

**COLLEGE OF NATURAL AND COMPUTATIONAL SCIENCE**

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**International relations**, the study of the relations of states with each other and with [international organizations](https://www.britannica.com/topic/international-organization) and certain regional organizations.

The **foreign relations of Yemen** are the relationships and policies that [Yemen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yemen) maintains with other countries. It is a member of the [United Nations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations), the [Arab League](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab_League), and the [Organisation of Islamic Cooperation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organisation_of_Islamic_Cooperation" \o "Organisation of Islamic Cooperation). Yemen participates in the nonaligned movement. The Republic of Yemen accepted responsibility for all treaties and debts of its predecessors, the YAR and the PDRY. Additionally, Yemen has acceded to the [Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_Non-Proliferation_Treaty) and has stressed the need to render the Middle East region free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction.

Yemen is one of the poorest countries in the Arab world. Thirty-four percent of the population is unemployed. Forty-five percent live below the United Nations‘ poverty line. Fifty percent are illiterate. Seventy-three percent still live in rural tribal areas. With per capita gross domestic product (GDP) at only $2,500, Yemeni living standards have more in common with sub-Saharan Africa than with the rest of the Middle East. This endemic poverty is exacerbated by one of the highest birth rates in the world. Three quarters of Yemen’s population is below age thirty and forty-six percent is below age fifteen. This unwieldy age structure seems likely to grow rapidly. With net population growth at 3.4 percent annually, Yemen it set to double its current population of 24 million by 2035. Yemen’s endemic poverty and population boom are even more troubling when one considers the state of the Yemeni economy. Already beset with high structural unemployment and low literacy, Yemen has recently endured annual inflation rates as high as nineteen percent. High inflation comes on the heels of a fifty percent drop in known oil and gas reserves during the last three years. With as much as seventy percent of government revenues derived from the energy sector, Yemen’s government is losing its capacity to implement fundamental economic reforms at a time when unemployment, poverty, and youth populations are all on the rise. Each of these challenges is compounded by a looming ecological crisis. Long renowned for its arid climate and mountainous terrain, Yemen’s renewable water resources amount to only 220 cubic meters per capita per year. This figure is far below the Middle East average of 1,000 cubic meters per capita, and represents less than three percent of the global average of roughly 8,000 cubic meters. As a result, only 2.9 percent of Yemeni territory is currently suitable for agriculture. Urban life is under similarly severe strain, with water tables in Sana’a, the capital city, falling an average of six to eight meters every year. Despite these scarcities, Yemenis continue to allocate a substantial share of their limited land and water to the cultivation of qat, a narcotic plant chewed by users throughout East Africa and parts of the Middle East. According to some observers, this resource-intensive crop consumes as much as 37 percent of Yemen’s irrigation water. Others estimate that qat production accounts for as much as 10 percent of Yemen’s annual GDP. On one level, this phenomenon suggests deep desire among ordinary Yemenis to insulate themselves from the harsh realities of daily life. Yet it also contributes to these realities, reducing economic productivity whilst displacing crops that could be profitably exported. These realities inform political instability in three ways. First, demographic pressures are producing a population that is younger, poorer, larger, and less able to address its basic economic needs. Second, persistent economic malaise is frustrating efforts to maintain public services, improve existing infrastructure, and invest in long-term economic growth. Finally, resource constraints exacerbate each of these structural challenges whilst simultaneously undermining the complex system of tribal and political patronage established during President Saleh’s 33-year reign. With a growing number of parties competing for a shrinking pool of assets, the incentives for dissension and armed insurrection show few signs of subsiding. POLITICAL UNREST Yemen is no stranger to political unrest. Although the 1990 merger between the Republic of Yemen (ROY) and the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) was initially amicable, efforts to integrate the North and South swiftly turned contentious. Incompatible economic systems, separate standing armies, and disputes over oil concessions each contributed to a growing schism between President Saleh’s Arab Nationalist General People’s Congress Party (GPC) and the South’s Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP). Just four years after unification, YSP officials broke with President Saleh’s regime and re-asserted the South’s independence. The 1994 Yemeni civil war produced a series of unconventional political and ideological alignments. Wary of President Saleh’s support for Saddam Hussein during the 1991 Persian Gulf War, conservative Saudi Arabia reversed its historic support for the North and intervened on behalf of the secular socialist South. President Saleh’s regime responded by characterizing the civil war as a struggle between Islam and atheistic socialism—a measure aimed at animating Yemeni Islamists and recruiting recently-returned veterans from the Soviet-Afghan war. The result was a confluence of Arab nationalist, Islamist, and socialist actors, each with different ideologies, different objectives, and different perspectives on the conflict in which they were engaged.

The North’s decisive military victory did little to consolidate these political factions. Regional and ideological tensions with the South ossified, with the YSP and other small leftist parties forming a permanent yet largely powerless minority in the Yemeni Parliament. Saleh’s efforts to build a centralized Arab Nationalist state also drew the ire of Islamists and tribal leaders, who together comprised the Yemeni Congregation for Reform (al-Islah). By 2005, YSP’s and al-Islah’s parliamentary factions had joined forces under the umbrella of the banner of the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) in an effort to curb the GPC’s dominance and implement long-delayed reforms. Fragmentation within the JMP has frustrated many of these efforts. The coalition’s leftists were divided among the YSP, which was dominant in the South, a Nasserite party, and two competing Ba’athist groups. Al-Islah had its own internal coordination problems, often divided between tribal leaders with an interest in preserving decentralized authority structures and urbanized Islamists seeking reform from the top down. Even the Islamists operated in coalition, with their numbers divided between Yemen’s Muslim Brotherhood, with its modernist inclinations, and Salafis led by prominent Sunni religious scholar Abdul Majeed al-Zindani. This ideological diversity explains the resilience of the 2011 Yemeni uprising. Inspired by protests across the Arab world and supported by thousands of student activists, the JMP’s constituents formed the National Council for the Forces of the Peaceful Revolution (National Council) and demanded President Saleh’s ouster. They even incorporated defecting Yemeni Army units. Chief among them was the First Armored Division, which intervened to protect Yemeni protesters from government forces in Sana’a.16 Resilience is not the same as effectiveness, however. Beset with incompatible ideologies and factional divisions, the National Council proved far more effective at catalyzing public anger than channeling it into concrete political action. President Saleh’s recent departure underscores this distinction between social mobilization and political transformation. Though forced to resign in November 2011 under the terms of an agreement brokered by the Gulf Coordination Council (GCC), the former President transferred power to his Vice President, Abd al-Rab Mansur al-Hadi. In February 2012, Vice President Hadi ascended to the presidency following an election in which he was the only candidate. With the GPC still holding an overwhelming majority in the Yemeni Parliament, and with Saleh’s extended family members occupying key posts in government ministries and the national security apparatus, there are few signs of significant structural change. It is still not clear whether the GCC plan will produce a more stable equilibrium. Despite acknowledging the transition process, the YSP and other opposition groups have relatively little to gain from the status quo. The same is arguably true for Yemen’s tribal leaders, who remain wary of efforts to centralize power and dilute their traditional authority. Engaging these potential spoilers will be vital to both President Hadi’s success and Yemen’s security. With the next round of elections nearly two years away, the failure to find a working consensus may create openings for militants that stand to profit from a chronically unstable state.