

Poverty: Inhibitor of Yemeni Revolution

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The world is riddled with impoverished countries; this has become an unfortunate fact of life. Regrettably, many of these countries also receive the double misfortune of oppressive leadership or a fragmented political system which the citizens of the country generally disfavor. Located within the region of the Middle East is one of these impoverished countries with a disjointed political system – Yemen (Lust, 2013, pp. 867, 874, 876).

In trying to fix the vast amounts of political and economic problems it faces, the country has had previous generally decentralized attempts at a revolution, with less than successful results (Gelvin, 2012, p. 80). Unfortunately, it seems as though the likelihood of Yemen succeeding in a full-scale democracy revolution is miniscule, if not non-existent. This lack of possibility is owed in great part directly to one very important factor: the economic state that the country is in.

In an effort to show that Yemen is very unlikely to succeed in a democratic revolution, previous scientific research will first be analyzed, as well the history of Yemen afterward – from this information, a conclusion can be drawn. Regrettably, this previous scientific research has shown that it is very unlikely for impoverished countries in an economic situation similar to that of Yemen to have any sort of successful political revolution which puts power in the hands of the country's citizens (Helliwell, 1994; Huang, 2012); likewise, Yemen's own past demonstrates that previous attempts at a revolution have not been successful (Lust, 2013, p. 876). From this material, it can be seen that the poverty status for individuals in Yemen greatly prohibits the likelihood of a successful democratic revolution from taking place to any degree.

Poorer Countries Struggle to Form Democracies

The first premise necessary to establish in order to prove that it is extremely unlikely for

the country to have an effective democratic revolution is the fact that poor countries are much less likely to form a successful democracy. There have been ample scientific studies done which show that either poor countries are very unlikely to form democracies or have successful democratic revolutions, or wealthy countries are more likely to form democracies (Lipset, 1959; Helliwell, 1994). There are a variety of logical reasons to sufficiently explain why these this may be the case.

Evidence

In Helliwell's article, the connection between a country's income and the likelihood for that country to have a democratic form of government is analyzed in-depth (1994). As points out from previous studies, the fact that democracy forms where economic development and education levels are high has been a "longstanding presumption" (Helliwell, 1994, p. 225). In the article, he points out the statistical data which supports the relationship between a very economically developed county and the likelihood for that country to form a democracy, and explains how the data does in fact show causation, and not simply a correlation (Helliwell, 1994, p. 233). He further explains how the data he collected does indeed show that the good economic standing caused a democracy to form, and not that the formation of a democracy caused a good economic standing (Helliwell, 1994, p. 243).

In his article, Helliwell even analyses the idea that different cultures may create very different degrees of democracy, finding that oil-dependent countries in the Middle East produce a "sharply lower" degree of democracy (where democracy in this study is measured between 0 and 1.0, with 0 being no political and civil rights and 1.0 being full measures of both political and civil rights) (Helliwell, 1994, p. 228). This information further supports the idea that Yemen, which could be potentially be considered an oil-dependent country or at least to have a similar

culture, is very unlikely to form a democracy, and if it somehow were to manage this anyway the democracy is very likely to be of a lower degree.

Helliwell finally concludes his article with a definitive statement: “The data surveyed here support strongly the notion that countries at higher income levels are more likely to have democratic forms of government,” (Helliwell, 1994, p. 244). He then goes on to clarify that the positive correlation of the data shown “does not appear to be the result of reverse causation: estimates of the reverse effect of democracy on subsequent growth indicate that this feedback is more likely to be negative than positive,” meaning that the data show that high income causes a democracy, not that a democracy causes high income (since, as explained, this relation is actually more likely to be negative) (Helliwell, 1994, p. 244).

There are other articles which examine similarly-related connections between a country’s economy and its political system (Huang, 2012; Lehning, 2007). In the article by Huang, a “unified political economy model” is established in order to analyze the process of democratization from the “dynamic economic development” perspective (Huang, 2012, p. 1341). The article explains as a country’s economy progresses (driven by “the inherent technical features of different production factors”), its political system coevolves with it, due to political conflicts which arise “among factor owners in output distribution” (Huang, 2012, p. 1360). To clarify, this means that Huang’s article shows that as a country’s economic source naturally shifts from land to human capital, the political system shifts along with it from monarchy to democracy due to the power shifting from landlords to workers (Huang, 2012, p. 1341). It also mentions that when natural resources are the main source of wealth in a country, authoritarian regimes are more probable to be the “political equilibrium”, due to the fact that the power is not in the hands of the workers when human capital is not the main source of wealth (Huang, 2012, p. 1360). This

information supports the fact that Yemen is very unlikely to form a full democracy due to its highly land-based and partially oil-based economy, neither of which are factors which allow for a natural transition to a democratic political system.

In Lehning's article, among several things examined is the connection between poverty and political participation (2007). She states that as evidence shows, "political scientists have found that individuals living in poverty fail to participate in such political activities as voting, protesting, or contacting elected officials," (Lehning, 2007, pp. 96, 97). Although much of this information is mainly applied specifically to the United States, it can be seen that this research can be applied to citizens in Yemen as well.

Reasoning

There are a variety of logical reasons that a country which has a poor economic system would be much less likely to succeed in forming a democracy. The main factor is that poor economic systems are saturated with unemployed and ravenous individuals. In situations such as this, these individuals are then clearly much less likely to focus on their political rights and freedoms, and much more likely instead to focus on basic survival instincts, namely being the acquisition of food. Lehning also states a few factors which may potentially explain the low political participation rates among the poor, such as the fact that "those living in poverty tend to be poorly organized," and although her study mainly applied to the United States, this information may potentially be extrapolated to include the analysis of Yemen (Lehning, 2007, p. 97). This then draws a clear explanation of why countries with a poor economy then are less likely to form democracies.

Essentially, when the people of a country have a high poverty level, they are much too focused on providing food for their family and getting through the day to be focused on politics.

For this reason, without a focus on politics, political change cannot take place on a wide-scale level. As further possible explanation, in addition to these facts, due to the high poverty level the technology such as social media which is present in many other countries is absent. This means that widespread dissemination of information is far more difficult, since the technological advances which allow for more efficient communication are simply not present. All of this information can be used to logically explain some of the potential reasons for the existence of this connection between a country's economic situation and that country's ability of likelihood to form a full democracy.

Causation Conclusion

It can be seen by taking into account all of this information that it is very improbable, if not nearly impossible, for an extremely poor country to form a successful democracy. It takes a certain level of financial stability for enough individuals to stop focusing on whether where their next meal will come from and start focusing on political change. This all establishes the second premise in explaining that it is exceedingly unlikely for Yemen to have a successful democratic revolution: that poorer countries are far less likely to form democracies.

Yemen – A Poor Country

The second premise necessary to establish in order to prove that it is extremely unlikely for the country to have a successful democratic revolution is the fact that Yemen is indeed a poor country. There are a great deal of studies and evidence which show that Yemen is unquestionably poor, both comparatively and absolutely (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013; Breisinger, Xinshen, Collion, & Rondot, 2011; Euphrates Institute, 2011; Lust, 2013; Rural Poverty Portal, 2009; World Bank, 1996). In order to show that Yemen is a poor country, it is proper to first explain the economic history of the country, since examining its current economic state

inevitably leads to the question of how Yemen fell into the economic status that it is currently in. Its past history may also be necessary in order to examine if the country has any chance at improving its economic state.

History

Yemen, officially known as the Yemeni Republic, is an Arab country which was formed in 1990 by the unification of North Yemen (officially the Yemen Arab Republic) and South Yemen (officially the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen) (Lust, 2013, p. 872; World Statesmen.org; 2012). Since its formation, Yemen has remained a country in need of serious economic aid (Breisinger, Xinshen, Collion, & Rondot, 2011, p. 156; Gelvin, 2012, p. 70; Lust, 2013, pp. 881-883). Due to a variety of characteristics and circumstances, it appears as though Yemen has continued throughout the years to remain in a state of economic despair.

Even before the unification of North Yemen and South Yemen in 1990, the area now known as Yemen was poor (Colton, 2010, p. 410). However, during the 1980s, the situation looked hopeful as things were slowly improving (Colton, 2010, p. 411). This lasted until the situation quickly took a turn for the worse, when shortly after it was unified Yemen professed its support for the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (Colton, 2010, pp. 414, 415; Library of Congress, 2008, p. 8). At this point, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait reacted to this Iraqi support negatively, which greatly worsened the state of Yemen's economy (Colton, 2010, pp. 414, 415; Library of Congress, 2008, p. 8). Its economy was then brought even further down by Yemen's 1994 civil war (Library of Congress, 2008, p. 8; Lust, 2013, p. 882). This trend then continued as Yemen's reliance on oil exportation and the reduction of oil exports led to even more economic trouble, and the corruption within the government caused yet more issues (Library of Congress, 2008, p. 9; Palmer, 2010).

Support for Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. One of the first factors which led to Yemen's increasingly negative economic state was its stance on Iraq's invasion of Kuwait (Colton, 2010, pp. 414, 415; Library of Congress, 2008, p. 8). Up until this point in the early 1990s, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait had been providing "critical financial assistance" to Yemen (Library of Congress, 2008, p. 13). Once Yemen began its support of Iraq during the 1990-91 Gulf War, both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait dramatically reduced their economic aid to Yemen (Library of Congress, 2008, p. 8). Additionally, due to its support of Iraq Saudi Arabia "demanded that all Yemenis in the Kingdom be required to have work permits and that all Yemeni businessmen have Saudi partners," (Colton, 2010, p. 414). This caused the expulsion of nearly 1 million Yemeni workers from Saudi Arabia, forcing these now unemployed workers back into Yemen (Library of Congress, 2008, p. 8; Colton, 2010, p. 414). The country then had a swelling unemployment rate, which negatively affected the economy (Colton, 2010, p. 415).

Civil war. Just a few short years after Yemen's support for Iraq during the Gulf War, in 1994 Yemen entered a civil war (Gelvin, 2012, p. 75; Infoplease, 2012; Lust, 2013, p. 873). This of course cost Yemen's economy greatly, as wars are apt to do, which sent the country even further into a state of economic issue (Library of Congress, 2008, p. 8; Palmer, 2010). Although the civil war lasted barely over two months, Yemen's economy was further devastated due to the war; the war caused at least \$2 billion worth of damage in the country, and some estimates of the damage done are even higher (Lust, 2013, p. 873). In addition to this information, it is even directly stated in an article about the poverty of Yemen that because of this civil war, since 1995 the country has heavily relied on economic aid in order to sustain its economy (Palmer, 2010, p. 8).

Decreasing oil exportation. One of the major direct causes for Yemen's decreasing

economic status was its high dependence on oil exportation, which rapidly decreased in quantity (Palmer, 2010; Plaut, 2008). Although it is a small producer of oil and does not belong to the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), as of 2008 income from oil production still counted for 75 percent of the government's revenue (Library of Congress, 2008). Although the government has tried to move away from its reliance on oil by initiating economic reform programs in 2006 in attempt to diversify its economy, the fact still remains that its previous dependence on oil combined with a reduction in oil exportation has contributed to Yemen's current economic state (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013).

Corruption. Lastly, one of the main causes for the current state of economic poverty in Yemen is the corruption within its political system (Palmer, 2010). There is a great deal of research which shows that Yemen has been, and continues to be, a politically corrupt country on a multitude of levels (ARD, Inc., 2006; Euphrates Institute, 2011; Salisbury, 2013). There have also been scientific studies done which demonstrate the relation between high corruption within the government and great economic problems (Blackburn, 2012). All of these examinations back the fact that the corruption with Yemen is one of the major contributors to its current terrible economic situation. It is an unfortunate cycle that corruption is a cause of poverty, yet poverty is an inhibitor of expelling corruption.

Current State

Due to many of its historical factors, as well as several ongoing factors, there are countless sources which show that currently, Yemen is in a state of economic despair (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013; Breisinger, Xinshen, Collion, & Rondot, 2011; Euphrates Institute, 2011; Rural Poverty Portal, 2009; World Bank, 1996). Some of these sources directly state that the country has the highest levels of poverty in the Middle East, if not the entire world.

(Breisinger, Xinshen, Collion, & Rondot, 2011; Rural Poverty Portal, 2009).

In order to clearly show that Yemen is indeed a country drenched in poverty, it is important first to examine the meaning of the term “poverty”. As Breisinger, Xinshen, Collion, and Rondot explain in their article, “poverty means different things to different people and has been approached differently by various disciplines, organizations, and countries,” (2011, p. 419). They go on to explain that although historically economists used measures of economic growth and income to detect the presence of poverty within a country, defining poverty in a country now focuses on “human” indicators, with the examples of health care, education, and informant mortality, among others (Breisinger, Xinshen, Collion, & Rondot, 2011, p. 419). Judging by these indicators, it can be seen that Yemen displays a great number of these factors, thereby able to be objectively considered a county high in poverty. As Breisinger, Xinshen, Collion, Rondot noted in their observations, much of the information taken from the CIA Factbook on Yemen support supports this objective statement (2011, p. 419; Central Intelligence Agency, 2013). Among this information is the fact that 45.2 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, 70 percent of the country’s females are illiterate, only 55 percent of the citizens within the country have access to healthcare, and the average household size is 6.5 members, along with others (Breisinger, Xinshen, Collion, & Rondot, 2011, p. 419).

Subjectively, Yemen’s poverty is also very apparent. Among the multitude of sources which profess Yemen’s evident poverty, there are a countless number of facts which support their claims (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013; Breisinger, Xinshen, Collion, & Rondot, 2011; Euphrates Institute, 2011; Lust, 2013; Rural Poverty Portal, 2009; World Bank, 1996). There are a substantial number of facts which demonstrate these claims: 15 percent of the rural population is covered by the national electric grid (Rural Poverty Portal, 2009); many individuals live in

extremely isolated locations leading to an inaccessibility of resources (Euphrates Institute, 2011; Rural Poverty Portal, 2009); the country has the highest infant mortality rate in the Middle East (World Bank, 1996); and the country ranks the lowest of all Arab states on the Human Development Index (Lust, 2013, p. 875).

Economic Conclusion

Taking into account all of this information, it is apparent that the country of Yemen is certainly a poor country in a state of economic despair, with a high amount of individuals living in poverty. It has acquired this low economic status due to a variety of historical factors, including its support for the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, its civil war, its decreasing oil exportation, and its corruption, among many other ongoing factors. This all establishes the first premise in explaining that it is extremely unlikely for the country to have a successful democratic revolution, that Yemen is in fact a poor country.

Yemen's Revolution is Inhibited by Poverty

Previously Attempted Yemeni Revolution

In addition to the country's damaged economic system, Yemeni people have struggled to keep their political system in check. Throughout recent years, regardless of the fact that the odds aren't exactly in their favor, there have been generally decentralized attempts at a revolution in order to force the government to rule in a way that the country's citizens wish to be ruled (Gelvin, 2012, pp. 78-80; Qarawi, 2011). However, although these revolutions may have succeeded in some ways, for the most part the predominant goal of a democratic form of government, or at least a more democratic political system, has evaded the people's grasp (Lust, 2013, pp. 876-880; Shapiro, 2012; Qarawi, 2011).

Yemen's revolution has had two main goals; the first was the short-term goal of ousting

the president at the time, Ali Abdullah Saleh, while the second was the long-term goal of reforming institutions in order to establish modern, democratic institutions (Qarawi, 2011). Although the short-term goal would be a temporary fix, the enduring fix and ultimate goal of the revolution was democratic reform. Yemenis not only saw the president as corrupt and in need of removal, but the need for a repair of the entire system as well (Dahlgren, 2011).

Relatively speaking, it took quite a bit of time in order to throw out Saleh, although this goal was eventually realized (Salih, 2013, pp. 193, 194). There were several reasons to account for why it took such a relatively long time, including the fact that the international community actually supported Saleh's regime, due to its fear of al-Qaeda taking power in the event of a power vacuum in the country (Salih, 2013, p. 194). This evidence shows that although the short-term goal of simply overthrowing the previous rulers would be much more similar than ousting these rulers and changing the institutional setup entirely, the citizens of Yemen still struggled to barely accomplish this first and easier goal.

Unfortunately, although this short-term goal of the overthrow of Saleh may have been completed (Saleh resigned in November 2011), the long-term goal of establishing a democratic system of government was not (Gelvin, 2012, p. 80; Lust, 2013, pp. 876-880; Shapiro, 2012). Even after the resignation of Saleh, marking the success of Yemen's short-term goal, the country has still remained authoritarian in practice (with only some of the "formal aspects of a democratic system") (Lust, 2013, p. 876). This information all demonstrates that Yemen's ultimate goal for their revolution, to establish a democratic form of government, was never realized even though there were a multitude of actions and events made in attempt to achieve this goal.

One issue that may be brought up with all of this information is that perhaps Yemen is

still in the process of its revolution, and therefore has not officially failed. However, in response to this, there are several sources which show that the revolution is indeed over, or coming to a close (Shapiro, 2012; Stuster, 2013). One source even explicitly indicates that protesters within the country have previously dismantled their protest camps all over the country, symbolically “declaring an end to the revolution” (Stuster, 2013). These statements, compiled with the observation that the revolution began nearly three years ago and its ultimate goal has still not been accomplished, show that the essence of Yemen’s 2011 revolution is indeed over and that this revolution was not successful in accomplishing its ultimate goal.

Why Yemen’s Revolution Is Not Likely to Succeed

Now that the two premises necessary to prove that it is extremely unlikely for the country to have a successful democratic revolution have been established (the fact that Yemen is indeed a poor country, and the fact that poor countries are much less likely to form a successful democracy), a logical deduction can be drawn: Yemen is much less likely to form a successful democracy. This evidence, compiled with the fact that Yemen has previously attempted a revolution yet was incapable of doing so, leads to the conclusion that Yemen has very little hope of becoming a fully democracy.

Other than evidence logically deduced and historical events, there are other pieces of evidence which show that it is very unlike to form a democracy. It is of note that indirectly related to income, there have also been direct correlations between Yemeni citizens’ education levels (which are commonly related to income) and those citizens’ confidence in their government; less educated (and thereby presumably lower-income, since the two factors are typically related) Yemenis are more likely to have confidence in their government, which is counterproductive in order to have a successful revolution (Gallup, 2011). This information only

adds to the unlikeliness for Yemen to successfully have a democratic revolution.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Yemen is extremely unlikely to succeed in its long-term revolution goal of establishing a democracy. Although Yemenis have previously attempted a revolution in which more democracy was a goal, and may continue to do so to varying degrees, the odds are against them. There is a great deal of evidence which shows that Yemen is certainly a poor country with an unfortunate economy, as well as evidence which shows that poor countries are extremely unlikely to form democracies, especially those in situations similar to that of Yemen. This statistical analysis, in addition to previous historical data, show that it is very unlikely for the country to succeed in forming any degree of a successful democracy, let alone a highly efficient one. However, it is of note that this data is certainly not absolute, and it is indeed possible for Yemen to form a successful democracy – it is just infinitesimally probable to occur any time soon.

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