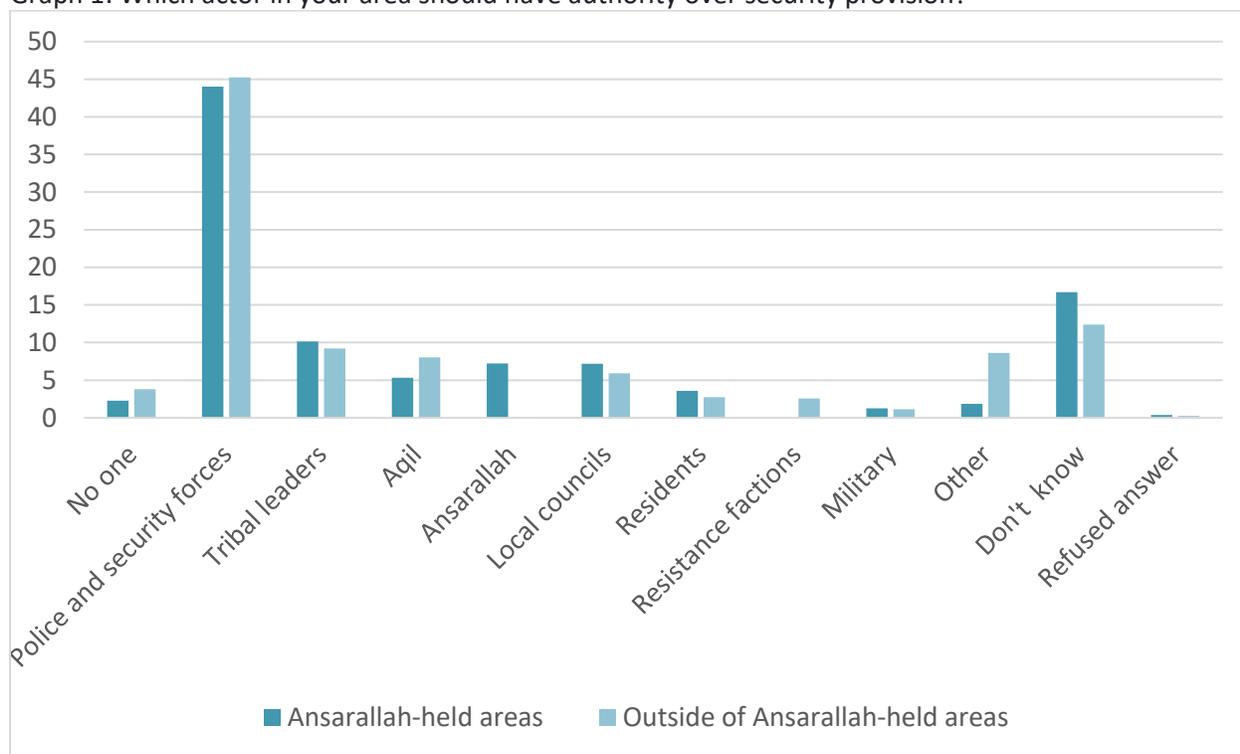


The State of the Police in Western Yemen

Across the country, Yemenis share the desire for functioning security institutions. In a survey conducted by the Yemen Polling Center (YPC) in 2019 about police-related issues, 61 percent of respondents across Yemen indicated that they wanted the police to have authority; nearly 45 percent indicated they wanted police to have authority over security provision. Yet this is far from the reality in Yemen today, where the state lacks the capacity to create a unified police on many different levels. Civil war and foreign military intervention, as well as pre-existing societal and political differences in Yemen, have fragmented the state into several territories with competing and sometimes overlapping authorities and interests. This has led to a complex security arrangement in Yemen. Police capacity thus depends on the group that claims authority in their respective area. While some capacity deficits are crosscutting, others are unique to particular regions.

Graph 1: Which actor in your area should have authority over security provision?¹



¹ The nationwide representative surveys conducted between April and July 2019 had a sample of nearly 4,000.

Multiple Authorities Emerge

The police in Yemen had been a centralized structure, with relatively weak representation on the local level and in rural areas. This was reflected in YPC surveys: in the 2012 survey, 88 percent of the rural population said there was no police station in their area; in 2019, this number decreased to 68 percent. The Ministry of Interior is nominally responsible for the entire police force, which are represented at the governorate level in the so-called Security Departments. The Security Department is the main police station in each governorate and is headed by the police chief. Further police stations and district security departments are scattered throughout each governorate, with rural areas usually having less representation than urban areas. Local police rely on their cooperation with neighborhood authorities, the so-called *aqil*. The Security Departments on the governorate level have a greater capacity to provide security, particularly given that they are better equipped and armed. Police stations on the district level have historically been weak. However, with the increasing fragmentation of the country, they have grown in importance.

In fall and summer 2014, loyalists of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh within the police supported Ansarallah's incursion. This resulted in the takeover of the Ministry of Interior, and police chiefs across western Yemen handed over police institutions to Ansarallah. Consequently, Ansarallah took control of police leadership. In northwestern Yemen, where Ansarallah established full control, police stations and security forces maintained their capacities as the old state structures stayed intact. Southwestern Yemen, areas such as Taiz, al-Dhale and Aden, witnessed more intense ground battles between Ansarallah and local resistance forces. As Ansarallah was able to gain control of the governorate level Security Departments in these areas, the already weak local level police stations on the district level collapsed.² To exacerbate this chaos, most citizens in these areas cannot differentiate between official security figures and informal fighters belonging to militias because many policemen do not wear uniforms. This is well indicated in a YPC survey as almost 31 percent confirmed that the police officers do not always wear uniforms when on duty.³

Continuity, Collapse and Fragmentation

Ansarallah took over police structures and placed so-called supervisors within the institutions to shadow police officers and learn the craft of state administration. On the governorate and district level, supervisors have a similar function as the *aqil* or governor, and supervisors are also reported to interfere in and perform police work.⁴ Thirty-four percent of the residents in Ansarallah-held areas say supervisors are active in a negative way. Many police officers simply transitioned from the previous authority under President Hadi to another under Ansarallah. In the context of the salary crisis, Ansarallah were able to

² Mareike Transfeld, "Peace and State Fragmentation in Yemen," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 22, 2019. <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/80399> (accessed 26 January 2020).

³ The nationwide representative surveys conducted between April and July 2019 had a sample of nearly 4,000.

⁴ Mareike Transfeld, "Implementing Stockholm: The Status of Local Security Forces in al-Hodeidah," YPC Policy Report, Yemen Polling Center, November 2019. http://www.yemenpolling.org/Projects-en/ICSP_EU_HodeidahReport2019November30.pdf (accessed 26 January 2020).

attract further support by funding police structures.⁵ Countless officers were also replaced and marginalized due to their lack of loyalty.⁶ Police officers across Ansarallah-controlled areas of Yemen told YPC that the police have become weak and marginalized under the rule of Ansarallah and that the “real” role of the police should be restored.⁷

In al-Hodeidah, in Yemen’s west, which has been under Ansarallah’s control since 2014, police officers interviewed by YPC confirmed that their old leadership has remained in place, but that leadership has very little practical power in the wake of Ansarallah’s takeover.⁸ Civil figures and activists reported that residents try to avoid seeking the help of Ansarallah due to the strict religious norms they base their policing on, as well as their arbitrariness.⁹ In fact, when comparing the police in Ansarallah areas with police outside of the Ansarallah-held areas, residents perceive it as more present, but have a less positive perception, with more residents avoiding voicing an opinion in the first place.¹⁰ This points to the repressive nature of police in these areas. Many interviewees also reported that police have turned into a political tool for Ansarallah, arresting political opposition rather than investigating and preventing crimes.

It was only in 2017 that the internationally recognized government (IRG) began efforts to rebuild the security sector in areas outside of Ansarallah control. Security Departments on the governorate level were restored and were to function under a Ministry of Interior that answered to the IRG. As a result of these efforts, resistance fighters pursuing local agendas were integrated into military and police. In the fall of 2015, police and some military institutions in Aden were rebuilt with support from the UAE. During the process, supporters of the southern movement rose from within the state and in May 2017, established the Southern Transitional Council (STC), demanding an independent southern state.¹¹ In Aden and in al-Dhale, the police is under the influence of the STC. For example, police officers in Aden reported that they receive their instructions from the governorate level Security Department, which is led by southern separatist Shallal Shaye, rather than the Ministry of Interior under the IRG.¹²

In Taiz, police structures were likewise rebuilt starting in 2017. Given the dominance of the Islah party, Yemen’s Muslim Brotherhood, in Taiz’s resistance to Ansarallah, police became dominated by the group

⁵ Members of the security sector did not receive their salaries for several months between 2016 and 2017. Phone conversation of author with YPC researcher, Taiz, 2 October 2019.

⁶ YPC interviews with police officers, Sanaa, Ibb and al-Hodeidah, between November 2018 and March 2019.

⁷ YPC interviews with police officers, Sanaa, Ibb and al-Hodeidah, between November 2018 and March 2019.

⁸ Mareike Transfeld, “Police, Aqil and Supervisors: Local Security Forces in Ansarallah-held al-Hodeidah,” edited by Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung, October 2019. <https://www.kas.de/documents/286298/0/The+Yemen+War.pdf> (accessed 26 January 2020).

⁹ YPC focus Group Discussion with civic figures and activists, Sanaa, 18 February 2018.

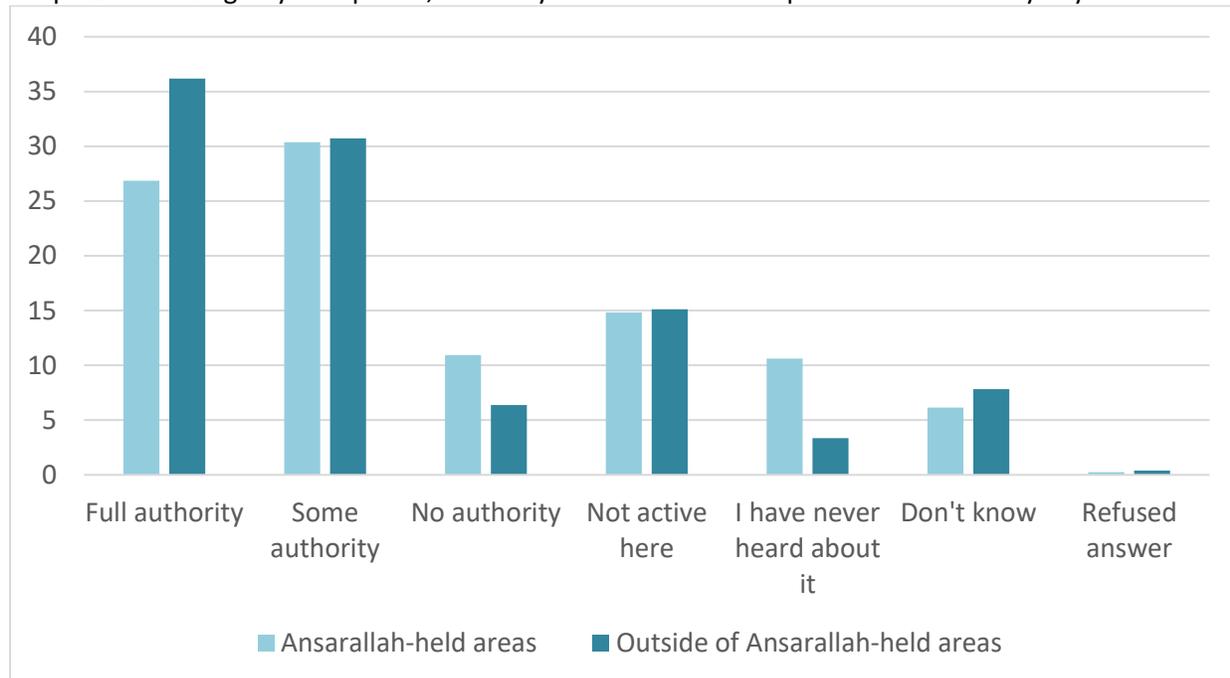
¹⁰ The nationwide representative surveys conducted between April and July 2019 had a sample of nearly 4,000.

¹¹ Saleh, Fatima and Ahmed Al- Sharjabi, “*Institutional Prerequisites for the STC “Coup” in Aden and Perspectives on the Jeddah Deal,*” Research Debrief, Yemen Polling Center, October 2019. http://www.yemenpolling.org/Projects-en/ICSP_EU_Research_Debrief_on_Aden_2019Oct23_LK.pdf (accessed 26 January 2020).

¹² YPC interview with police officers, Aden, 4-18 July 2019.

as well. Al-Islah backs the IRG and makes an effort to be perceived as a responsive state actor in the city, with the interests of citizens in mind. Thus, police institutions in Taiz reported to receive their missions from the IRG’s Ministry of Interior.¹³ However, the police’s capacity to provide security in Taiz is regularly impacted by political infighting among the different political factions in the city; police officers complain about interference from sheikhs and militias. However, with the increasing dominance of al-Islah, such power struggles have decreased.¹⁴ Given the IRG’s support for security structures in Taiz’s urban areas, as well as the support from the UAE for the police in Aden, the police in these areas are able to at least maintain a certain degree of presence.

Graph 2: According to your opinion, who do you think should the police have authority in your area?¹⁵



In tribal areas, such as Marib, tribes often coordinate with the police in order to maintain security. Especially in Marib, residents have a positive perception of the police and credit them for maintaining law and order. Between 2012 and 2019, residents who knew of a police station in their area increased from 0 to 30 percent. A representative of the IRG Ministry of Interior praised the partnership of the tribes with police in Marib. The representative supported tribes’ role in maintaining security on roads, apprehending suspects and reinforcing the role of the police through public statements. In contrast to other areas,

¹³ YPC interviews with police officers, Taiz, 17 February - 27 March 2019.

¹⁴ Sultan, Transfeld and Kamal Muqbil, “Formalizing the Informal State and Non-State Security Providers in Government-Controlled Taiz City,” YPC Policy Report, Yemen Polling Center, July 2019.

https://yemenpolling.org/advocacy/upfiles/ICSP_EU_FinalTaizReport2019July19.pdf (accessed 26 January 2020).

¹⁵ The nationwide representative surveys conducted between April and July 2019 had a sample of nearly 4,000.

where police officers often complain about the interference of non-state actors such as tribes, both tribes and police try to coordinate more closely in Marib. A local sheikh described the presence of the “state” as still weak, but that there was a demand for state-enforced rule of law among tribesmen.

Low Capacity, but Functioning

Corruption is widespread in Yemen. Security institutions have historically served as a mechanism for elites to enrich themselves and as a result, Yemenis have long cited corruption and nepotism as being the main factor accounting for their lack of trust in the police.¹⁶ That police salaries are dismally low or nonexistent has only exacerbated this problem. Since the 2015 war began, and with it the collapse of national level state institutions, police officers have gone long periods without salaries, especially in Ansarallah-held territory. Police officers stationed outside such areas reported to receive salaries on a regular basis, yet they do not have operational budgets. The lack of an operational budget, and regular salaries for police in Ansarallah-held areas, renders the police force vulnerable to political exploitation by whichever authority is operating in their area. Police will be loyal to whichever group pays, rather than serving the state or the needs of the Yemeni public. This has particularly been reported in areas under the control of Ansarallah, where loyalists are said to receive preferential treatment.¹⁷ Residents in various areas of the country have also reported that the police prefer to handle cases that would allow them to make a financial profit, such as land or inheritance conflicts.

Police stations not only lack operational budgets, but there is also a significant shortage of equipment in general. Although police stations in urban areas are privileged, most district police stations do not have the most basic equipment needed for them to operate effectively. YPC researchers observed in Taiz, for example, that a supposed police station was just an empty building with no equipment and only a single policeman standing outside. Additionally, policemen lack even basic training. As a result, organizational hierarchies and working processes are often chaotic. A means for police to increase effectiveness is through collaboration with other security providers, such as sheikhs and aqils, who have more local influence. However, these actors often cooperate with the police based on personal or political loyalties, and lack the knowledge to follow administrative processes.

Furthermore, very few women work in the police force. Even though there is high demand for female police staff, women officers are rarely found at police stations. This can prove challenging for females who may be seeking police assistance. Yemen’s police force currently contains only 2,868 women compared to 168,996 men (1.7 percent).¹⁸ Eight percent of the YPC survey respondents said that women work at police stations. A lack of funding, conservative social norms and restrictive policies from governorate level

¹⁶ Soudias, Dimitris, and Mareike Transfeld, “*Mapping Popular Perceptions: Local Security, Insecurity and Police Work in Yemen*,” YPC Policy Report 3, Yemen Polling Center, July 2014, p24.

http://www.yemenpolling.org/advocacy/upfiles/YPCPublications_Policy-Report---Mapping-Popular-Perceptions-Local-Security-Insecurity-and-Police-Work-in-Yemen---July-2014.pdf (accessed 26 January 2020).

¹⁷ YPC focus group discussions, interviews with police officers, Sanaa and Ibb, 13-15 March 2019.

¹⁸ Al-Methaq. “Yemen: al-shurtat al-nisaiyyat tursid al-iirhabiyyin fi alniqat al'amniat waealaa madakhil al-mudun al-rayisyia.” 14 October 2010. <http://www.almethaq.net/news/news-17831.htm> (accessed 26 January 2020).

Security Departments prevent local police stations from recruiting women.¹⁹ This is a major detriment to women living in these communities who do not wish to report crimes to men; most women who have been victimized prefer to not go to the police because they do not feel safe at police stations.²⁰

Support for Local Police

Yemenis want to restore stability to state security institutions. Fifty percent of respondents told YPC that they would feel more secure if there were more police in their area. The sense of insecurity has risen among civilians in all Yemen's 22 governorates, though the exact level of insecurity varies depending on the region. Insecurity and mistrust in police forces will remain without significant investment into Yemen's security apparatus. As different regions of Yemen have different societal and political realities with respect to the strength of tribal structures, police structures and authorities, police force reform could be more effective if it was tailor-made to fit in with the varying realities across Yemen.

¹⁹ YPC interviews with police officers, Taiz, 17 February - 27 March 2019.

²⁰ Marie, Heinze and Sarah Ahmed, "Integrating Women's Security Interests into Police Reform in Yemen," Yemen Polling Center policy report. 1 June 2013. http://yemenpolling.org/Projects-en/English-YPC_Policy_Report_June2013.pdf (accessed 5 January 2020).

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