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Trends in Yemeni Public Opinion: Attitudes toward the National Dialogue Conference Document and the Second Transitional Period

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Introduction

This report presents selected results of the 2014 Arab Opinion Index (AOI) from Yemen. The Arab Opinion Index is the largest opinion poll of its kind in the Arab region, with more 20,000 respondents from 15 countries included in 2014. The AOI seeks to elucidate public opinion on a number of social, political, and economic issues, including attitudes towards democracy; political and civic participation; and respondents' views of state institutions in their own country.

In addition to the main battery of questions, respondents in Yemen were asked their opinion on a range of topical issues, including questions on the outcomes of Yemen's National Dialogue Conference. This report reviews the support and opposition of Yemeni public opinion of the National Dialogue Conference Document, as well as the measures and decisions included in the National Dialogue Outcomes which extended the transitional period for a maximum of one year.

The fieldwork was carried out in Yemen by the Statistics Institute for Studies and Research under the direct supervision of the ACRPS from February 4 to February 27, 2014, only a few weeks after the release of the National Dialogue Document on January 26, 2014. The sample was composed of 1,500 respondents who took part in the survey through face-to-face interviews and were selected through a systematic, multi-staged, stratified cluster sampling method, giving a sample which is self-weighted with probability proportional to size (PPS). This provides for equal representation among respondents from all main administrative divisions (urban and rural) in Yemen, as well as between genders. As a result, the confidence level for this sample is 97% with a margin of error of $\pm 2\%$. The ACRPS wishes to express here its gratitude to all of the Yemeni respondents who took part in the survey.

Yemeni Attitudes toward the National Dialogue Conference Document

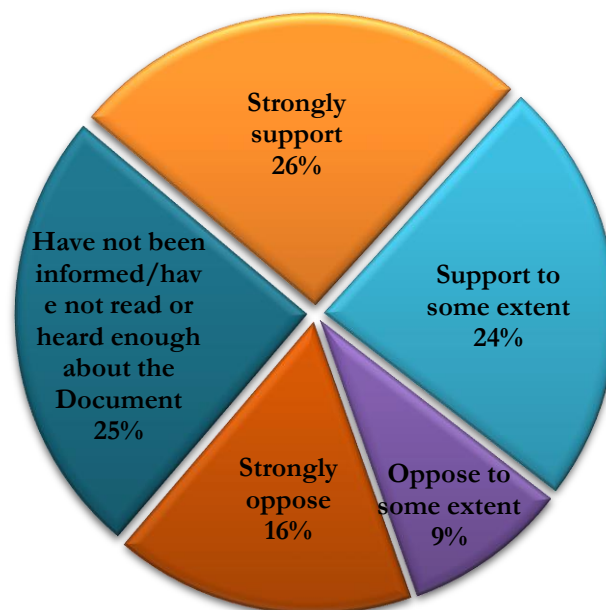
Yemen's February 2011 revolution led to the agreement of the various political and societal forces to the GCC initiative, which stipulated a transitional period of no longer than two years. During that time, there was to be dialogue between all the political forces in order to reach agreement over areas of political difference and work to found a democratic political system able to achieve the revolution's goals. On January 26, 2014, shortly before the end of the transitional period agreed on as part of the Gulf

initiative, the National Dialogue Conference approved the National Dialogue Document.

Yemeni Public Opinion toward the NDC Document

Towards identifying trends in public opinion regarding the outputs of the Yemeni National Dialogue Conference, the Arab Opinion Index undertook to measure Yemeni views for or against the distillation of the conference outcomes, namely the National Dialogue Conference Document. The results show that 50 per cent of Yemenis polled expressed support for this document (26 per cent said they strongly support it, and 24 per cent support it to some extent). In contrast, 25 per cent of Yemeni public opinion polled voiced their opposition to the National Dialogue Conference Document, with 16 per cent expressing their “strong opposition” – significantly less than the 26 per cent who supported it strongly. Despite the importance of the matter, 25 per cent of respondents indicated were not familiar with the NDC document. However this does not necessarily mean that they were unaware of the process of national dialogue underway, or of the publication of the NDC Document; rather they simply have not examined the document in order to form an opinion either for or against its terms and its proposals.

Figure 1: Supporters and Opponents of the NDC Document



Reasons for supporting and opposing the NDC Document

To obtain a more nuanced understanding of Yemeni attitudes toward the NDC Document, the respondents were asked the reasons behind their support or opposition. Yemenis who expressed support for the NDC Document gave many reasons and factors for their support, with the most common reason given, at 56%, being that the document represents a suitable way for Yemen to deal with its crisis and avoid the conflicts and civil war that would have broken out if the National Dialogue Conference had not agreed on these outcomes. Seventeen percent of those in support said they backed it because it laid the foundations for a modern democratic state based on citizenship. The preservation of Yemen's unity and preventing the possibility of partition was given as a reason by 11% of supporters, and 7% thought it met all or some of the main demands of the revolution. 3% of Yemenis believed it represented the triumph of dialogue, and thought the outcomes had managed to overcome the political and party differences between the leaders of the political and societal forces in Yemen. A further 3% support the NDC Document because it endorsed the federal system for Yemen, which in their opinion is the most suitable system for Yemen.

Table 1: Reasons cited by supporters of the NDC Document for their positions

Reasons for Support	%
Provided the country with a way out of a crisis, avoiding potential strife and civil war	56
Provides a foundation for a modern, democratic state	17
Maintained the unity of Yemen	11
Fulfils the demands, if partially, of the revolution and the youth of the country	7
The federalist system is most appropriate for Yemen	3
It is a success for a negotiated settlement to political conflict	3
Other reasons	2
Do not know	1
Total	100

The respondents opposing the NDC Document also gave various reasons for their opposition. The foremost reason, at 34%, was that the adoption of the federal system in the form of the six regions marked the beginning of Yemen's partition or would lead to that. Not meeting the demands of the South Yemeni, or from the southern movement, was given as a reason by 20% of the respondents; 16% are against the Document because they did not meet all the demands sought; 8% reject them

because neither the dialogue nor the outcomes represented all political actors and social sectors; and 5% see the Document as being imposed on Yemen from abroad.

Factors cited by those opposed to the NDC Document suggest that about one third of them were not opposed in principle, but had higher expectations from the National Dialogue Conference that were not reflected in the Document; or that they felt the process of the Dialogue did not represent all political parties; or that the Document was biased favorably to claims of particular political factions.

Table 2: Reasons cited by opponents of the NDC Document for their position: percentages are the proportion of opponents to the NDC Document

Opposition Reasons	%
The adoption of a federalist system will lead to the partition of Yemen	34
The Document does not meet South Yemeni demands	20
The Document does not meet all the demands and goals	16
The agreement does not represent all the social and political sectors of Yemen	8
Because it was imposed from abroad	5
Opposed to the dialogue process in the first place	4
Bias toward some parties and their agenda at the expense of others	4
Lack of confidence in the implementation of provisions and suggestions	3
The agreement will not resolve the crisis in Yemen	3
Other reasons	1
Do not know	3
Total	100

Although the majority of Yemeni public opinion supported the NDC Document, an important segment expressed opposition to it, some 26 per cent of the Yemeni "street". This should not be overlooked. Analysis of reasons for either support or opposition to the NDC Document highlight a set of challenges that must be addressed in order to maintain broad support for it, most notably the need for the Yemeni state to swiftly enact systematic procedures to shore up security and stability in the country, and to strengthen democracy, pluralism and popular participation in governance. Work on the implementation of the main items of the document would itself contribute to the deepening of confidence that the recommendations will be implemented. The lack of knowledge with regard to the provisions of the NDC Document, on the part of nearly a quarter of Yemeni respondents, is indicative of an urgent need to raise awareness concerning its main recommendations.

Yemeni Attitudes toward Measures for the Second Transitional period

With the ending of the two-year transitional period marked by the conclusion of the National Dialogue Conference and the publication of the outcomes document, the members of the conference agreed to extend the transitional period for a further one year at most, as stated in the outcomes, in order to complete the implementation of the tasks and outcomes agreed upon.

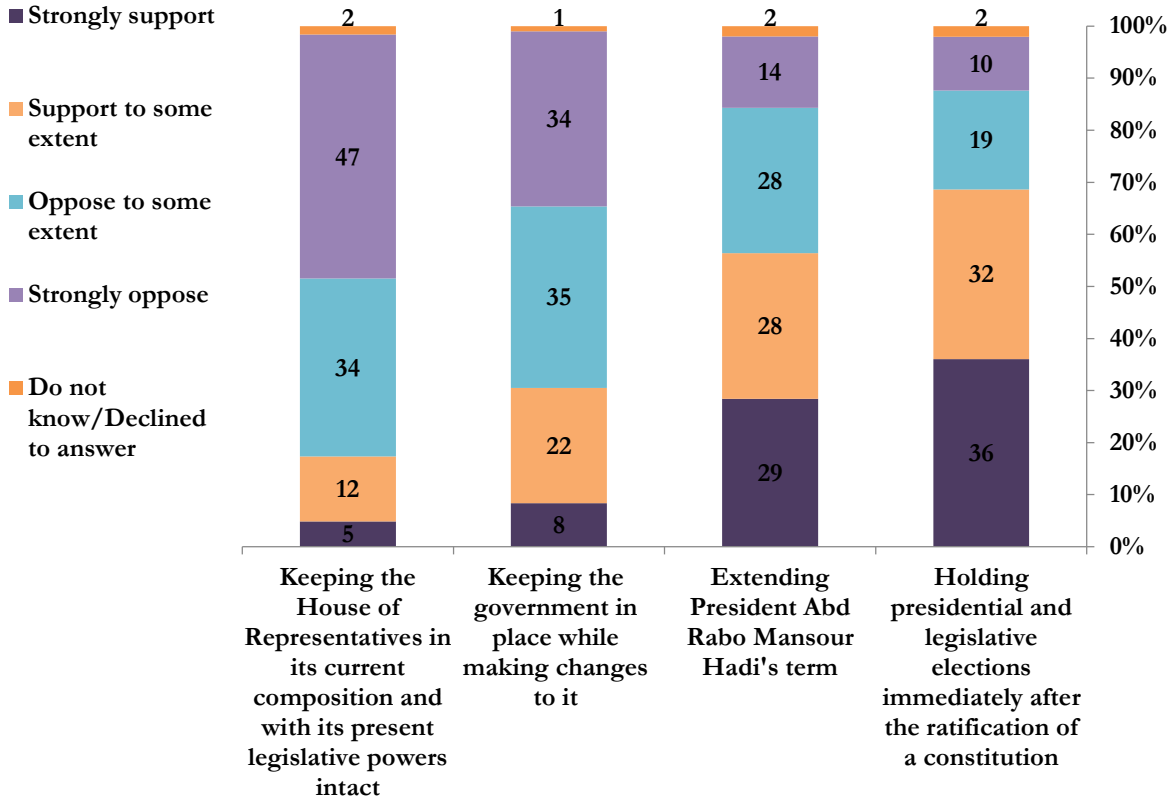
In this context, the respondents were asked whether they would support some of the decisions and measures related to the second transitional period stipulated in the dialogue outcomes. These decisions were to extend the term in office of President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi; keep the government in place with a reshuffled cabinet; keep the parliament elected in 2003 in place with the same formation, speaker, and legislative powers; and hold parliamentary and presidential elections immediately after the declaration of the constitution.

The results show that a majority of Yemenis supports the decision to extend the office of President Hadi, at 56%. Forty-two percent of the respondents opposed this step. In contrast to the 56% who support extending President Hadi's term, only 30% are in favor of keeping the government in place with a reshuffled cabinet and 69% opposed.

The measure for the transitional period that received the least support was maintaining the parliament elected in 2003 with the same constituency, speaker, and legislative powers, which was supported by 17% of the respondents and opposed by 81%.

The most popular of these measures is to hold parliamentary and presidential elections as soon as the constitution is passed, which was backed by 69% of respondents. The measure was opposed by 29% of the respondents, with 19% against and 10% strongly against.

Figure 3: Supporters and Opponents of Clauses and Measures of the Second Transitional Phase (%)



Public Opinion on the Federal System

The NDC Document provide for Yemen’s becoming a state based on a federal system of government. The text stipulates that the federal state is made up of six regions, two in the south and four in the north. This decision caused considerable debate, among both the members of the National Dialogue Conference and Yemeni citizens, over the adoption of the federal system itself, the number of regions, and the mechanism for division. In this context, the AOI survey attempted to gain an understanding of public opinion regarding the federal system by asking: “The National Dialogue Conference Document propose that Yemen adopt a federal system of government. In your opinion what is the federal system?” The results showed that 75% of the respondents were able to give their own conception or definition of the federal system of government, while 22% said they did not know what the federal system meant and 2% refused to answer.

Respondents gave over 500 definitions of the federal system, all of which expressed familiarity with the idea of the federal system or expressed a political stance toward this recommendation. Less than 0.5% gave a definition unrelated to the subject. With regard to these definitions, 28% thought that federalism meant the division of the country into a number of regions, without clarifying the powers of these regions and their relationship with the central government. However, some responded to this open question using the terms as suggested in the NDC Document. Around one-quarter of the respondents stated that the federal system means the presence of a central government for defense, foreign, and financial policy along with the independence of the regions in local matters.

11% of Yemenis understand that the proposed federal system is one whereby the inhabitants of each region make use of the region's own resources; these respondents emphasized, in defining this type of system, the importance of each region controlling its own natural and financial resources, without considering the relationship between regions and the central government, or the management of the natural resources and finances of these regions. 5% of respondents expressed the view that this kind of system achieves a decentralized system of management.

Some respondents defined 'federal system' based upon their political viewpoint, with 2% indicating that it would lead to the partition of the country, and 1% considering it to offer more scope for democracy and justice to citizens.

Table 3: The National Dialogue Outcomes propose that Yemen adopt a federal system of government. In your opinion what is the federal system?

Answers	%
Adoption of regionalism for running the country	28
Central government with control of defense and foreign policy with powers for the regions to manage their own financial and administrative affairs	22
The people and administration of each region control its financial resources	11
A system based on decentralization	5
Will lead to the partition of the country	2
Maintenance of Yemen's unity and avoidance of conflicts and divisions	1
A more democratic and fair system of government	1
Self-rule	1
Other	0.5
Do not know/Refuse to answer	29
Total	100

Summary

A majority of the Yemeni public opinion polled voiced support for the National Dialogue Conference Document, with the number of respondents supporting the NDC Document twice those opposed to it. A quarter of respondents polled did not take a position on the NDC Document because they were not familiar with its terms and recommendations.

Analysis of the factors and motives cited by respondents for their position either endorsing or opposing the NDC Document indicates that maintenance of broad support for it requires addressing the concerns of a large segment of Yemenis who believe that a federal system will entail the partition of Yemen, as well as the concerns of those who are not confident that the terms of the NDC Document will be implemented, given that this would require government action to boost security and stability. The results also show the need for an effort to publicize the document and its recommendations more widely, if the latter are to be successfully implemented and support for them maintained.

The results of the polling demonstrate that a majority of Yemeni public opinion is in favor of holding presidential and parliamentary elections after the adoption of the Constitution, that is, within one year from the date of the adoption of the National Dialogue Conference Document. Finally, a majority of Yemeni public opinion has relevant perceptions about the nature of the federal system proposed by National Dialogue Conference Document as a system of rule of Yemen.