

COUNTRY PROFILE: YEMEN

June 2008



BASIC FACTS:

- Population of **23 million** (2008 est.), area of **527,970 sq km**.
- Around **35%** of the population lives below the poverty line.
- Life expectancy at birth - **61 years** (men), **64 years** (women)
- Total adult literacy rate - **50.2%**.
- GDP per capita - **US\$ 600** (Nominal - 2006 estimate), **US\$ 2,300** (PPP - 2007 estimate)

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT:

North Yemen became independent of the Ottoman Empire in 1918. The British, who had set up a protectorate area around the southern port of Aden in the 19th century, withdrew in 1967 from what became South Yemen. Three years later, the Southern government adopted a Marxist orientation. The massive exodus of hundreds of thousands of Yemenis from the south to the north contributed to two decades of hostility between the states. The modern Republic of Yemen was born in 1990 when traditionalist North Yemen and Marxist South Yemen merged after years of border wars and skirmishes. But the peace broke down in 1994 and a short civil war ended in defeat for separatist southerners and the survival of the unified Yemen. Since unification, Yemen has been modernising and opening up to the world, but it still maintains much of its tribal character and old ways. Tensions persist between the north and the south.

Yemen is one of the least developed countries in the world. Around 35% of the population lives below the poverty line. A high population growth of 3.1% is placing new demands on education, the water supply, social services and employment. Since 1975, Yemen's population has almost tripled and it is expected to double by 2025. About 60% of the population is below 18 years of age. The adult literacy rate is about 50% for men and about 35% for women.

Several factors may be identified as posing risks to the country's development and stability. Poverty coupled with high population growth aggravates many of Yemen's problems. Declining oil resources are having a negative impact on the country's income and limit the government's ability to influence internal processes. Growing poverty is fuelling widespread disenchantment and increasing tribal tensions, foreshadowing security risks exacerbated by the availability of small arms. Climate change is exacerbating the frequency and intensity of weather-related natural hazards.



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

AT A GLANCE:

- Full name: Republic of Yemen
- Population: 23 million
- Capital: Sana'a
- Largest city: Sana'a
- Area: 527,970 sq km
- Major languages: Arabic
- Major religion: Islam
- Life expectancy: 61 years (men), 64 years (women) (UN)
- Monetary unit: 1 Yemeni riyal = 100 fils
- Main exports: Crude oil, coffee, dried and salted fish
- GDP per capita: US \$600 (World Bank, 2006)
- Internet domain: .ye
- International dialling code: +967

POLITICS:

Yemen is a republic with a bicameral legislature. Under the constitution, an elected president, an elected 301-seat House of Representatives, and an appointed 111-member Shura Council share power. The president is head of state, and the prime minister is head of government. The constitution provides that the president be elected by popular vote from at least two candidates endorsed by at least fifteen members of the Parliament. The prime minister, in turn, is appointed by the president and must be approved by two thirds of the Parliament. The presidential term of office is seven years, and the parliamentary term of elected office is six years. Suffrage is universal for people age 18 and older.

President Ali Abdullah Saleh became the first elected President in reunified Yemen in 1999 (though he had been President of unified Yemen since 1990 and President of North Yemen since 1978). After an initial reluctance to run once more, he was re-elected to office in September of 2006. Saleh's victory was marked by an election that international observers judged to be generally "free and fair". There was a marked decrease from previous years in election-related violence.

The constitution calls for an independent judiciary. The former northern and southern legal codes have been unified. The legal system includes separate commercial courts and a Supreme Court based in Sana'a. Since the country is an Islamic state, the Islamic Law (Sharia) is the main source for laws. For this reason, many judges are religious scholars as well as legal authorities.

The exercise of power in Yemen has required the backing of army and security forces and has been dependent on the maintenance of religious and tribal alliances and the system of patronage. Direct money injections play an important role in gaining allegiance of the tribes and in resolving conflicts.

The traditional system of alliances appears to be under strain as Yemen is becoming increasingly subject to pressures for democratization. There is progress towards modernizing the economy, decentralization and popular participation. However, the current discontent is most obvious in the Sa'ada province where the Zaydi Shi'a rebellion is ongoing and the South-North tensions. An abundance of arms (estimated at 60 million small arms - roughly 3 per inhabitant), a tribal tradition consistent with a large measure of regional autonomy from central government control and the activities of Islamic radicals, both local and foreign, constitute yet another serious risk factors.

ECONOMY:

Yemen, one of the poorest countries in the Arab world, reported average annual growth in the range of 3-4% from 2000 through 2007. Its economic fortunes depend mostly on declining oil resources, but the country is trying to diversify its earnings. In 2006, Yemen began an economic reform programme designed to bolster non-oil sectors of the economy and foreign investment. As a result of the programme, international donors pledged about US\$ 5 billion for development projects. In addition, Yemen has made some progress on reforms over the last year that will likely encourage foreign investment. Oil revenues probably increased in 2007 as a result of higher prices.

Oil production, which accounts for 75% of government revenue, is declining and will probably bottom out in the next 6-7 years. The production of gas will not be able to compensate for the loss of income from oil.

In the south, pre-independence economic activity was overwhelmingly concentrated in the port city of Aden. Since unification, the government has worked to integrate two relatively disparate economic systems. However, severe shocks, including the return in 1990 of approximately 850,000 Yemenis from the Gulf states, a subsequent major reduction of aid flows, and internal political disputes culminating in the 1994 civil war hampered economic growth.

Sources:

CIA World Factbook - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mo.html>

BBC News - http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/middle_east/country_profiles/791867.stm

Wikipedia - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/morocco>