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## CIVIL WAR THEORY TESTING: HOW GREED, HORIZONTAL INEQUALITIES, AND INSTITUTIONS EXPLAIN THE YEMENI CIVIL WAR BETWEEN 2004 AND 2009?

*This article applies a comparative design to test the explanatory power of formal quantitative models of civil war. It examines the grievance, horizontal inequalities, and institutional models of civil war through the case study of the Yemeni civil war between 2004 and 2009. The aim is to highlight political processes that culminate in civil war, and to account for omitted variables in theories of civil war. In the Yemeni case these variables were the competitive rebel market and tribalism. The article shows that civil wars are not isolated events, but parts of a cycle of violence. By accounting for micro-level motives the causal processes that lead to civil wars can be better understood.*

### INTRODUCTION

In March 2015, the Saudi Arabia led international coalition launched a military attack in Yemen against the Zaydi Houthi movement (Ansar Allah). Who are the Houthis and how did they evolve to a de facto status quo challenger rebel organization? In order to understand the current internationalized civil war, this article examines the 2004-2009 Saada wars which were fought by the government of Yemen (GoY) and the Houthis. The case selection was inspired by Sambanis' (2004) seminal *Using Case Studies to Expand Economic Models of Civil War* article. Here, Sambanis argues that "It is not as useful to view civil war outcomes as the result of deep-seated and hardly changing structural conditions as it is to observe the links among different forms of political violence and to analyze the dynamics of conflict escalation and the transition from one form of violence to another." (Sambanis, 2004:260) Studies of civil war most often apply cross-national statistical analyses, which are able to discover general patterns, but they often fail to account for the causal pathways that link micro-motives to macro outcomes. The paper applies a nested-analysis method (Liebermann, 2005). The three theories of civil wars presented in this article were tested statistically, so I did not need to re-test them. The purpose was rather to explore interactions among different independent variables and to identify causal processes by exploring the fit of the theories to the Saada wars. The unit of observation is dependent on the model examined. In case of the greed and the institutional model, the unit is the country, whereas in case of the horizontal inequality model, the unit is the governorate. The paper proceeds as follows. I begin with a brief discussion on the 2004-2009 fighting, mapping the actors and their relations. In the second section three theories of civil war onset -- greed, horizontal inequalities and political institutions -- are presented. Simultaneously, I assess their explanatory power in the context of the Saada wars to improve causal inferences drawn on the basis of these models. The paper then concludes with a discussion of findings and their relevance for the theoretical debate about civil wars.

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## FACTUAL BACKGROUND TO THE SAADA WARS

For today Yemen became a vivid illustration of escalatory mechanisms, since what started as an intrastate conflict, quickly evolved to an internationalized civil war.<sup>2</sup> In order to understand the causes of the current war one need to examine the conflict in its “infancy”, i.e.: when it was fought between two clearly distinguishable local parties. Note that the Saada wars were for several years not included in UCDP data due to the lack of a stated incompatibility. This fact highlights the often limited utility of defining civil wars by achieving a certain threshold of casualties (in case of the UCDP is is 1,000 battle deaths).<sup>3</sup> Between 2004 and 2009 Zaydi Shiite fighters, known as the Houthis or Ansar Allah fought six rounds<sup>4</sup> of war against the GoY headed by that-time president Saleh. The conflict took place almost exclusively in the Zaydi minority’s stronghold in the northern governorate of Saada<sup>5</sup> adjacent to the Saudi border. Saleh’s extensive support of the Global War on Terror (GWOt) campaign after 9/11, and the subsequent invasion of Iraq marked a new era for the Houthi’s leader Hussein al-Houthi, who started to raise his opposition against the Saada - Washington alliance.<sup>6</sup> From 2002 onwards his sermons attracted authorities’ attention and they began to consider al Houthi’s political activism as an internal threat to state security. (Salmoni et al., 2010:7) In other words, the Saleh regime began to securitize<sup>7</sup> the Houhti-led activism which meant that extraordinary measures were legitimized against the movement. In 2004, after a failed attempt by Saleh to find a political compromise with al-Houthi, the GoY began its military attack against the group in their mountainous stronghold with the aim of killing the movements leader. After the death of al-Houthi, his father and later his younger brother took charge of the group. In 2007 Qatari representatives intervened and offered to broker a peace deal which demanded ceasefire, but it

<sup>2</sup> The current Yemeni civil war broke out in 2014, after the Shiite Houthi rebels took over over the capital, Sanaa and subsequently occupied larger swathes of the northern and central part of the country. Note that it was not the protest itself that caused the current conflict. Yemen faces myriad of structural problems ranging from environmental, humanitarian and security problems.

<sup>3</sup> The UCDP definitions states that the incompatibility, or the conflict issue, can be either concerning government (the type of the political system, the replacement of the central government) or territory (secession or autonomy for intrastate conflicts). Ansarallah has persistently claimed that they don’t want to overthrow the sitting government. Instead, the group stated that it wants the government to end what they perceive as socioeconomic injustices and the governments political discrimination of the group and the Houthi tribe. On 9 March 2014, however, the leader of the group, Abd-al-Malik al-Huthi, called on the government to step down. The leader cited what the group perceived as the governments failure to improve living standards in the country as well as corruption as reasons for its call for resignation.” For further details see: UCDP: Ansarallah, accessed: <http://ucdp.uu.se/#actor/1091>

<sup>4</sup> The fighting took place in the following phases. First round: June 2004 to September 2004, second round: March 2005 to May 2005, third round: November 2005 to early 2006, fourth round: January 2007 to June 2007, fifth round: March 2008 to July 2008, sixth round: August 2009 through February 2010 (Boucek, 2010)

<sup>5</sup> In terms of administrative division, Yemen is composed of four regions at the national level (northern, southern, western and eastern), 22 governorates, 333 districts and 37,000 settlements.

<sup>6</sup> Later on, he advised his followers to stop paying zakat to the state, and instead give it to the Houthis. (Day, 2012: 216).

<sup>7</sup> The present paper applies the following definition of securitization: “The construction of identities on the basis of the negative difference provided by radical otherness and enmity” (Browning, Joenniemi 2016: 2).

proved to be short-lived. The war ended with the heavy-handed involvement of the Saudi Air Force in November 2009.<sup>8</sup>

### ACTOR MAPPING AND CONFLICT CHARACTERISTICS

To understand civil war's onset, duration, termination and recurrence first and foremost actors, their preferences and the structure they are embedded in is need to be correctly mapped. Who are the Houthi rebels? What is their relationship with the government, with the Yemeni population and how do they position themselves in relation to other local rebel groups? By answering these questions, the environment – or “market” - in which rebels operate and make strategic decisions can be better understood. The Houthis along with Southern Movement and the Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) poses a critical security challenge to stability in Yemen. In fact, these groups are competitive status-quo challengers. Why the Houthis were able to outperform other groups? In short, they managed to overcome the *collective action* (CAP), the *coordination* and the *time-consistency problems*.<sup>9</sup> The Houthi's kin networks (in the form of tribes), the group's religious homogeneity (Zaydism), the geographic concentration (smaller distance should make mobilization easier), the previously established networks (in the form of the Believing Youth organization) gave al-Houthi the *social capital* which is essentially for mobilization.

Theoretically, governments possess monopoly over the use of force, and responsible for the provision of public goods, most importantly of security. However, governments often fail to exercise their power over large swaths of territory. As a consequence, certain micro-states emerge where local warlords, tribal leaders and all kinds of Olsonian stationary bandits fulfill the role of protection. Yemen is characterized by a unique dual-governance structure. Historically, the central government possessed only a limited degree of control over the country's peripheral provinces. Water scarcity, the lack of employment opportunities and harsh weather conditions are all factors that contributed to the semi-autonomous nature of the northern region. Here, the dominant social value system is *qabyala* (tribalism), in which kin networks structure the daily lives of locals. In practice, tribal confederations<sup>10</sup> and their powerful leaders are responsible for providing conflict mediation, public services and other basic state functions. Therefore, the local population's loyalty is based on these socio-cultural microstructures and as such territory and power is organized quite differently from the Westphalian state model. These structural features have important consequences on rebel group's ability to organize.

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<sup>8</sup> The Sa'ada wars inevitably transformed the Houthi movement from a student organization to a popular resistance movement. Despite the protracted nature of the conflict and the high level of casualties, the simple fact that the Houthis could not be defeated by government forces alone, only by the intervention of Yemen's much larger and military capable neighbor Saudi Arabia, was enough for the movement to portray the military struggle as a victory.

<sup>9</sup> At the same time, it is necessary to highlight that CAP is not just an in-group phenomenon. The several ceasefires that were established during the conflict were unable to provide lasting solutions because of the mistrust between the government and the Houthi rebels. For further information on the game theoretical problems rebel face, see: Collier 1999

<sup>10</sup> The Hashid and Baku confederations are among the most influential tribal networks in Yemen

The wars in Saada are particularly difficult to accurately examine since the government severely restricted media access. According to the estimates of RAND, casualties range between hundreds to more than 20,000.<sup>11</sup> In addition, more than 150,000 displaced people were reported and an estimated 3,000 people have been arrested for supporting the Houthis (Salmoni et.al 2010:15). The conflict has been characterized by continuous fighting of varying intensity, aided by multiple short-lived ceasefires and external mediation attempts.<sup>12</sup> The fighting ended when the Saudi military began to directly confront the Houthis. The origins of the conflict are debated, but as the fighting proceeded the heavy-handed military responses of the government led to new grievances, further protracting the conflict.<sup>13</sup> According to Boucek (2010:1) at the beginning of the war the Houthis were “protesting the dilution of Zaidi influence and identity” which was primarily caused by the presence of the Sunni Salafi activists and the governments’ tacit support for their expansion. Another often cited cause is the historical underdevelopment of the northern governorate. According to the official GoY reasoning, the Houthi’s aim was to re-establish the Zaydi imamate that ruled Yemen for more than a thousand years until the 1962 republican revolution. It is necessary to note that during this period the Houthis were perceived as secondary threats to Yemen’s political stability and the main status quo challenger was identified as the Southern movement.<sup>14</sup>

## **THEORIES OF CIVIL WAR THE GREED MODEL**

Collier’s and Hoeffler’s article (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004) (henceforth CH) contrasts the economic accounts that explain rebellion in terms of opportunities (greed) to the political science literature which traces back the origins of violent conflicts to motives (grievance) and argues that civil wars are not caused by ethnic divisions, but by the opportunity structure for the organization of insurgency.<sup>15</sup> The CH model disaggregates opportunities into the following independent

<sup>11</sup> By applying Kalyvas and Balcells’ (2010) categorization, it becomes clear that the technology of rebellion in the Sadaa was a textbook example of irregular civil wars, in which the military technologies of the rebels were lagging behind those of the state. (Kalyvas and Balcells, 2010: 418). At the same time, it is important to note that the Houthis military capabilities were gradually evolving because they were able to capture weapons from the GoY and the frequent ceasefires provided them the necessary time to rearm and to reorganize. (Salmoni et. al, 2010:100-103)

<sup>12</sup> This paper refers to the Sadaa wars as a continuous conflict and only emphasis the separate phases when it’s necessary for theory testing.

<sup>13</sup> Note that this assumption resonates with Fearon and Laitin’s argument, who claim that “It seems quite clear that intense grievances are produced by civil war – indeed, this is often a central objective of rebel strategy.” (2003:88)

<sup>14</sup> As such, the ruling regime’s motivation in the Saada wars were multifaceted: Saleh anticipated that the war in the North is most likely to result in a military victory and that the Saada wars will act as a deterrent for the Southern Movement. (Boucek, 2010:3)

<sup>15</sup> Fearon and Laitins (2003) (FL) applies a similar analytical lens and arrives to the same conclusions, i.e.: the conditions that favor insurgency – state weakness marked by poverty, large population, and instability – are better predictors of which countries are at risk for civil war than are indicators of ethnic and religious diversity or state discrimination against minority religions or languages.

variables: *availability of financing rebellion* (1), *atypically low cost/cost of rebellion* (2), *low costs of conflict specific capital* (3) *atypically weak government military capabilities* (4).

The CH model argues that *rebellion can be financed* (1) through natural resource extortion<sup>16</sup> (1/a), donations from diasporas (1/b), and subventions from hostile governments (1/c). They found that primary commodity exports substantially increase conflict risk and diasporas substantially increase the risk of conflict renewal. The unification of Yemen in 1990 was marked by sudden socio-political and economic changes which was led by the rapid development of the oil sector.<sup>17</sup> Between 2000 and 2009, the hydrocarbon sector accounted directly for 15 percent of Yemen's GDP, 80-90 percent of its export and 65 percent of government revenues (IMF, 2011). At the same time, since 2001 oil output is drastically declining and the sector is plagued by highly inefficient fuel subsidies. This trend signals weak government capabilities, the lack of effective institutions, and the suboptimal redistribution of oil revenues<sup>18</sup> across governorates. *Diaspora support* (1/b) is hard to measure in the case of Yemen, at least in the sense of the original CH model which proxies the size of a country's diaspora by its emigrants living in the United States.<sup>19</sup> Given the demographic and economic history of Yemen, a fruitful substitution of the diaspora proxy would be to estimate the remittances sent home by Yemeni workers and international aid.<sup>20</sup> Hostile government support (1/c) in the CH model was proxied by the Cold War. In the Cold War there were no such an entity as the Republic of Yemen. South Yemen, or the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDR) and North Yemen, known as the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) were indeed supported by the Soviet Union and the Western powers. As such, systemic effects influenced the capabilities of the two states mostly through the increased availability of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in South Yemen. This support however quickly dried up by the end of the Cold War.

According to the CH model the second explanatory variable for rebels to be able to engage in a violent conflict is *arising from atypically low cost/cost of rebellion* (2). They found that male secondary education enrollment (2/a), per capita income (2/b) and growth rate (3/b) all have statistically

<sup>16</sup> Natural resource extortion is proxied by the ratio of primary commodity exports to the GDP.

<sup>17</sup> The discovery and development of oil fields however proved to be a double-edge sword: It helped to overcome many of the challenges posed by the unification, but it created a new source of vulnerability for the government due to price fluctuations (IMF 2001) and as a potential opportunity for greed-based rebellion through the mechanisms of asymmetrical resource revenue redistribution policies.

<sup>18</sup> The majority of the oil fields are located in the southern part of Yemen and indeed one of the main problems of the Southern movement is that they did not enjoy the wealth generated by the oil sector. At the same time oil is not a resource that is easy to capture. Even if that would be the aim of a particular rebel group it would make more sense in the Southern Movement's case.

<sup>19</sup> According to the Embassy of the Republic of Yemen in Washington DC there were an estimated 350,000-400,000 Yemenis living in the United States as of 2010. But almost the double of this number lives in the United Kingdom and across the Gulf-countries, most notably in Saudi Arabia.

<sup>20</sup> Even though precise estimates are hard to make due to the often informal nature of remittances, according to Lackner (2014:270) between 2000 and 2010 remittances to Yemen fluctuated between 1,4 and 1,5 billion USD. This means that controlling for the demographic changes in this period, remittances constituted between 15,7 and 6,25 percent of the GNI. Remittance dependence also signals weak government capacity, since it means that people are ready to move to a different country, leaving their family behind in order to earn enough money.

significant and substantial effects that reduce conflict risk. First and foremost, poverty in Yemen is endemic.<sup>21</sup> According to the UNESCO and the World Bank data, male secondary enrollment (2/a) was around 54 per cent in 2008. The biggest problem remains that there are marked inequalities in access between rural and urban children, between boys and girls and regions. (World Bank, 2006). For the sake of this analysis it is important that Saada is a rural, underdeveloped region thus educational opportunities are few.<sup>22</sup> In fact, the only higher education institute in Saada governorate is the Saada College. Therefore, the recruit base of the Houthis (male resident without secondary education) is higher than in other areas of the country. Yemen is a low income country, in 2005 the GDP per capita was 928.6 USD and it increased only to 1310 by 2010 (2/b).<sup>23</sup> According to the World Bank (2015) between 1990 and 2010 on average the economy grew (2/c) at 5 percent annually, but due to the enormous demographic pressure -- the annual population growth rate was at 3.1 percent over this period -- GDP per capita rose only 1.3 percent a year. This number is the lowest in the MENA region. These numbers signal extremely weak government capacity which according to the model makes rebellion viable.<sup>24</sup> It is important to note that given these economic indicators, the Houthis are operating under resource constraints in their recruitment process.<sup>25</sup>

The third factor in the CH model which makes rebellion viable is that *conflict specific capital* (3) is unusually cheap. This capital usually refers to SALW availability for non-state actors. While the exact number and types of weapons remain challenging to assess, estimates claimed the number to be between 40 million to 60 million, but a more recent estimate puts this number around 6-9 million.<sup>26</sup> Probably more important is that SALW, their trade and their socio-cultural acceptance is concentrated in the very area of the Houthi-government contestations. Furthermore, Saada is home to Suq al-Talh, the largest weapons market in the entire country (Salmoni et.al, 2010:31) which operates like a “grocery store”<sup>27</sup> with no formal requirement to purchase a

<sup>21</sup> According to World Bank data, in 2005 34.5 percent of the population lived below the poverty line. This number increased to 48.6 in 2014.

<sup>22</sup> According to the Human Rights Watch in 2011, out of Saada governorates 725 schools 70 were almost completely destroyed and another 145 were partially destroyed or looted. This means that in the past couple of years, secondary male educational enrollment drastically decreased thereby potential students are likely to be involved in the fights, since they have very few outside options. For additional information on the current wars effect on education, see: Human Rights Watch: Education Under Attack, Yemen Country profile, March 18, 2014

<sup>23</sup> This number is well below the regional MENA average which was 5,730 USD in 2010. Another sharp contrast is that Saudi Arabia's GDP per capita in the same year was more than 10 times more than Yemen's, 15,836 USD. World Bank Statistics

<sup>24</sup> According to Salmoni et. al (2010:3) “Perhaps more than any other Arab country, Yemen has a central government that possesses an extremely attenuated degree of control over its peripheries – ant the north is the least responsive to Sanaa.”

<sup>25</sup> Attracting fighters by offering selective incentives in the form of pecuniary rewards then becomes a challenge and the rebel leader has to rely more on non-pecuniary rewards.

<sup>26</sup> United Nations Security Council (2015): Letter dates 20 february 2015 from the Panel of Experts on Yemen established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2140 (2014) addressed to the President of the Security Council

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

weapon. Rebel armament costs are therefore low, since SALW availability is high, government control over SALW is virtually non-existent in Saada, and carrying weapons openly in the public is a socially accepted and embedded practice.

The fourth variable in the CH model is the *atypically weak government military capability* (4) which means that forests and mountains provide rebels with safe haven. Medium and high altitude mountains are located in the South and they are surrounded by a desert area, called the Empty Quarter. According to Clark (2010:250) “The region’s jagged mountains and roomy caves have always favored the rebels”. In sum, according to the CH-model Yemen’s geographic, economic and political settings are making the country more prone to civil war. However, the model does not fully able to explain the successful recruitment of the Houthis, since they have to operate under a severe resource constraint.

## HORIZONTAL INEQUALITIES

First and foremost, it is necessary to acknowledge that grievances are difficult to proxy and thus to measure their impact on civil war onset. The concept of horizontal inequalities (HI) (Stewart 2002, 2008) however reveals mechanisms through which grievances can be utilized by rebel groups to mobilize for violent action.<sup>28</sup> HIs are systematic economic and political inequalities between ethnic, religious or regional groups, either perceived or real. If these inequalities are coinciding with cultural cleavages, mobilization becomes possible. Nevertheless, in order violence to become a viable option the social contract between the state and its subject has to be dysfunctional. According to Murshed and Gates (2005:123) *asset inequality* (1), *unequal access to public employment* (2), *unequal access to public services* (3) *over-taxation and economic mismanagement* (4) are salient aspects of HIs.<sup>29</sup>

In terms of *asset inequality* (1) land ownership is closely tied to water rights. As both resources are scarce in the country, competition over them is so extreme that according to the Yemen Armed Violence Assessment (2010), “land disputes are the single most common cause of armed violence in the country.” Finding comparative data is extremely hard due to the lack of authentication or proper land registration system. However, it is argued by the World Bank (2006) that ownership is concentrating in the hands of a few influential families and as such weaker social groups are disadvantaged.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> According to the HI model it is not only resentment among the deprived that may cause political instability. The relatively privileged can also attack the unprivileged (or the state) as a reaction to what they may perceive of as unfair redistribution, or out of fear that the relatively deprived may demand more resources and political power.

<sup>29</sup> In case of Yemen then horizontal inequalities need to be augmented with a spatial lens. As most of the Houthi rebels are from of Saada and this is the area where the actual conflict took place, it logically follows to compare this region’s position relative to other governorates to assess the real impact of horizontal inequalities.

<sup>30</sup> Due to the lack of data however the problem whether for example Southern or Northern Yemenis have better access to land remains unresolved. General patterns of inequality are presented and as it had been already demonstrated, the Northern part is a semi-autonomous region which implies that land acquisition and ownership is regulated by local tribal rules rather than state legislation.

Data on governorate level public employment (1) is also difficult to find, but the cooptation of influential tribal leaders and the fact that they are appointed to government offices ensures that they become key actors in the patronage system. As a result, access to public employment is the privilege of the few elderly and already influential tribal leaders. The Saada region indeed had an *unequal access to public services* (2) (Salmoni et. al. 2010, Clark 2014, Boucek 2010). A vivid illustration of this is that the Water Ministry has not established a local water corporation in the governorate. Furthermore, citizens have limited access to formal and effective legal systems. Given the tribal history of Saada, people are more likely to utilize traditional dispute resolution mechanisms.<sup>31</sup> *Economic mismanagement* (3) is inextricably linked to the above detailed discrepancies. Given the semi-autonomous nature of the governorate and its proximity to Saudi Arabia, people in Saada developed local economic initiatives, aimed for self-reliance and relied on revenues from the cross-border trade with the Kingdom. Beside the cash crop oriented agricultural activity, residents earn money through the taxation of various transportation routes. According to Salmoni et. al “both the geographical context and the nature of these exchanges is such that they are virtually impossible for the authorities to regulate.” (2010:35)

In order to gain a complex understanding of HI's (perceived or real) identity related mechanisms need to be understood. Currently, Zaydism make up 35 to 45 per cent of Yemen's total population.<sup>32</sup> The post-Imamate era was characterized by the increasing marginalization of the Zaydi sect, the gradually increasing Saudi Arabia supported Wahhabi infiltration into the Zaydi tribal heartlands, and the subsequent conversion of many Zaydis to Wahhabism. (King 2012: 406).<sup>33</sup> After the 1994 civil war, Hussein al-Houthi fled to Syria and after returning to Saada he established the Believing Youth (BY) movement. The BY started as a network of educational centers for the marginalized northern Yemeni youth. When they began to open their summer camps around 1994 they simultaneously began to politicize the Zaydi cause (Freeman 2009:1008). By this time, between 10,000 and 15,000 students from the Saada and neighboring governorates attended these camps. As such, the BY re-created the Zaydi identity and established the necessary social capital for the subsequent anti-regime campaigns.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, social capital in the form of the BY reduced the adverse selection effect that insurgent organizations often face. Collective action was viable in case of the Saada wars, because of Hussein al-Houthi, a characteristic

<sup>31</sup> These findings are further supported by the results of the Social Vulnerability Index which claims that Saada is one of the most vulnerable governorates with the most underdeveloped infrastructure in the country. (Kanhed and Kumar, 2015)

<sup>32</sup> It is important to clarify that although Zaydi Shiism (or the so-called Fivers) is a sub-sect of Shiite Islam, it's doctrinally different from the dominant “Twelver Shiism” which is practiced in Iran, Iraq and Lebanon. In fact, Zaydi religious practices are closer to Sunni Islam.

<sup>33</sup> From the 1980's, Wahabbism rapidly gained support in the originally Zaydi territories due to its extensive “marketing strategies”, such as the establishment of religious institutions, educational centers and massive social benefit systems. Riyadh's aim was to gradually transform the socio-cultural and religious landscape of northern Yemen and to alter the balance of power to Riyadh's favor. The al-Haqq party was formed by the al-Houthi and other families as a competitor against the Salafists supported Islah party.

<sup>34</sup> Initially the BY found support in governmental circles as it was seen as another platform for cooptation. (Salmoni et.al, 2010: 92-103).



“conflict entrepreneur” (Gates, 2011) who in fact was responsible for the effective organization of the insurgency.

## POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

I argue that greed and grievance based accounts are not rival, but rather complementary explanations. Both of them takes a rebel perspective and views the state as the entity which either creates or quell opportunities for rebellion. In Yemen, both the willingness (fuelled by horizontal inequalities) and the opportunity (state weakness in general) was given for a civil war to broke out. At the same time, it is necessary to include a regime perspective and to examine whether Yemen’s peculiar historical political settings play any role in it’s instability, and if it does, in what direction do these institutions influence the likelihood of civil war onset. According to Hegre et. al (2001) intermediate regimes are the most prone to civil war, even if they have had time to consolidate and as such there is an inverted-U shaped curve between the level of democracy and the likelihood of civil war. Semi-democracies or anocracies combines *repressiveness* and *openness* which opens a window of opportunity for rebellion. This institutional contradiction translates to political incoherence which in turn invites civil violence.

Yemen’s Polity Score in 2009-2010 was -2, meaning that it is indeed an anocracy.<sup>35</sup> According to the 2010 Polity IV country report, there are only slight limitations on the executive power and political competition is restricted. In 1990 after unification, the newly established Republic of Yemen declared itself a participatory parliamentary democracy. In 1991 a new constitution was adopted which granted voting and candidacy rights to all adult citizens; it recognized the legal equality of citizens; judicial independence and directly elected parliament. However, in reality the freedom of expression and political associations were severely limited. President Saleh ruled the country for 33 years and even though that there were progressive moves towards democratization, Yemen’s political system remained more autocratic than democratic primary because of the patronage and neopatril ruling techniques.<sup>36</sup>

Unquestionably, 33 years should be enough time for a democracy to consolidate, however in case of Yemen the “one step forward two steps back” policy was the reality. The country gradually moved back to autocracy ever since the unification. The peculiar Yemeni patronage system invites political contestation, because it is fluid and it does not embody itself in either fully repressive or inclusive state institutions, but in the ruling regime’s short-term interest towards various groups. The patronage system is probably the largest impediment to the establishment of a real democracy in Yemen. As such, the political process that Yemen witnessed after the unification is characterized by “limited opening, controlled pluralism, and regime endurance that are related processes and all too often repression tends to follow periods of relaxed control.” (Phillips 2007:5) The unification took place in the atmosphere of mutual distrust and even though it see-

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<sup>35</sup> According to the Polity project, “The Polity scores can also be converted into regime categories in a suggested three part categorization of “autocracies” (-10 to -6), “anocracies” (-5 to +5 and three special values: -66, -77 and -88), and “democracies” (+6 to +10). As such, Yemen with it’s -2 score falls into the anocracy category.

<sup>36</sup> A vivid illustration of the difficulties of ruling Yemen was when President Saleh famously likened governing Yemen to the act of “dancing on the head of snakes”.

med like that the CAP was eliminated, the 1994 civil war proved that the agreement between the former YAR and PDRY<sup>37</sup> was ineffective. The 1994 civil war ended in and cemented the northern dominance. Previous steps towards democratization were quickly reversed and the ruling General People's Congress (GPC) party retracted many of its progressive reforms. According to the Hegre et. al model, the failed democratization process in the unified Yemen made the country more prone to civil war.

## I. FINDINGS

The following typography summarizes the explanatory power and the applicability of the theories.

|  | <i>Explain</i>   | <i>Miss</i>   | <i>Applicability</i>   |
|--|--|---|--|
| <b><i>Greed</i></b><br>1. <i>availability of finance rebellion</i><br>2. <i>atypically low costs</i><br>3. <i>low costs of conflict specific capital</i><br>4. <i>weak government capabilities</i> | 1. not fully supported<br>2. supported<br>3. supported<br>4. supported | - path dependency: the effects of unification and failed democratization on development<br>- role of foreign aid and remittances<br>- local level power settings: tribalism (substitution for state power)<br>- successful rebellion in resource constrained settings | Conflict phase: onset<br>Perspective: rebel<br>Unit of analysis: country           |
| <b><i>Grievance (HI's)</i></b><br>1. <i>asset inequality</i><br>2. <i>unequal access to public employment</i><br>3. <i>unequal access to public services</i><br>4. <i>economic mismanagement</i>   | 1.: supported<br>2.: supported<br>3.: supported<br>4.: supported       | - how sub-state alternatives to the government (tribalism related mechanisms) are able to mitigate HI's   | Conflict phase: recurrence<br>Perspective: rebel<br>Unity of analysis: governorate |
| <b><i>Regime type</i></b><br>1. <i>Semidemocracy</i><br>2. <i>T ransition</i>  | 1: supported<br>2: supported   | Conflict phase: roots/onset   | Perspective: GoY<br>Unit of analysis: state  |

Table 1. Civil war theory testing in the case-study of the Saada wars

<sup>37</sup> Note that, neither states had a history of democratic politics

## CONCLUSION

This article assessed the explanatory power of three general theories of civil war through the case study of the Yemeni civil war (2004-2009). The paper's aim was to uncover the casual links that eventually led to the eruption of the civil war. The paper applied a nested analysis (Liebermann, 2005) methodology which combines large-N statistical findings with small-N qualitative studies. I selected the Yemeni case to illustrate the utility of viewing civil wars not as discrete events, but as certain phases in the cycle of violence. This case-study contributes to the literature in the following ways: It challenged the conventional "civil war" categorization which rests on a certain threshold of deaths on both sides. Recall that the Saada wars are not included in the UCDP database, but omitting this period (the Saada wars) limits our understanding of the actually coded civil war (from 2014 according to the UCDP). Secondly, qualitative studies on civil wars rarely take a comparative approach in terms of theory testing. Third, by simultaneously assessing three different schools' explanatory power, the case-study was able identify previously omitted variables that contributed to the outbreak and the protraction of the war. First, the effect of a *competitive rebel market* on civil war onset and duration. In case of Yemen, it is essential to include the multiple potential status quo challengers (AQAP, the Southern Movement and the Houthis) because they divert the governments attention and resources. The competitive rebel market can provide another window of opportunity for a rebel group to successfully mobilize and this can be incorporated into the general models. Secondly, these theories treat a civil war mostly as a closed game with two players, i.e.: rebels and the government. This obviously make sense for the sake of comparability when one seeks to do a large N statistical analysis. However micro-level studies reveal that in reality such sub-state level variables, as tribalism decreases the costs of rebellion, as it can provide a solid basis for overcoming collective action problems. Accounting for these details is only possible in a detailed case study, but they reveal important hiatus in macro level studies.

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