition are unclear, both Saudi Arabia and the UAE have pledged to support it financially. For a contemporaneous announcement on Twitter, see <https://tinyurl.com/49yz7ff7>. For analysis of the PLC, see Gregory D. Johnsen, *Old Wine in New Skins: The Yemen Presidential Council*, THE ARAB GULF STATES INSTITUTE IN WASHINGTON, (Apr. 7, 2022), available at <https://tinyurl.com/2z9fwjns>.

<sup>3</sup> While this paper describes the economic impact of the war in southern governorates for the purpose of understanding how it might affect support for political actors, the data does not provide a basis for prescriptive economic recommendations. For a fuller discussion of economic policy and related recommendations, see PILPG Policy Paper 7, *The Currency Crisis*.

## **Statement of Purpose**

This White Paper provides an analysis of public perception on how to address the political, economic, and social demands of Yemenis living in the South, and surveys what they most prefer for the future of Southern Yemen, a place of diverse groups and political actors with different goals and interests. Through both qualitative and quantitative surveys, this paper addresses questions of political leadership, economic status, and overall security for those in the South, and seeks to provide clarity on what a future Yemeni state may look like, based upon public opinion.

## **Background**

Politically and geographically the South comprises several distinct regions, each with their own cultural history, political goals, experience of the conflict, and local concerns. The regional groupings include:

- Lahj and al-Dhale'a
- Abyan and Shabwa
- Aden
- Hadramaut: Coastal and Valley Regions
- al-Mahra and Socotra

By focusing on regional subgroups in the South, this policy paper will illustrate the prevailing conditions related to southern demands, and where possible, suggest how these might shape political choices in the future. The analysis first addresses variable regional security situations, followed by the largely shared southern experience of the economic crisis, using data from relevant in-depth interviews (Phases II and III). The paper then analyzes participant preferences for party inclusion in negotiations using 2020 Focus Group Discussions (Phase II) and in depth interviews from 2021 (Phase III). It then assesses 2021 survey data on public acceptance across southern governorates of the Southern Transitional Council (STC), currently the most powerful southern political party. Lastly, it provides conclusions and makes policy recommendations.

The origins of southern political activity are well-documented.<sup>4</sup> The Southern Movement, or Hiraak, emerged in 2007 to advocate for the rights of southerners among political elites based in the North. A loose alliance of organizations and activists, Hiraak has since split into factions, each with distinct leadership and funding support. Some factions called for the immediate reestablishment of South Yemen as a sovereign state while others supported temporary federalism followed by a referendum to decide the future of South Yemen.<sup>5</sup>

After the Saudi-led coalition drove Ansar Allah, the political party supported by the Houthi social and religious movement,<sup>6</sup> out of the South in late 2015, southern independence gained visible popular support.<sup>7</sup> The United Arab Emirates (UAE), part of the Saudi-led Arab Coalition, trained and funded armed proxy forces affiliated with southern political actors calling for independence. Over time, UAE support was consolidated in the STC, which had attracted some of those proxies. The STC-affiliated armed group known as the Security Belt Forces (SBF)<sup>8</sup> seized physical control of Aden, in addition to parts of Lahj, as well as Abyan<sup>9</sup> and clashed with pro-ROYG/Legitimacy forces<sup>10</sup> supported by Saudi Arabia. Despite the existence of multiple southern political parties, in November 2019, only the ROYG and the UAE-backed STC entered the Riyadh Agreement to end the fighting and implement power sharing.<sup>11</sup> The Riyadh Agreement has not been fully

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<sup>4</sup> Steven W. Day, *The Role of Hiraak and the Southern Transitional Council*, in GLOBAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL DYNAMICS IN THE YEMEN CRISIS, 253-270 (S. Day and N. Brehony, Springer, eds., 2020). (Providing a historical overview of southern political movements and the relationship between them).

<sup>5</sup> International Crisis Group, *Yemen's Southern Question: Avoiding a Breakdown*, (Sept. 25, 2013), available at <https://tinyurl.com/yc4kthjw>.

<sup>6</sup> Ansar Allah is the political entity backed by the Houthi movement that currently controls much of northern Yemen. The Houthis are the religious revivalist group who are the driving force behind Ansar Allah, however it also includes allied tribes, former members of the GPC and political actors who elected to ally with Ansar Allah for practical reasons.. Because survey participants referred often to "Houthis," that term is employed to refer to this group when it is contained in the survey data.

<sup>7</sup> Chatham House, *Yemen's Southern Powder Keg*, (Mar. 27, 2018), available at <https://tinyurl.com/2p8pa347>.

<sup>8</sup> For an overview of the UAE's involvement with armed groups in the South, see Emile Roy, *UAE's Sphere of Influence in Southern Yemen*, ARMED CONFLICT LOCATION & EVENT DATA (ACLED), (Mar. 9, 2018), available at <https://tinyurl.com/6xjm2mvy>.

<sup>9</sup> Emile Roy, *Yemen's Fractured South: Aden, Abyan, and Lahij*, ACLED, (Dec. 18, 2019), available at <https://acleddata.com/2019/12/18/yemens-fractured-south-aden-abyan-and-lahij/>.

<sup>10</sup> The data includes many references to the "Legitimacy" (*Shara'iya*, Arabic شرعية) government. Because interviewees used this term instead of ROYG, this paper employs both terms to refer to the political group led by ex-President Hadi and the internationally recognized Republic of Yemen Government (ROYG). For a full analysis of the term, see Nadwa al-Dawsari, *The Role of Legitimacy, Hadi, and the Islah Party*, in GLOBAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL DYNAMICS IN THE YEMEN CRISIS, (S. Day and N. Brehony, Springer, eds., 2020)

<sup>11</sup> Riyadh Agreement (Nov. 5, 2019), available at [www.peaceagreements.org/masterdocument/2235](http://www.peaceagreements.org/masterdocument/2235).

implemented and has been widely criticized.<sup>12</sup> The STC and the ROYG/Legitimacy Coalition continue an uneasy alliance fighting together against the Houthis in the North and each other in the South.

Whether the South would secede and then cohere as a political entity is subject to intense debate. What is clear from the data is that any political party seeking to consolidate public support in the South must deliver solutions for a complex set of security situations, revitalize a failed economy, and address the bloody history of social conflict amongst southerners. Future research could focus on the capacities of the southern separatist parties to manage these existential threats.

## **Data Analysis**

The sections below provide an overview of southern Yemenis' perceptions of security, the economy, and political parties in their own governorates as well as throughout Yemen. It relies on data collected from Phases II and III (2020 and 2021).

### *Regional Security Trends in the South: 2020-2021*

Interviewees in both Phases II and III were asked to describe the security situation where they live, how it had changed, and what (if anything) made them feel safe in their communities. Perceived levels of security varied over time in southern governorates. Factors that contributed to a positive view of participant security include: security forces being locally staffed; strong governorate level institutions; tribal influences maintaining the social fabric; and distance from the front lines. While the conflict in Yemen is dynamic and could shift rapidly, this data helps policymakers understand what Yemeni southerners value in terms of security outcomes. In turn, this may influence political choices and confer legitimacy to a political entity capable of securing the different southern regions.

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<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Ahmed Nagi, *Empowering the Separatists*, DIWAN: MIDDLE EAST INSIGHTS FROM CARNEGIE, (Jul. 9, 2020), available at <https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/82263>. (Arguing the Riyadh Agreement sought to “represent the interests of the coalition members, through the appointment of their proxies.”).



## Lahj and al-Dhale'a

The Lahj and al-Dhale'a governorates are located southwest and south of Sana'a respectively. Historically, Lahj and al-Dhale'a formed a cultural and political group based on the *Thogma*, or the "ruling clique," an affiliation of farmers and fighters which dominated the South politically prior to unification in 1990.<sup>13</sup> Despite this shared past, these governorates experienced very different patterns of violence during the data collection period. This could influence future political choices at the governorate level, in that they may act to preserve local security instead of mobilizing along their historic alliance.

In 2020 in Lahj, seven of eight interviewees indicated that the security situation was either good, improved, or stable. Interviewees attributed this to "the presence of strong security forces" and citizen "awareness and familiarity dealing with the security authorities" compared to that in the past. (LM02). However, even those who indicated they felt that security was stable in their governorate noted security concerns about "the general situation of the country being unstable, especially in some neighboring areas." (LM01). A woman from Musaymir in northern Lahj governorate, close to al-Dhale'a governorate, was the sole interviewee who reported significant instability, "with clashes occurring from time to time." (LF01, PH II). By August 2021, the situation in Lahj appeared to have worsened. A man in Tuban district explained that the presence of "more than one security force" constantly generated fear among people there. (LM01, Ph III). A man in al-Hawta explained that in addition to the worsened security situation, "the work of the prosecution and the judiciary has been disrupted." (LM03, Ph III). Overall, interview responses in 2021 from Lahj tended to note that while the security situation in this region was relatively better than that in the rest of the country, tensions remained and citizens were aware of, and anxious about, conflict in other parts of Yemen.

In contrast, most interviewees from neighboring al-Dhale'a governorate (just north of Lahj) reported danger and instability in 2020. A woman explained, "[T]he situation is not safe, with widespread killing and theft. People are afraid to leave their homes." (DF01, Ph II). By August 2021, many interviewees from al-Dhale'a

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<sup>13</sup> The January 1986 civil war in the South involved two components of southern society: the pastoralists of eastern Abyan and Shabwa (referred to as the Bedouins, derogatorily referred to as *Zumra* or "desperate band"); and the farmers and warriors of Lahj and al-Dhale'a (known as the "ruling clique," or *Thogma*). The Lahj/al-Dhale'a group defeated the Abyan/Shabwa Bedouins and tens of thousands of them – including President Hadi – were forced to leave for North Yemen. See Abdulghani Al-Iryani, *The Riyadh Agreement Dilemma*, SANA'A CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES, (Jul. 9, 2020), available at <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/analysis/10311>.

reported security improvements. A woman noted the local security apparatus was functioning, there were active markets and open hospitals, and citizens were able to live “comfortably, wake up, and enter and exit [their homes] safely.” (DF01). A man explained he felt safe because of his regional knowledge and the fact the SBF are divided up to cover public areas. He added that within al-Dhale’a City the SBF had “a mandate to control security.” (DM05, Ph III). In sum, the security situation, according to interviewees, appears to have improved over the course of the latest data collection, opposite to the trend described previously in Lahj.<sup>14</sup>

### Abyan and Shabwa

Abyan and Shabwa were historically part of a Bedouin pastoralist affiliation referred to as the *Zumra* in the 1986 southern civil war.<sup>15</sup> The *Zumra* lost the southern civil war and many fled to the North or outside of Yemen, including former President Hadi and others who became part of the northern political elite. Unsurprisingly these governorates have been considered a pro-ROYG area. While these governorates have an important shared political history, their security situations were vastly different in 2020-21, according to interviewees.

In 2020 in energy rich Shabwa, many interviewees reported relative satisfaction with the security situation. In addition to the absence of armed groups, contributing factors included the cooperation between citizens and the security forces, the presence of state security forces, and a tribal system that enforced social order. A man explained that “in the governorate, I feel safe. Outside the governorate, I do not feel safe.” He noted the major security improvement was due to the “presence of the state and activation of state institutions,” adding that “[the improved security situation] is tangible for everyone... ask anyone on the street.” (WM04, Ph II). Another man explained that because the “tribal social situation” in Shabwa meant that local tribes preserved the social structure, which “made people stay away from provoking conflicts,” deterring conflict and promoting security. He

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<sup>14</sup> For a social explanation of recruitment to the Security Belt Forces deployed in Aden, Abyan, Lahj and al-Dhale’a, and an overview of fighting between armed groups aligned with secessionist groups and pro-ROYG forces, see Eleonora Ardemagni, Yemen’s Southern Military Crisis, CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE, (Sept. 19, 2019), *available at* <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/79881>.

<sup>15</sup> See footnote 12 for a brief history of the 1986 southern civil war.

added that as a result citizens work “more than the state” to maintain security.<sup>16</sup> (WM01, Ph II).

In Shabwa in August 2021, a man from Habban indicated Shabwa’s stable security situation was due to the ROYG’s domination, which had resulted in “one political decision, one administrator, and one security and military authority” because there were “no conflicting military forces inside Shabwa governorate.” (WM04, Ph III). However, opportunistic crime and general lawlessness were reported by others. A female social activist from Ataq explained that theft had risen to the point where “on any occasion or gathering, a person’s belongings are not safe.” More disturbing, she reported an increase in “bullying, theft, kidnappings, murder, child abduction, harassment and rape, and you do not know who the perpetrator is.” (WF02, Ph III). This unease extended to state institutions. A male academic in al-Rawda observed that while security in Shabwa was better than elsewhere, he had no trust in due process for those arrested. He explained that if a person was taken by the security forces, it was not clear what happened to the detainee, and “years go on for the simplest cases.” (WM02, PH III).

Since the data and statements noted above were taken, Ansar Allah launched a campaign to encircle Marib City, which placed their troops in Shabwa, with an assault in early 2022. The UAE-backed Giants Brigades retook Shabwa on January 10, 2022.<sup>17</sup> While we cannot know the full impact on citizen security, we can infer that the security problems detailed in August 2021 have increased, in addition to that caused by front-line fighting.

In Abyan in 2020, responses varied greatly according to interviewee location. Some interviewees noted the lack of security came from “the absence of the state.” (AM04, Ph II). A woman described the “[lack of a] security establishment, security imbalances, and the spread of weapons and random shootings.” (AF03, Ph II). By August 2021, the situation in Khanfar, Abyan governorate had reportedly stabilized. A female Abyani social activist said she felt secure because she was in her “hometown and among my family.” (AF01, Ph III). A male worker explained, “I feel safe because there is no shooting in the area and

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<sup>16</sup> Even prior to the 2014-15 civil war, tribes played a critical role in holding Yemen together in the face of increasing political conflicts and harsh economic conditions. This was particularly true in the tribal areas of Shabwa (in the South) and Marib, al-Jawf, and al-Bayda (in the North). For an overview of tribal influence, see Nadwa al-Dawsari, *Tribal Governance and Stability in Yemen*, CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE, (Apr. 2012), available at <https://tinyurl.com/Dawsari>.

<sup>17</sup> Mahmoud Mourad and Lisa Barrington, *Yemeni pro-govt forces say they have retaken Shabwa from Houthis*, REUTERS, Jan. 10, 2022, available at <https://tinyurl.com/yckhuuve>. Note that the Giants Brigade, while supported by the UAE, is not affiliated with the STC.

there are no military confrontations.” (AM01, Ph III). A social leader in Zinjibar emphasized his tribal ties, explaining that he felt safe because “this is my area, with my family and my clan, and I have not been exposed to any security risks.” (AM02, Ph III). However, he acknowledged intermittent poor security with “confrontations between military parties.” (AM02, Ph III).

### Aden

Interviewees described insecurity and a preponderance of armed groups in Aden in both 2020 and 2021. Despite the Riyadh Agreement of 2019 (discussed in the introduction), which provided for power sharing within the *de facto* capital, a male activist in al-Tawahi reported deep insecurity, pervasive lawlessness, and “repeated attacks by armed groups. The security situation is fragile.” He further described restrictions on daily life: “Movement is limited, particularly in the evening. Children can’t move freely. We must take caution because there is no security apparatus to enforce the law.” (XM08, Ph II). By August 2021, the situation had further deteriorated, with multiple security forces present and no restoration of state institutions. A male member of the historically marginalized Muhamasheen minority noted “the constant instability of the security situation,” explaining that in Sheikh Othman (near the international airport), there were “armed groups whose conflict intensifies from time to time” and that “parties benefit from these groups to achieve their interests.” (XM07, Ph III). A woman in the historically upscale Khormaksar district described “general instability in the security situation. My father was killed in his car for no reason, and he had no role in politics.” (XF01, Ph III).

### Hadramaut Coast and Valley

Hadramaut is geographically the largest of the governorates, with a distinct cultural identity, important mercantile history and its own Arabic dialect.<sup>18</sup> Hadramaut valley (or inland Hadramaut) and coastal Hadramaut, which contains the port city of Mukalla, have developed different political tendencies during the past twenty years. These arguably resulted from the ROYG decision in 2014 to include the Hadramaut valley in one military zone and the coast in another; the

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<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of trends in Hadrami local governance since 2015, see Benoit Challand and Joshua Rogers, *The Political Economy of Local Governance in Yemen: Past and Present*, 13(4), Contemporary Arab Affairs, 45, (2020).

presence of outside military forces from areas seized by Ansar Allah in Sayoun; and the takeover of Mukalla by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).<sup>19</sup>

All interviewees from the Hadramaut coast in 2020 reported relative satisfaction with the security situation there, mainly due to the cooperation and trust between the local population and the security forces. The coast has traditionally been pro-UAE, it has enjoyed better security than the Hadramaut valley although coastal political allegiances have been split between the STC and the ROYG. However, a woman from al-Shihr noted her “fear that the conflict will spread to the coastal cities” in the future. (HF03, Ph II). Overall, respondents reported high levels of citizen support for the security forces, which they attributed largely to the fact that the members were locals. A woman explained that citizens of Hadramaut coastal areas showed “solidarity” and “cooperated with the local authority and the Hadrami Elite (Forces), who maintained security at the governorate and district levels,” and “which come from among the governorate’s population.” (HF02, Ph II). A man from al-Shihr explained that “[T]he citizen became the second eye of the security forces,” and that since locals managed security, “terrorist operations and the crime rate decreased.” (HM02).

The Hadramaut valley, in contrast, has been traditionally pro-Islah (the political party now substantially part of the Legitimacy government led by the ROYG). In 2014, many forces were relocated there from areas seized by Ansar Allah, making them effectively foreign to the region. In 2020, interviewees from Sayoun reported insecurity, with only slight improvements in 2021. A man explained that there were still many security concerns and that citizens showed “no noticeable support for the security services,” which could “lead to an explosion at any time.” (VM05, Ph II). By July-August 2021, interviewees from Sayoun reported improvements. A female social leader reported the stability came from “the presence of Legitimacy-controlled [ROYG] security forces and the lack of an active fighting front near Sayoun.” (VF03, Ph III). A male academic noted “slight insecurity” related to the “assassinations of security personnel by unknown persons.” (VM02, PH III). However, a female activist described the security situation as “highly destabilized due to the absence of the government.” (VF02, Ph III).

### Al-Mahra and Socotra

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<sup>19</sup> Personal correspondence, Gregory Johnsen, Yemen Policy Expert (April 6, 2022), on file with PILPG. For a discussion of Yemeni public opinion about violent extremism and AQAP in Yemen, see Position Paper 5 of this series, *Countering Violent Extremism*.

The data collection team conducted relatively few in-depth interviews in the remote governorates of al-Mahra (n=4) and Socotra (n=5). However, the data gives policymakers a rare glimpse at public opinion in these strategic southern areas.

### Al-Mahra: The Western Expanse

In October 2020, researchers conducted in depth interviews with two male and two female government workers in al-Ghayda, al-Mahra's capital city.<sup>20</sup>

Opinions varied on the degree of security, which may well indicate a difference in the way interviewees conceive of this term. Security forces on al-Mahra reportedly addressed public insecurity from war-related violence, but may not be equipped to handle the opportunistic and organized crime that flourishes in conflict. A woman observed that the security situation was “almost stable, but there are some problems that occur as a result of tribal conflicts.” However, she distinguished between the war and organized crime, including “gang wars and drug smuggling,” which she characterized as beyond the capacity of the security forces to handle. She noted that these problems were “getting worse every day.” (ZF01, Ph II) (ZF02, Ph II). Another woman described the security situation as “not stable at all,” with periodic improvement followed by “unusual security chaos” attributed to “war and conflict.” She added her perception that the rule of law had weakened, with the applicable security law “applied to the weak and not the strong.” (ZM02, Ph II). This could be interpreted to mean that there is corruption within the security sector, and the powerful seemed to be insulated from legal consequences.

In al-Mahra, even interviewees who indicated the security situation had worsened described the governorate as being safe overall. They reported the importance of tribal customs as a critical stabilizing factor, emphasizing “the solidarity of the tribes with the local authorities.” (ZF02, Ph II). A man added that “al-Mahra is a tribal society governed by tribal customs” thus cooperation between the tribes and security authorities was key. He highlighted the importance of “cooperation between citizens and the competent authorities” (ZM02, Ph II).

### The Socotra Archipelago: Strategic Maritime Asset

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<sup>20</sup> Note that no IDIs were carried out in Phase I or III in al-Mahra. See *Annex I, Methodology* for an overview of sampling across the data collection phases.

Socotri interviewees complained of instability due to the spread of foreign forces and weapons on the island. The STC claimed the governorate's capital, Hadibu City, as part of its bid for independence on June 20, 2020.<sup>21</sup> A government worker also from Hadibu reported the security situation was stable, with “no deterioration in the security situation in general at the governorate level.” (SM03, Ph II). An academic also noted “some stability on the security side.” (SM04, Ph II). However, a civil society member from Hadibu explained that Socotra “had been safer” in the past, but “the entry of foreign forces from outside the island, as well as the spread of weapons” made citizens feel uneasy about security. (SM05, Ph II). A government worker from the western district of Qalansiyah wa ‘Abdelkuri noted that insecurity was “due to the presence of forces from outside Socotra, from the northern regions or from al-Dhale’a.” (SM01, Ph II).

In summer 2021, however, some interviewees from Socotra reported security improvements and increased stability. A social activist from Hadibu described “harmony between the people and the security forces,” adding “whenever needed, people report problems and assist the security forces. For their part, the security forces do their duty.” (SM02, Ph III). Nevertheless, a public intellectual from Qalansiyah wa ‘Abdelkuri reported ongoing security concerns related to the absence of the state such as “kidnappings and (armed security) encampments established outside of government institutions.” (SM04, Ph III). A social activist from Hadibu explained his belief that insecurity would prevail “as long as the war continues, with the mobilization of the people of Socotra in Shabwa governorate” where fierce fighting was ongoing. (SM02, Ph III). This observation is consistent with trends described in other governorates that reported improved security between 2019 and 2020; no governorate in Yemen has achieved stability – which may not be possible as long as the war continues.

### *Economic conditions in the South, 2020-2021*

After physical security, the economy is a vital issue for constituents in southern Yemen. In fact, the provision of public goods can depend on local security including that provided by militias and foreign-backed armed forces.<sup>22</sup> As has been

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<sup>21</sup> The New Arab, *Hadi government 'betrayed by Saudi Arabia' as UAE-backed separatists capture Socotra island*, Jun. 20, 2020, available at <https://tinyurl.com/Socotri>.

<sup>22</sup> For the importance of an integrated study of militias and rebel groups in civil wars, see Corinna Jentsch, Stathis Kalyvas, and Livia I. Schubiger, *Militias in Civil Wars*, 59(5) *J. of Conflict Resolution*, 755-769, (2015)

addressed at length elsewhere,<sup>23</sup> Ansar Allah has engaged in economic warfare against territories outside its purview, including the southern governorates. Any political actor seeking to consolidate support must address the need for basic services and general economic stabilization. As discussed in the Security section above, although southern interviewees indicated some security improvements, there was consensus amongst interviewees in both Phase II and Phase III data collection that the economy, public services, and the standard of living all declined.<sup>24</sup> In Phase III, interviewees voiced more blame on the government – technically, both the ROYG and the STC – for this deterioration.

### Lahj and al-Dhale’a

In 2020, a man in al-Hawta, Lahj, attributed the lack of control over prices to “the absence of the State” and its inability to adjust the currency (LM03, Ph II). Interviewees blamed the parties to the conflict for focusing on their political goals without concern for the population. “Even the liberated provinces are not developed for political reasons,” noted a male government worker from Tuban. (LM01, Ph II). In 2021, the situation continued to decline. A female activist from Musaymir blamed the poor economy on the lack of implementation of the Riyadh Agreement. (LF01, Ph III). A male government worker from Radfan described “the declining standard of living and the suspension of inadequate salaries.” (LM04, Ph III). In 2021, weak institutions were singled out by a man in Tuban in addition to the “absence of government and overall instability.” (LM05, Ph III).

In al-Dhale’a, “the absence of the state and the government” was a recurring theme for participants discussing the economy. (DM03, Ph III). A female government worker from al-Dhale’a City blamed continuously rising inflation on ongoing war. (DF06, Ph II). A man from al-Azariq blamed the parties (including the ROYG and the STC) for the lack of concessions, which perpetuated the conflict and by extension, the economic crisis. (DM03, Ph II). A woman from Juban noted that “war merchants and profiteers” benefitted from the conflict. (DF03, Ph II). By August 2021, the currency collapse was foremost in the minds of interviewees. A male activist from al-Dhale’a noted the living situation had gotten worse,

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<sup>23</sup> International Crisis Group, *Brokering a Ceasefire in Yemen’s Economic Conflict*, (Jan. 20, 2022), available at <https://tinyurl.com/2p954efb>.

<sup>24</sup> Interviewees in both Phases II and III were asked “During the past six months, have there been any changes in the current situation in terms of conflict in the country, in general?” They were then asked to discuss improvements or decline, and attribute causes for both. *PILPG-Resonate Interview Guide Phase II and Phase III*, on file with author.



“especially the last month, with the increase in the currency, which led to the deterioration of the humanitarian situation.” (DM01, Ph III).

## Aden

The STC maintains military control of Aden despite technically sharing power with the ROYG in the city. In 2020, a male civil society member from Dar Sa’ad held “the Arab coalition<sup>25</sup> responsible... It deepened the crisis and created a second coup in Aden [the STC declaration of independence] and impeded the legitimate authority from achieving sovereignty on the land as a guardian through the UN Security Council.” (XM16, Ph II). A male activist in the city district of al-Tawahi explained that “the August (2019) confrontations between the government and the Transitional Council caused division and competition for control,” adding that “the government’s corruption, incompetence, and presence outside the country for a long period of time” made things worse. (XM13, Ph II).

Frustration with all political parties continued to rise in 2021 as the economy worsened further and inflation reached unwieldy levels, leading to dramatic price increases and approximately 75% of Yemenis experiencing poverty.<sup>26</sup> In 2021, rial banknotes depreciated from YER 691 for USD 1 on January 1 to YER 1,535 for USD 1 in mid-November [2021].<sup>27</sup> A female academic in Khormaksar noted the impact of this phenomenon, saying, “prices are doubling, and people cannot find anything to eat.” (XF03, Ph III). A female social leader in Mansoura complained of “the lack of government on the ground and people’s lack of confidence in any party.” (XF04, Ph III). A female high level political activist from Mansoura noted that living conditions had “worsened despite the local authority’s attempts. There are parties that obstruct any improvement in electricity and water. There is a significant decline in the standard of living, an increase in the exchange rate, and salaries remain the same.” XF06 (Ph III). A male intellectual from al-Brega (historically known as Little Aden) described the impact of weak government on

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<sup>25</sup> While the meaning of “Arab Coalition” is not clear in this statement, a Yemen policy expert understood it in context to refer to the UAE, which backs the STC but is part of the Saudi led coalition. Personal correspondence, Gregory Johnsen, former member, U.N. Panel of Experts (Apr. 7, 2022), on file with PILPG.

<sup>26</sup> Kali Robinson, *Yemen’s Tragedy: War, Stalemate, and Suffering*, Council of Foreign Relations (Apr. 8, 2022), available at <https://www.cfr.org/background/yemen-crisis>. See also, UN News, *\$4.3 billion needed to help over 17 million people across Yemen*, (Mar. 16, 2022), available at <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1114032>.

<sup>27</sup> ACAPS, *Yemen: increased civil unrest and worsening humanitarian situation in southern governorates*, Anticipatory Briefing Note (Nov. 29, 2021) available at <https://tinyurl.com/53fdvnf>.

everyday work life, noting an “absence of oversight over all sectors, and everyone works according to his whims.” (XM04, Ph III).

### Abyan and Shabwa

In Abyan in 2020, interviewees spoke pointedly about the failure of the STC to prevent financial mismanagement or to provide for basic needs in the South. A female government worker in Lauder derisively referred to “the coup of the Autonomous Administration, which has no goals or vision to change conditions for citizens.” (AF01, Ph II). A male government worker from Mudiya described the “coup of the Southern Transitional Council against the government in Aden” as a direct cause of “the emergence of militias that practice looting and corruption in every form and use force.”<sup>28</sup> (AM03, Ph II). A female civil society member from Zinjibar decried “corruption, mismanagement and looting of state public resources.” (AF03, Ph II). By August 2021, government failure to address the economy, standard of living, and security were linked in the minds of interviewees. A male worker from Khanfar blamed “local authorities” and the “absent government for high prices and the lack of basic services.” (AM01, Ph III). A female social activist from Khanfar blamed the government for its failure to “address problems, especially regarding services and high prices.” (AF01, Ph III).

In Shabwa, the themes of government absenteeism were repeated. A female civil society member from Ataq complained “the government is not doing its part.” (WF01, Ph II). A male government worker from Ataq said “a government outside the country [referring to President Hadi and his cabinet residing in Saudi Arabia] cannot carry out its duties, its work.”<sup>29</sup> He noted the disruption of “oil and gas installations, meaning a state without resources,” directly linking missing revenue to weak governance. (WM04, Ph II). By August 2021, a male worker from Habban noted the “deterioration of services from all aspects: the currency collapse and increase in poverty. We may even reach the point of starvation.” (WM01, Ph III). Overall, the data from these governorates show citizen belief that the government is neglecting its duty to regulate the economy, and that its lack of intervention is to

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<sup>28</sup> Mohammed Mukhashef and Maher Chmaytelli, *Yemeni separatists quit some Aden posts; Houthis attack Saudi oil plant*, REUTERS, Aug. 17, 2019, available at <https://tinyurl.com/43tuw5bw>.

<sup>29</sup> President Hadi fled to Saudi Arabia when Ansar Allah forces took Aden in March 2015 and has resided there ever since. Some Yemenis feel Hadi has lost legitimacy for being outside Yemen for so long. See Al-Monitor, *Have Yemenis given up on Hadi during six-year exile?*, (Jun. 2, 2021), available at <https://tinyurl.com/PresHadi>. Recognition of this sentiment may well have been a factor in Hadi’s transfer of the powers of the Presidency to the Presidential Leadership Council in the evening of April 6, 2022. See footnote 2.

be blamed for the rising prices of basic goods and services and therefore, an increasingly dire humanitarian crisis.

### Hadramaut Coast and Valley

Coastal Hadramaut has been considered pro-UAE since 2014, and the armed groups it has trained and supported have provided significant security improvements. The port at Mukalla is a valuable economic asset for multiple political actors including the STC.<sup>30</sup> As of April 2022 the STC did not hold major leadership positions in Hadramaut, however as will be discussed further below, the 2021 Phase III survey demonstrated relatively significant support for the STC on the coast (62% of respondents). The valley has supported Islah which, as discussed below, is nominally a part of the Legitimacy government bloc.<sup>31</sup> In both regions, interviewees reported frustration with the economic crisis. In 2020, a female activist from al-Shihr noted the impact of “the blockade and the closure of ports and airports” on citizens, adding that “shop owners complain about the delay of their goods, and the cost is passed on to citizens in price increases.” (HF02, Ph II). Currency inflation was a central complaint. A male civil society member from al-Shihr explained his belief that the currency crisis was “linked to the war, but is controlled by the merchants, not by the state. If there was a central bank that pumped the currency and controlled the exchange rate, the situation would not have become this bad.” (HM02, Ph II).

The Hadramaut valley has been historically pro-Islah. Islah now sits within the ROYG-affiliated Legitimacy umbrella group, however interviewees attributed the economic situation to Legitimacy. While it is difficult to predict how this might translate into a political position in the future, there was widespread displeasure with the economic crisis. In 2020 a female government worker in Sayoun described how continued conflict drove rising prices, which had “impacted oil and gas revenue.” She noted this led to “an increase in the price of foodstuffs, as well as the deterioration of the currency.” (VF02, Ph II). A male civil society member from Sayoun expressed his belief that profiteers had incentives to maintain the

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<sup>30</sup> The UAE trained and supported the armed forces that drove Al Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula (AQAP) out of Mukalla in 2016. For a history of the AQAP occupation and its expulsion from Mukalla, see, Tawfik al-Ghanad, Gregory D. Johnsen and Mohammed al-Katheri, “387 Days of Power: How Al-Qaeda Seized, Held and Ultimately Lost a Yemeni City, SANA’A CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES, (Jan. 5, 2021), available at <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/main-publications/12247>. The emergence of UAE-backed militias is discussed at length in PILPG Position Paper 6, *The emergence of new actors and redefining roles in Yemeni society*.

<sup>31</sup> Emile Roy and Andrea Carboni, *Yemen’s Fractured South: Shabwah and Hadramawt*, ACLED, (May 9, 2019), available at <https://tinyurl.com/Shabwah>.

conflict, including unspecified “internal and external parties who have an interest in keeping the situation as it is.” (VM02, Ph II). By 2021, interviewees were unanimous that the economic situation was worse and openly blamed the government for the economy’s failure. A female social leader noted the unsustainably high “cost of living for citizens.” (VF01, Ph III). A displaced woman residing in Sayoun explained her belief that “the one who caused this situation is the Legitimacy government (ROYG),” likely for its decision to print money to cover war and regular operating costs, spurring devastating inflation. (VF01, Ph III). A male government worker blamed the Legitimacy government (ROYG), because “it is outside the country and lives in luxury” and “does not feel the suffering of the citizen(s).” (VM04, Ph III).<sup>32</sup>

### Al-Mahra and Socotra

Although al-Mahra and Socotra are remote compared to the other southern provinces, interviewees reported anger at a lack of government response to their economic crises. Male and female government workers in al-Ghayda, the capital city of al-Mahra governorate, described deep economic impacts in 2020.<sup>33</sup> One woman also noted the socioeconomic issues created by the novel coronavirus pandemic in addition to other diseases, as well as “the deteriorating economic aspect.” (ZF01, Ph II). Another woman observed that the “low income of citizens, as well as the lack of job opportunities and outrageously high prices” contributed to the poor economic outlook. (ZF02, Ph II). A man observed the “depreciation of the Yemeni currency compared to other foreign currencies” had led to economic hardship across the country. (ZM01, Ph II). His peer described the “permanent interruption of salaries” and a “sharp decline in the Yemeni currency compared to the dollar and Saudi Arabian riyal,” which he attributed to “continuation of the war, as well as other factors contributing to the economic crisis.” (ZM02, Ph II).

Citizens in Socotra expressed anger towards those in charge, consistent with opinions expressed in other southern regions. Anti-STC sentiment was high among interviewees in Socotra. A male academic from the capital city of Hadibu linked Socotra’s economic troubles to the STC, which he described as a “party that performed a coup without any studied plan for the post-coup.” (SM04, Ph II). A male government worker in Hadibu blamed Ansar Allah, the STC, and the ROYG for the economic crisis, noting “the Legitimacy government did not deal correctly with these events.” (SM03, Ph II). In 2021, the criticisms became more pointed.

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<sup>32</sup> Whether the April 6, 2022, transfer of power from Hadi to the eight man Presidential leadership Council will result in better outcomes remains to be determined. See footnote 2.

<sup>33</sup> Note that in-depth interviews were conducted in al-Mahra only in Phase II (2020).

“Things got worse because the Legitimacy government did not carry out its duties,” explained a male social activist from Hadibu. (SM02, Ph III). Interviewees blamed both the STC and the ROYG for not taking responsibility for or taking steps to avoid the increasingly worsening economic crisis.

Viewing the aggregate responses from all the surveyed southern governorates, it does not appear to matter whether the STC or the ROYG is in charge or favored by citizens. The data demonstrates that southerners in 2020-21 appeared likely to support any government party that could address the economic situation and prioritize the economy as much as security or negotiations. Many interviewees believed that government officials are out of touch with the needs of locals in Yemen and wanted to see a central authority take their concerns seriously. Significantly, interviewees wanted swift action to fix the economic problem affecting the ever more desperate civilian population.

#### *Preference for Participation: Negotiations, Credibility, and Popularity*

To determine the potential future success of southern political parties, it is helpful to assess how interviewees, respondents, and focus group participants viewed regional actors.

#### “Fair representation”: Focus Group Discussions, 2020

In the fall of 2020, Phase II Focus Group Discussion (FGD) participants overwhelmingly endorsed the idea that the STC should be involved in any national peace negotiations, including between Saudi Arabia and Ansar Allah. Pro-STC focus groups included those in Abyan, al-Dhale’a, Lahj, and Aden. However, they did not recommend the STC exclusively. While “southern factions” were mentioned many times in the same breath as the STC, few additional parties were named except for Hiraak; the Southern Military Retirees Association; the Shabwa Council; the Hadramaut Conference; and the Tribal Alliance. One interviewee mentioned the importance of including the Ba’um faction of Hiraak, which has endorsed a federal state.

How much consideration to give to the other factions varied among participants. For instance, a participant from the Hadramaut coast indicated the STC was chosen by the people and “represents all southern factions because in 2017, it delegated Aidarous al-Zubaidi to lead it, regardless of other points of view.” (FGHS15, Ph II). However, another participant from the same focus group

noted the “STC alone cannot represent the South. If we do not involve all the factions, ongoing episodes of conflict will remain.” (FGHS15, Ph II). Paradoxically, FGD participants from the Hadramaut coast, where the STC would like to control, articulated the desire for Hiraak and the Hadramaut-based political factions to participate in addition to the STC. In al-Mahra, FGD participants noted that the STC was the main actor in the Riyadh Agreement but that “the Peaceful Southern Movement, the Hadrami League, and the General Council of the People of the Governorates of al-Mahra and Socotra” should also have been at the table. (FGZ01, Ph II). Hadramaut coast participants noted the importance of the STC’s financial backing from the UAE to political participation, contrasted with “groups like Hiraak and women's sector that didn’t have funding” and the “Hadramaut Conference, which carries a vision for resolving the conflict, but did not have a share in the negotiations.” (FGHS14, Ph II). An interviewee from al-Dhale’a in 2021 indicated her belief that the STC maintained public credibility because it “pays salaries for employees in their territory,” (DF02, Ph III).<sup>34</sup> Hadramaut coast participants noted that in the Riyadh negotiations, “the Southern Movement, the Tribal Alliance, and other large parties were not represented” and that they must have “fair representation” in negotiations. (FGHS1, Ph II).

In the Hadramaut valley and coast, as well as Socotra, participants expressed support for the Hadramaut Conference and the Hadrami League to participate in negotiations. Participants from the coast noted “Hadramaut represents a third of the Republic of Yemen, and geographically three-quarters of the South,” but was marginal “compared to the Legitimacy government. It must be equal in negotiations.” (FGHS11, Ph II). FGD participants from the Hadramaut valley and Socotra also supported the Mahri and Socotra political factions.

Focus groups were also asked about the importance of involving individual actors and marginalized groups in negotiations. Interestingly in Lahj, Abyan, Hadramaut valley and coast, and al-Dhale’a, including women was described as a priority for negotiations. In Hadramaut Valley and al-Dhale’a, participants mentioned youth as important.

### Southern Political Parties, 2020-21

The qualitative and quantitative data collected in Phases II and III paints a picture of a dominant political party that might enjoy more name recognition than

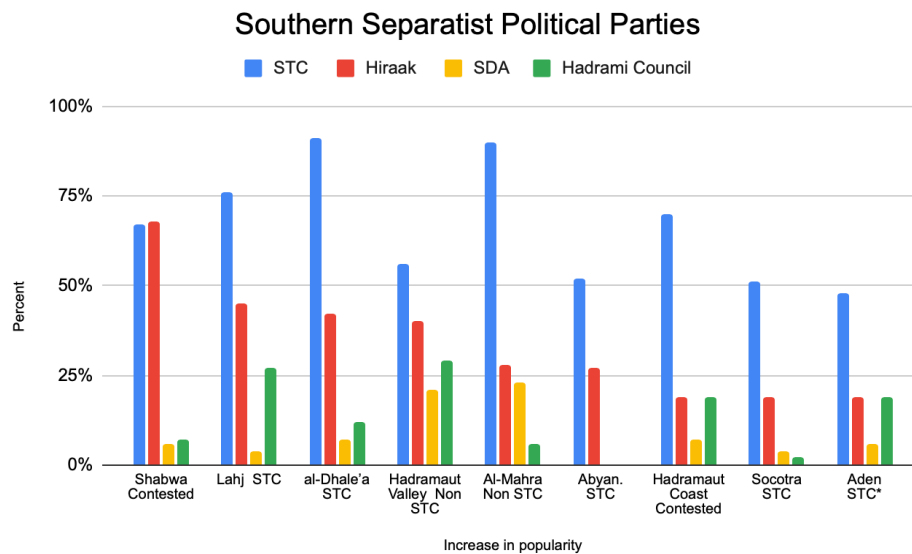
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<sup>34</sup> This contrasts with the ROYG, which resorted to printing money to meet operating costs. See International Rescue Committee, *Yemen currency devalues to historic lows, exacerbating hunger needs, warns IRC*, (Jul. 21, 2021), available at <https://tinyurl.com/2zfrk3vw>.

true political support. In 2020 and 2021, interviewees were asked who the most credible party in the peace process was. A minority of interviewees in Phase II (15%) and Phase III (20%) spontaneously mentioned the STC as the most credible, or among the most credible political parties.<sup>35</sup>

However, in the Phase III quantitative survey, 62% of respondents throughout the southern governorates reported that the STC’s “public acceptance” or popularity had increased (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: Increase in Popularity of Southern Separatist Political Parties



In Shabwa, Hiraak was perceived as slightly more popular than the STC. However, in all other southern governorates the STC was significantly more popular than the other three southern separatist parties: Hiraak, the Southern Democratic Council, and the Hadrami Council. The STC was most popular in al-Dhale’a and al-Mahra, and least popular in Aden, the only governorate where it currently governs. The Southern Democratic Alliance (SDA) appeared to have the least public acceptance, followed by the Hadrami Council, even in Hadramaut. While reported popularity in 2021 may not translate directly into citizen support, this data demonstrates that the STC enjoys extensive name recognition. The qualitative data showed that it may face competition from other southern parties whose representation interviewees and participants described as critical to peace in the South.

<sup>35</sup> “Which is the most credible party in the peace process? I. Why do you think they are credible?” See, *PILPG-Resonate Survey, Phases II and III*, on file with author.

## The STC's Relative Popularity: Interviews 2021

The Phase III 2021 interviews demonstrated the logic expressed by those supporting the STC. There were three broad categories of reasons for the STC's relative popularity among those who felt it was the most credible party. First, its physical presence on the ground in southern Yemen (in contrast to the absent ROYG) was important, although in Aden, the STC enjoyed the least public acceptance in the survey. Second, interviewees noted the STC's commitment to an independent South. Third, interviewees perceived the STC's relative commitment to peace and the political process.

Interviewees characterized the STC as functional and engaged, a stark difference from their perceptions of the ROYG. A man from Abyan explained their credibility was due to the STC's "presence on the ground, and their public supporters." (AM04, Ph III). A woman in al-Dhale'a attributed the STC's credibility to "the way they deal with people, solve problems and stand up for people's rights, and they pay salaries for employees in their territories." (DF02, Ph III). A man from the Hadramaut Coast noted that the STC asked "for the opinions of the majority of people." (HM02, Ph III).

After its physical presence, the STC's commitment to southern independence was critical for interviewees, although it was less clear if this preference stems from their belief that independence would help stop the impact of the war, reflects their lack of confidence in the ROYG, or if they truly want to return to an independent state. A woman from Lahj explained her opinion that it was "the most credible party to the conflict because it defends the southern case and works for peace." (LF01, Ph III). A man in Abyan explained the STC was credible because it fought "the Houthi and al-Qaeda and wants the return of the South." (AM05, Ph III). A woman in Aden explained that credibility came from its goal of restoring "the (southern) state to its position and weight." (XF05, Ph III).

Pro-STC interviewees described their belief that the STC was credible because of its commitment to peace and political process compared to other parties such as the Houthis and the ROYG. A man from Lahj claimed the STC was "serious in reaching a peace agreement, while Houthis are not credible." (LM05, Ph III). A man from al-Dhale'a explained the STC was committed to implementing the security provisions of the Riyadh Agreement and assigned "leaders of the Security Belt Forces, while the (ROYG) interior minister was not committed to assigning security managers." (DM05, Ph III). A man from Socotra observed that



the STC wanted to “implement the Riyadh agreement and call the (ROYG) government to come back to Aden and meet their commitments.” (SM03, Ph III).

While the STC maintains an important role in southern politics, its popularity seems defined at least in part against other, less-preferred actors such as the “absentee” ROYG and the “untrustworthy” Houthis. In order to gain support across the South, the STC may need to consider opening up political discourse to include other actors, delivering security guarantees in areas affected by years of instability, and critically, managing the impact of the economic crisis that the conflict perpetuates.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In general, the data demonstrated that public opinion in southern governorates trends toward greater autonomy, emphasizing local solutions to pressing social and economic problems. Professed supporters of the STC endorsed independence as a goal although these made up a minority of interviewees. Nearly two-thirds of survey respondents throughout the South however reported that public acceptance of the STC had increased. This might indicate name recognition, growing popularity, or at least a public belief that the STC’s power is increasing. The data does not indicate if this is based on the STC’s affirmative vision for an independent South, or a desire to disengage from the ROYG, which may have lost credibility because of former President Hadi’s perceived ineffectiveness and long absence from Yemen. Importantly, even interviewees who believed the STC should be involved in negotiations clearly expressed the need to include other southern political actors, especially in remote areas such as Hadramaut.

The STC’s credibility appears to rest on a combination of its physical presence on the ground, its aspirational rhetoric about independence, and its perceived relative commitment to peace and political process compared to Ansar Allah and the ROYG. The data show that while in 2021 the STC (funded by its main supporter, the UAE) enjoyed a slim majority in many parts of the South, to represent all southern governorates, it will need to address “bread and butter” issues such as security and the economy. Critically, the STC must address calls for wider political and geographic representation regardless of whether it remains part of a unified Yemen in which the ROYG is led by an integrated PLC, or as an independent state.

## *Recommendations*

Any action towards improving the security situation in southern Yemen should be aimed at fostering trust between local populations and the security forces, ensuring that they can keep local citizens safe from both war *and* regular crime. Moreover, these will strengthen political cohesion throughout the South, and may slow or stop fragmentation. In addition to this overarching observation, there are four main policy recommendations that stem from this analysis.

First, policymakers may seek to encourage the STC and other southern actors to form political parties designed to work within the framework of a single Yemeni state. The newly constituted PLC could provide a framework for more representative political participation. A single Yemeni state would remove the perception of conflicting authorities, whether between the ROYG and Ansar Allah, or the ROYG and local tribal leaders, may contribute to an increase in general stability and overall ease among citizens. Respondents articulated the need for a clear delineation of authority and stability. If these actors can work together as political parties under a unified framework, society's need for other armed groups or tribal influence could decline, potentially leading to fewer clashes and conflicts over territorial authority.

Second, the Republic of Yemen Government should update local council registries as a way of preparing for local council elections. Legitimate and transparent local council elections may consolidate public trust and control. Local authorities with a sense of duty to protect the citizens that elected them could promote local ownership of security forces.

Third, policymakers should encourage the ROYG, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE to coordinate efforts in Hadramaut as a way of rebuilding political unity between Hadramaut valley and coast. Currently the experiences on the coast and in the valley are vastly different for citizens. To begin to build a sense of unity throughout Yemen, policymakers can focus on uniting citizens of the same governorate. On the coast, policymakers should seek to improve public services. In the valley, ROYG forces from areas now occupied by Ansar Allah, considered to be affiliated with the ROYG, are based in Sayoun. These forces should be encouraged to recruit locally, including for military leadership positions. Longer term, peace negotiations should include discussion about the remobilization of forces originally from areas held by Ansar Allah to governorates that are closer culturally and linguistically.

Lastly, based on the most recent data collection, policymakers may seek to encourage the UAE to channel its aid into governorates such as Hadramaut and Socotra through either the ROYG or through local governorate entities. While a full analysis of this approach lies beyond the scope of this paper, the data clearly indicated a need to build confidence in local authorities. Therefore, aid should not be delivered through either STC councils in Hadramaut or a local UAE or STC representative in Socotra. By channeling aid through local government, the UAE could help build support and consensus for legitimately recognized bases of authority and promote the perception of Yemen growing closer to unification. As previously mentioned, clear delineations of authority contribute to better security situations and more positive remarks from citizens. By channeling aid through the internationally recognized government or through local governorate entities, rather than competing forces, the UAE may ease tension between such groups and build support for those viewed as legitimate, creating further stability.

## **About the Public International Law & Policy Group Policy Planning Initiative**

PILPG's Policy Planning Initiative supports the development of long term, strategic policy planning that is crucial to international accountability, global conflict resolution, and the establishment of international peace. The Initiative provides timely and accurate policy planning analysis and work product on pressing and future policy conundrums by leveraging PILPG's deep network of talent within the international legal and policy communities and experience with its *pro bono* clients globally. PILPG Policy Planning focuses on advising policymakers, policy shapers, and engaged stakeholders on pressing issues within the arenas of international law, war crimes prosecution, and conflict resolution efforts. This includes identifying and addressing gaps within existing policies, anticipating key conundrums and questions that will riddle future policy decisions, applying lessons learned from comparative state practice, and proactively producing and sharing work product to inform such policies and avoid crisis decision making.

## **Annex I: Methodology**

Beginning in March 2019 and ending in December 2021, Yemeni civil society organizations part of the Civil Alliance for Peace (CAP), with support from Public International Law & Policy Group (PILPG) and Resonate! Yemen, conducted quantitative surveys and qualitative in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) throughout Yemen. In total, there were two quantitative surveys with 5,750 respondents. The team conducted over 350 in-depth interviews and held 159 focus group discussions over all three years. (See Table 1).

### *Surveys*

The surveys were developed by Yemeni civil society leaders in collaboration with non-Yemeni survey design experts. In Phase I (March and April 2019), the CAP conducted 2750 in-person surveys about Yemeni views on and recommendations for the international peace process. Seven governorates including Abyan, Aden, Hadramaut, Ibb, Lahj, Marib and Taiz were polled, with a conscious effort to include underrepresented voices and vulnerable populations.

In Phase III, (July - September 2021), the team conducted in-person surveys of 3000 Yemenis about their views on and recommendations for the international peace process. Ten governorates currently controlled by the Republic of Yemen Government (ROYG) including Abyan, Aden, al-Dhale'a, al-Mahra, Hadramaut, Lahj, Marib, Shabwa, Socotra, and Taiz were polled. For security reasons, the quantitative survey was not implemented in areas currently held by Ansar Allah.

### *In-depth Interviews and Focus Group Discussions*

#### *Phase I (March-July 2019)*

In addition to the survey component, CAP members conducted qualitative FGDs and IDIs in May, June, and July 2019. FGDs and IDIs took place in 14 governorates: Abyan, Aden, Amran, Dhamar, Hadramaut, Hajja, Hodeidah, Ibb, Marib, Raymah, Sa'ada, Sana'a municipality, Sana'a governorate, and Taiz. In total, the CAP conducted 64 FGs and 115 IDIs. For participation in FGs and IDIs, the CAP targeted influential social figures,

academics, civil servants, business people, civil society activists, women, youth, and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

### *Phase II (September-November 2020)*

Between September and November 2020, PILPG and its partners carried out 83 focus groups (FGDs) and 101 in-depth interviews (IDIs) in Arabic in ten Yemeni governorates currently controlled by the Republic of Yemen Government (ROYG). These governorates included Abyan, Aden, al- Dhalea, al-Mahra, Hadramaut (Coast and Valley), Lahj, Marib, Shabwa, Socotra, and Taiz. All surveys were conducted remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, except for one focus group led in person (February 2020).

### *Phase III (July-December 2021)*

In July 2021, PILPG and its partners carried out 100 in-depth interviews (IDIs) in Arabic in nine Yemeni governorates currently controlled by the Republic of Yemen Government (ROYG), including Abyan, Aden, al-Dhale'a, Hahramaut, Lahj, Marib, Shabwa, Socotra, and Taiz. In November and December 2021, PILPG and its partners carried out an additional 100 in-depth interviews (IDIs) in Arabic in nine Yemeni governorates currently controlled by Ansar Allah, including Amana Capital, al-Bayda, Amran, Mahweet, Dhamar, Hajja, Ibb, Rayma, and Sana'a. All interviews were conducted remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### *Limitations*

While the quantitative data provides rich insights into trends, it is limited by a number of factors. While there was significant overlap in the subject matter of each survey instrument, many questions were phrased differently in each phase. Some questions varied significantly, and sections of the data collection tools were added or removed across phases, making trend analysis challenging.

The large number of IDIs and FGDs represents an important source of qualitative insights, but representative generalized statements about population beliefs in the governorates surveyed cannot be inferred from the sample.

*Table 1: APPY Data Collection Sample, 2019-2021*

APPY DATA COLLECTION 2019-2021		Phase I			Phase II		Phase III	
		March-July 2019			September-December 2020		July-December 2021	
Governorate		Survey	PH I IDIs	Focus Group Discussions	IDIs	Focus Group Discussions	IDIs	Survey
ROYG/STC Controlled Areas	Abyan	248	6	3	9	6	7	271
	Hadhramaut	470	20	12	16	23	15	513
	Lahj	260	6	3	8	5	7	210
	Marib	400	20	12	15	13	15	485
	Taiz	620	20	12	16	13	21	510
	al-Dhale'a	-	-	-	10	4	7	183
	Shabwa	-	-	-	7	7	7	230
	Socotra	-	-	-	5	3	5	131
	al-Mahra	-	-	-	4	2	-	60
	Aden	502	13	6	23	10	16	420
Ansar Allah Controlled Areas	Amran	-	3	10	-	-	5	-
	Dhamar	-	3	2	-	-	6	-
	Hajja	-	3	2	-	-	6	-
	Ibb	250	5	3	-	-	8	-
	Rayma	-	3	2	-	-	4	-
	Sanaa	-	3	2	-	-	15	-
	Amana Capital	-	-	-	-	-	10	-
	Al-Bayda	-	-	-	-	-	5	-
	Mahweet	-	-	-	-	-	8	-
	Hodeidah	-	3	2	-	-	-	-
	Saada	-	3	2	-	-	-	-