

Rebelocracies - assessing the legitimacy of de-facto Houthi and Kurdish administrations.

"A comparative case study of governance between the Supreme Political Council in Yemen and the Syrian Democratic Council in northeast Syria"



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Abstract

The 21st century has seen conflicts become more complex, with new non-state armed groups (NSAG) taking over governance roles in active and frozen conflict zones. Due to the complexity of these conflicts the international community often finds themselves informally cooperating with these de-facto governments. Despite this, these administrations are not recognised as legitimate entities. Recognition of states is largely based on the traditional Westphalian concept, which the international community is hesitant to step away from. Thus, legitimacy must be created through other means. Recent literature has recognised a process through which these de-facto administrations can gain legitimacy, namely through their performance of good governance. To test if this is the case, two recently established administration with aims of more self-determination are studied; the Syrian Democratic Council and Supreme Political Council. Their governance performance will be analysed through a good governance framework, which will be translated into legitimacy through the half-virtuous model. The results show varying outcomes per case, with the first gaining some legitimacy due to its attempts at inclusive governance. In contrast, the other case's governance is shown to be largely superficial and therefore, cannot be deemed legitimate. These differing outcomes show that not every non-state armed group involved in governance is able to become legitimate through their actions.

List of abbreviations

| | |
|---------|---|
| PYD | Democratic Union Party |
| WB | World Bank |
| EU | European Union |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Program |
| PKK | Kurdistan Workers Party |
| NLF | National Liberation Front |
| PDRY | People's Democratic Republic of Yemen |
| SDF | Syrian Democratic Forces |
| YPG/YPJ | Kurdish People's/Women's Protection Units |
| AANES | Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria |
| TEV-DEM | Movement for a Democratic Society |
| WFP | World Food Program |
| KNC | Kurdish National Council |
| KDP | Kurdistan Democratic Party |
| GPC | General People's Congress |
| SDC | Syrian Democratic Council |
| SPC | Supreme Political Council |
| SCMCHA | Supreme Council for Management and Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and International Cooperation |

Chapter 1. Introduction

“Good governance is perhaps the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development.” - United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan

Starting in 2011, a series of anti-government protests rocked the Arab world, as citizens openly showed frustration with governance elements such as economic deterioration, corruption, repression and general suppression of individual liberties.¹ These events came to be known as the ‘Arab Spring’, yet this soon took a dark turn due to harsh reactions from central governments and ensuing armed rebellions.

Syria and Yemen currently serve as the main examples of this political instability. The civil wars in these two countries have lasted for 9 and 5 years respectively, leaving a humanitarian crisis in their wake and both national governments unable to exercise effective control within certain areas of their own country.² This ‘loss of domestic sovereignty’³ has allowed militia, rebels, terrorist organisations and even tribal affiliations to take over territories of the central government, leading to the creation of new political entities that govern the people in these regions.⁴

In Syria, the majority Kurdish, Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), became a significant power in the north of the country throughout the conflict. In areas currently under their control, the overarching political party, the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) has sought to implement their left-wing ideology of ‘democratic autonomy’.⁵ A similar development occurred in Yemen in the spring of 2015 when the Houthis, a political Islamic movement, captured the capital Sana’a and the surrounding governorates.⁶ The Houthis have since set up the Supreme Political Council (SPC) to implement their anti-imperialism and Zaidi revivalism ideologies.

¹ Kamal Eldin Osman Salih, “The Roots and Causes of the 2011 Arab Uprisings,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (2013): 184, <https://doi.org/10.13169/arabstudquar.35.2.0184>.

² Benedetta Berti and Jonathan Paris, “Beyond Sectarianism: Geopolitics, Fragmentation, and the Syrian Civil War. Strategic Assessment” (Tel Aviv, 2014); Jeremy M Sharp and Ida A Brudnick, *Yemen: Civil War and Regional Intervention* (Independently published, 2015).

³ Stephen D Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton University Press, 1999): 4.

⁴ Tim Eaton et al., “Conflict Economies in the Middle East and North Africa” (London, 2019).

⁵ Nazan Üstündağ, “Self-Defense as a Revolutionary Practice in Rojava, or How to Unmake the State,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 115, no. 1 (January 20, 2016): 197–210, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-3425024>: 197.

⁶ Micheal Knights, “The Houthi War Machine: From Guerrilla War to State Capture,” *CTC Sentinel*, Washington Institute., 2018.

Both Non-State Armed Groups (NSAG)- armed organizations operating outside the control of the state and willing and able to use force to achieve their objectives⁷ have established political bodies that govern their territories. This is done through extensive institutionalised administrations, either created by the militia or simply taken over from the previous central government.⁸ This has created a situation where two ‘de-facto’ administrations¹⁰ - not officially recognised, are governing over large territories.¹¹ These administrations aim for greater autonomy within their countries, however both the administrations have found it difficult to achieve this¹², in part due to a lack of support in the international community.

The difficulty in achieving their autonomy is, partly, because the drive towards autonomy is a process. As the conventional literature states, in order for a non-state actor, such as a militia, to achieve autonomy, it must first build legitimacy domestically and internationally.¹³ The definition of Legitimacy used in his thesis is – “a population’s belief that its political institutions have a right to rule”.¹⁴ Legitimacy is, in turn, largely derived from good governance.¹⁵ The execution of governance - “the manner in which power is exercised in the management of the economic and social resources linked to a country’s development”¹⁶, is thus the linchpin on which the process towards autonomy begins.

⁷ Benedetta Berti, “What’s in a Name? Re-Conceptualizing Non-State Armed Groups in the Middle East,” *Palgrave Communications* 2 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1057/palcomms.2016.89:1>.

⁸ Sinan Hatahet, “The Political Economy of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria” (Florence, 2019); International Crisis Group, “The Houthis: From Saada to Sana’a” (Brussels, 2014): 3.

⁹ A de-facto state exists where there is an organised political leadership, which has risen to power through some degree of indigenous capacity; receives popular support; and has achieved sufficient capacity to provide governmental services to a given population in a specific territorial area, over which effective control is maintained for a significant period of time (Pegg 1998, as seen in Lynch 2004, p. 15).

¹⁰ The political bodies representing the de-facto governance will be from here on referred to simply as ‘administrations’

¹¹ Harriet Allsopp and Wladimir Van Wilgenburg, *The Kurds of Northern Syria: Governance, Diversity and Conflicts* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019); April Longley Alley, “Collapse of the Houthi-Saleh Alliance and the Future of Yemen’s War,” 2018.

¹² Bekir Halhalli, *Kurdish Political Parties in Syria: Past Struggles and Future Expectations, Comparative Kurdish Politics in the Middle East: Actors, Ideas, and Interests* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-53715-3_46; Thomas Juneau, “Iran’s Policy towards the Houthis in Yemen: A Limited Return on a Modest Investment,” *International Affairs* 92, no. 3 (2016): 647–63, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12599>: 652.

¹³ Megan A. Stewart, “Civil War as State-Making: Strategic Governance in Civil War,” *International Organization* 72, no. 1 (November 20, 2018): 205–26, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818317000418>: 206; Hyeran Jo, *Compliant Rebels: Rebel Groups and International Law in World Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2015): 93.

¹⁴ World bank, 2011 as used by Cord Schmelzle and Eric Stollenwerk, “Virtuous or Vicious Circle? Governance Effectiveness and Legitimacy in Areas of Limited Statehood,” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 12, no. 4 (2018): 449–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2018.1531649>: 450.

¹⁵ Bruce Gilley, “The Determinants of State Legitimacy: Results for 72 Countries,” *International Political Science Review* 27, no. 1 (2006): 47–71, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512106058634>; Yu Keping, “Good Governance and Legitimacy,” in *China’s Search for Good Governance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

¹⁶ World Bank, “Governance, The World Bank’s Experience” (New York, 1994): 1.

However, as these regions remain within active conflict zones, the SDC and SPC administrations have found it challenging to strike a balance between security and governance.¹⁷ Nevertheless, militia with autonomous aims tend to be more inclusive in their structures of governance and provision of public goods,¹⁸ as this specifically legitimises them to their domestic audience and to the international community.¹⁹ In this way, “inclusive goods provision is thus a strategic tool [autonomy seeking militia] use to attain their ultimate objective of independence”.²⁰

The Good Governance framework was developed by the World Bank in 1992 to assess important elements of governance, and thus indirectly legitimacy. However, this framework is currently only used for nation states, and not for de-facto authorities within countries.²¹ This thesis will argue that it is possible to use this framework for ‘regions’ that are governed by de-facto administrations through slightly adjusting the framework to include the five principles of rule of law, participation, operationality, consensus oriented and accountability to evaluate the governance of these political entities. For the final phase the Virtuous Circle Model²² is used as a second framework that causally links the governance performance to legitimacy. For this legitimacy to be determined the aforementioned model has four conditions: ‘performance-based legitimacy beliefs’, ‘goals and social values’, ‘attribution’ and ‘generalization’. These must be met by the case studies before our observed governance values can be turned into legitimacy.

1.1 Research Objective and Questions

This provides for an opportunity to apply the good governance framework to the two administrations to analyse the extent to which good governance is being practised, and thus determine legitimacy of the administrations. The research objective of this thesis is therefore: *To determine the legitimacy of SDC and SPC administrations through their governance.* To achieve this objective, the main research question is: *To what extent are the administrations of the SDC and SPC legitimate according to the good governance framework?*

The extensive nature of the question means that this thesis answers two sub questions, each dealing with a different element to the overall research objective.

¹⁷ Ghadi Sary, “Kurdish Self-Governance in Syria: Survival and Ambition” (London, 2016): 11; Alley, “Collapse of the Houthi-Saleh Alliance and the Future of Yemen’s War.”: 3.

¹⁸ Stewart, “Civil War as State-Making: Strategic Governance in Civil War.”

¹⁹ Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 124.

²⁰ Stewart, “Civil War as State-Making: Strategic Governance in Civil War.”: 206.

²¹ Daniel Kaufmann, Aart Kraay, and Massimo Mastruzzi, “The Worldwide Governance Indicators: Methodology and Analytical Issues,” Policy Research Working Paper, 2010.

²² Schmelzle and Stollenwerk, “Virtuous or Vicious Circle? Governance Effectiveness and Legitimacy in Areas of Limited Statehood.”

The first sub question is of a descriptive nature, forming the main body of analysis. The first sub-question is: *To what extent are the SDC and SPC administrations practicing good governance?* This question will analyse the governance of these two autonomy-seeking militias, and their respective political parties – the Syrian Democratic Council and the Supreme Political Council - according to the framework of good governance.

The second sub question is of explanatory nature and builds directly off the analysis of the first sub question. The question adds the comparative aspect to the process of achieving autonomy, namely the question is: *How does the observed governance explain the difference in legitimacy through the virtuous circle model?*

Comparing both cases in this manner is relevant as both administrations have many contextual and governance elements that are similar. These two militias are the only ones with a de-facto administration in the Middle East today that publicly have the stated aim of wanting more autonomy from central-government rule. Thus, this question will determine if the legitimacy is derived from the governance in the same way for both cases or not.

To do what this thesis has set out to accomplish, it will consist of six sections. The first section is a literature review on militia governance and the process of gaining legitimacy, here the concept of good governance is also introduced. In the following chapter, the methodology will discuss the how the good governance framework was altered to fit the de-facto administrations as well as how the half-virtuous model will function. In this chapter the sources of the data used will also be expanded on, how this is categorised and analysed to answer the main research question. In the fourth chapter the first research question will be answered as it includes an analysis of the current governance of the de-facto administrations from their founding in 2011 and 2015 respectively, until the present (2020). The results chapter, will explore the process of how the observed governance in the previous chapter is reflected in the legitimacy of administrations in question. Here a comparison will be made of the governance of the administrations and how this determines which form of governance has created more legitimacy. The discussion on the thesis as a whole and its results will be part of this chapter. Finally, the thesis will end with a chapter outlining the conclusion and limitations of the thesis.

1.2 Societal and Academic relevance

This thesis is academically relevant for two main reasons. The first is regarding the application of the good governance framework to a de-facto administration. Such an analysis will answer two gaps in the existing

literature, it will reveal a broad insight into the governance present in northern Syria and north western Yemen, which is not currently available as existing literature focus solely on specific elements of governance such as security or transparency. Moreover, the study will allow for a greater understanding of the more local post Arab Spring, governance in the Middle East, for both administrations in this research arose in the wake of the popular protests due to dissatisfaction of the centralised governments²³

The second part of the thesis that makes this research academically significant is the manner in which legitimacy will be measured for both case studies. The governance of both administrations will reveal their intention on gaining legitimacy and ultimately autonomy. The ability to answer the hypothesis will further increase our knowledge on the actors of intrastate conflicts in which the case studies are located.

The administrations, and the situation in which they are governing, also lend the results of this study a high degree of social relevance. The legitimacy of both de-facto administrations is highly controversial and the narrative varies depending on whom one asks.²⁴ Therefore, an objective analysis on the extent to which these administrations are able to provide governance for their local populations would partially determine the legitimacy of the militia in question, both locally and to the international community.²⁵ Thus, providing such an analysis would contribute to how these de-facto administrations are perceived and categorised. Moreover, if the administration does not facilitate good governance, problematic features are identified by this research, which can improved upon. Since this paper will only evaluate two regions within two countries, it will provide a more precise governance score for these specific case areas. Consequently, an informative indicator can be obtained and potentially used by NGOs and other organisations working in this area to improve their understanding of how the administrations operate as well as their institutional strengths and weaknesses. Ultimately, this understanding could improve coordination with the administration in humanitarian aid distribution, conflict resolution and development.

²³ N Dam, *Destroying a Nation: The Civil War in Syria*. (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017); Mehmet Serkan Tosun and Sedar Yilmaz, "Centralization, Decentralization, and Conflict in the Middle East and North Africa," 2008: 3.

²⁴ Ana Rodríguez, "Turkey Asks the US to Designate the Syrian Kurdish YPG Militias as a Terrorist Organization," *Atalayar*, 2020; Mohammed Alshuwaiter, "No President Hadi and the Future of Legitimacy in Yemen" (Washington D.C, 2020).

²⁵ Bruce Gilley, *The Right to Rule: How States Win and Lose Legitimacy* (Columbia University Press, 2009).

Chapter 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

In the Middle East region, different ethnicities and religions were formally united through the Westphalian concept of the 'nation state' through agreements such as the Sykes Picot of 1916.²⁶ The citizens of the region however, merely saw these borders as 'lines in the sand', not prioritising their newfound nationalities as identities.²⁷ As a result, Non-State Armed Groups have gained prominence as actors.²⁸ While this prominence is reflected in the volume of literature on the general legitimacy of NSAG, such as rebels or militia,²⁹ very little is written on the governance such groups employ, and the effect this has on their legitimacy in an area of limited statehood.³⁰ Only a few academic sources discuss the de-facto administrations of the Syrian Democratic Council and the Supreme Political Council³¹.³² In addition, an even greater knowledge gap exists in the literature on the extent to which the SDC and SPC involve themselves in governance, the methods which they use to govern areas under their influence and the effect this has on their legitimacy.

The militia in our thesis can be considered both militia and rebels as there is to a large extent overlap in the definitions³³. According to Okumu & Ikelegbe, it is only in the objectives of such groups that differentiation can take place, militias are more concerned with protecting themselves or certain interests,³⁴ whereas rebel groups can also be categorised into four types, namely liberation insurgencies, separatist insurgencies, reform insurgencies and warlord insurgencies.³⁵ Despite all the types of NSAG discussed, the cases studied in this thesis cannot be labelled to one individual type considering both de-facto administrations and their armed wing use violence as a means, are fighting for certain values of which

²⁶ Asli Bâli, "Sykes-Picot and 'Artificial' States," 2016.

²⁷ James Barr, *A Line in the Sand: The Anglo-French Struggle for the Middle East* (WW Norton & Company, 2011).

²⁸ Mirjam E. Sørli, Nils Petter Gleditsch, and Håvard Strand, "Why Is There so Much Conflict in the Middle East?," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, no. 1 (2005): 141–65, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002704270824>.

²⁹ Micheal J Williams, "(Un)Sustainable Peacebuilding: NATO's Suitability for Postconflict Reconstruction in Multiactor Environments," *Global Governance* 17, no. 1 (2011): 115–34, <https://doi.org/10.1163/19426720-01701008>.

³⁰ Joséciro Martínez and Brent Eng, "Struggling to Perform the State: The Politics of Bread in the Syrian Civil War," *International Political Sociology* 11, no. 2 (2017): 130–47, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/olw026>; Schmelzle and Stollenwerk, "Virtuous or Vicious Circle? Governance Effectiveness and Legitimacy in Areas of Limited Statehood."

³¹ This is largely due to the fact that these cases are recent phenomena.

³² Joost Jongerden, "Governing Kurdistan: Self-Administration in the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq and the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria," *Ethnopolitics* 18, no. 1 (2019): 61–75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2018.1525166>; Juneau, "Iran's Policy towards the Houthis in Yemen: A Limited Return on a Modest Investment."

³³ See Zahar 2001, p. 108 and Mampilly, 2007, p. 17.

³⁴ Wafulu Okumu and Augustine Ikelegbe, *Militias Rebels and Islamist Militants: Human Insecurity and State Crisis in Africa*. (Institute for Security Studies (ISS), 2010): 4.

³⁵ Clapham, 1998 as seen in Didier Péclard and Delphine Mechoulan, "Rebel Governance and the Politics of Civil War," 2015 (Bern, 2015): 17.

secession is a main aim and have a reformist agenda as a secondary objective. As other authors have used broad interpretation of such definitions,³⁶ this study will consult literature on both governance by militia and rebel governance to gain the best overview of all existing theory³⁷ and can refer to them with the overarching term Non-State Armed Groups (NSAG).

Attempts at governance by NSAG are often undertaken through separately created political entities. Here, militias/rebels that are not pro-government are more likely to set up political organisations with ideologies which correspond to their own.³⁸ These political parties that are created to represent the interests and ideologies of these militias, often have the momentum to launch changes to the governance, as there is a greater support for political change. This is regarded as a ‘policy window’.³⁹ Here a ‘power vacuum’ occurs, in which the central authorities have lost control and no actor has replaced them. Thus, local actors are provided with a sudden opportunity to contribute to the creation of new policies in governance.⁴⁰

The intervention of non-state armed groups in governance is coined ‘rebel governance’ and is defined as an “organization of civilians within rebel-held territory for a public purpose”.⁴¹ The public purpose creates the perception that this is always good for society. For rebel governance to take place there are certain contextual conditions that must be present. The respective rebel group must physically control an area, which currently or recently has experienced conflict, in which civilians reside and finally the ‘guerrilla’ group must be free of external control.⁴²

The extent to which this governance can develop, however, is dependent on a multitude of factors. According to Podder, the governance present before the conflict has a crucial role in determining the success of these rebel governance attempts.⁴³ Podder states that if the previous central government’s influence was

³⁶ Ana Arjona, “Armed Groups’ Governance in Civil War: A Synthesis” (Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies, 2008).

³⁷ Although a clear distinction has not been found in the literature, the majority of work is on ‘rebel governance’ (prominent scholars are: Ana Arjona, Nelson Kasfir, Zachariah Mampilly and Megan Stewart).

³⁸ Nelson Kasfir, Georg Frerks, and Niels Terpstra, “Introduction: Armed Groups and Multi-Layered Governance,” *Civil Wars* 19, no. 3 (July 3, 2017): 257–78, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698249.2017.1419611>.

³⁹ John W Kingdon, *Agenda, Alternatives and Public Policy* (Boston: Pearson, 1995).

⁴⁰ Christopher Phillips, “Sectarianism and Conflict in Syria,” *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (February 24, 2015): 357–76, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2015.1015788>: 371; Peter Salisbury, “Yemen and the Saudi–Iranian ‘Cold War,’” 2015: 11.

⁴¹ Nelson Kasfir, *Rebel Governance—Constructing a Field of Inquiry: Definitions, Scope, Patterns, Order, Causes* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015): 24.

⁴² Nelson Kasfir, “Guerrilla Governance: Patterns and Explanations,” in *Series of the Program on Order, Conflict, and Violence* (Yale University, 2008): 4.

⁴³ Sukanya Podder, “Mainstreaming the Non-State in Bottom-up State-Building: Linkages between Rebel Governance and Post-Conflict Legitimacy,” *Conflict, Security & Development* 14, no. 2 (March 15, 2014): 213–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2014.889878>.

weak, there is likely to be support from local citizens,⁴⁴ similarly if a more traditional ‘indigenous’ type of governance existed there would also be more support for this rebel governance.⁴⁵ Finally, if there are weak governance structures present before the conflict there will generally be less consensus from civilians on who to support.⁴⁶

Similarly, there are a number of reasons for non-state armed groups to engage in rebel governance, political scientists observe that it occurs partially because conflicts create fragmentation within a country, which makes developments at a local level more important.⁴⁷ More specifically, from the rebel points of view, first it was thought that only those rebels which did not control resource abundant regions would choose to rely on civilians for resources.⁴⁸ However, this view was limited to an economic viewpoint and is lacking with regards to this governance developing further than just securing sources of income.

The foremost feature of a NSAG in regard to governance can be seen as a challenge to Weber’s idea of a states’ monopoly on the legitimate use of violence^{49,50} In turn, such challenges to the monopoly of violence provide militias, and the affiliated political party, the ability to use violence as a method of governance.⁵¹ This form of governance is referred to as ‘Aliocracy’ and is a basic type of governance that militia/rebels can choose to employ. It is characterised by the NSAG not willing to go beyond the provision of security, that is - ensuring there is order and preventing serious crimes.⁵² The provision of this public good is often combined with the collection of taxes, which can take the form of a regular sum or in sporadic demands of money or goods.⁵³ Here the NSAG purposely chooses not to involve itself with other forms of governance, opting solely for, and prioritizing the provision of security as it already has the means (arms) to provide it. This simple manner of governance can also be used in an exploitative manner as the monopoly on violence also provides the NSAG with the possibility to use coercive measures to ensure compliance,

⁴⁴ Podder.

⁴⁵ Sacks & Larizza, 2012 as seen in Podder.

⁴⁶ Podder: 221.

⁴⁷ Stathis N. Kalyvas, “The Ontology of ‘Political Violence’: Action and Identity in Civil Wars,” *Perspectives on Politics* 1, no. 3 (2003): 475–94, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592703000355>: 487.

⁴⁸ Jeremy M Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁴⁹ Although pro-state militia exist, these do not typically engage in the governance of the country, acting merely as agents of the state, either fighting opposition groups or using coercive tactics on the local population. Therefore, they do not qualify for this study and its stated aim.

⁵⁰ Weber (1918) as seen in Jens Borchert, “From Politik Als Beruf to Politics as a Vocation: The Translation, Transformation, and Reception of Max Weber’s Lecture,” *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 3, no. 1 (2007): 42–70, <https://doi.org/10.1163/180793207X209075>.

⁵¹ Zachariah Cherian Mampilly, “Stationary Bandits: Understanding Rebel Governance” (University of California, Los Angeles, 2007): 20.

⁵² Ana Arjona, Nelson Kasfir, and Zachariah Cherian Mampilly, *Rebel Governance in Civil War* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

⁵³ Arjona, Kasfir, and Mampilly: 189.

which is tempting as it often yields direct results.⁵⁴ Such strategies will only provide compliance in the short run as civilians are not passive agents in a conflict zone.⁵⁵ On the longer term, discontent citizens can become a thorn in the side of non-state armed groups through manipulation, espionage or even fighting back.⁵⁶ Here the strategy of solely providing goods or services is unsustainable in terms of support and legitimacy and the NSAG will have to "tap into other forms of forms of legitimacy – with most seeking to take over formal bureaucracy as part of the transformation".⁵⁷

An alternative to the aforementioned coercive tactics is the choice to engage with civilians for governance, or as Kasfir puts it: "use their immediate environment".⁵⁸ This requires a degree of pragmatism as rebels must often adapt their approach in order to gain the support of local citizens.⁵⁹ To attempt engaging with the local civilians, the NSAG is often faced with a 'power-ideology trade-off' dilemma,⁶⁰ where the governance of the NSAG will need to be more practical than their ideology would demand. However, an inclusive approach centered around citizens' participation can create benefits and opportunities for the de-facto administration. In *Welfare as Warfare*, Grynkewich argues that offering social services to the population is a strategy of creating support, sympathy and gaining recruits for the organisation.⁶¹ Furthermore, this overall approach has the added benefit of also undermining the legitimacy of the central state.⁶²

For such an approach, the label of 'rebelocracy' is chosen to represent a non-state actor which chooses to intervene in governance beyond the responsibilities of the aforementioned Aliocracy.⁶³ Here rebelocracy can "include the provision of mechanisms to adjudicate disputes",⁶⁴ and the choice to establish itself in the provision of public goods and services such as education and healthcare. Some observed groups

⁵⁴ Mampilly, "Stationary Bandits: Understanding Rebel Governance."

⁵⁵ Mampilly: 22.

⁵⁶ Péclard and Mechoulan, "Rebel Governance and the Politics of Civil War.": 21.

⁵⁷ Eaton et al., "Conflict Economies in the Middle East and North Africa.":13.

⁵⁸ Kasfir, "Guerrilla Governance: Patterns and Explanations.": 274.

⁵⁹ Péclard and Mechoulan, "Rebel Governance and the Politics of Civil War."

⁶⁰ Jennifer Keister and Branislav L Slantchev, "Statebreakers to Statemakers:Strategies of Rebel Governance," 2014:29.

⁶¹ Alexis G. Grynkewich, "Welfare as Warfare: How Violent Non-State Groups Use Social Services to Attack the State," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 31, no. 4 (April 4, 2008): 350–70, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100801931321>.

⁶² Grynkewich.

⁶³ Arjona, Kasfir, and Mampilly, *Rebel Governance in Civil War*.

⁶⁴ Ana Arjona, "Rebelocracy: A Theory of Social Order in Civil War," 2017.

even created “political institutions to structure some form of representation”.⁶⁵ Weinstein refers to the institutions which manage relations between the NSAG and civilians as “rebel government”.⁶⁶

Stewart identifies that recruitment is the foremost purpose for militia to offer any social services, and although services such as healthcare may only be offered to its fighters or supporters, they nonetheless form an element of governance.⁶⁷ Stewart also argues that militia groups may act ‘inclusively’ - providing for all members of society, to gain legitimacy for their case, either domestically or internationally.⁶⁸ Vinci continues by arguing that support and sympathy for the governance of a militia, together with physical control of a region, allows the movement to be recognised as an authority by the international community, which in turn provides sovereignty.⁶⁹ This sovereignty subsequently creates the potential to cooperate and develop relations with other states. The emphasis on garnering legitimacy is thus a well-recognised driver of why militias undertake the provisioning of goods and services to populations within their territorial boundaries. Indeed, those that engage in providing public goods are recognised as legitimate political entities,⁷⁰ Stewart centralises this point in her work, though she argues that it is mainly secessionist militias that offer unrestrictive welfare provisions.⁷¹ This strategy of “inclusive goods provision” is well thought out by secessionist militias as internalising inclusivity into the structures of governance legitimises the militia, both domestically and to an international audience.⁷² Such internalising of inclusive norms of governance as a move to build legitimacy is also argued by Jo as an explanation of why certain rebel and militia groups adhere to international laws of war and governance.⁷³

The aim of a militia which is connected to a political party is another important aspect of determining the approach of the militia and the potential governance elements attached to its administration. If the militia has motives such as goals of secession or autonomy, external support is considered a necessity.⁷⁴ This is demonstrated by Lasley & Thyne, who refer to the deployment of child soldiers to illustrate that the aim of a militia group will affect its methods of governance.⁷⁵ Although military

⁶⁵ Arjona: 8.

⁶⁶ Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*: 164.

⁶⁷ Stewart, “Civil War as State-Making: Strategic Governance in Civil War.”

⁶⁸ Stewart: 210.

⁶⁹ Anthony Vinci, “Anarchy, Failed States, and Armed Groups: Reconsidering Conventional Analysis,” *International Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2008): 295–314, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2008.00502.x>.

⁷⁰ Claire M Metelits, “Explaining Insurgent Violence Using Fuzzy Sets,” *Political Research Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (2009): 673–84: 2.

⁷¹ Stewart, “Civil War as State-Making: Strategic Governance in Civil War.”: 206

⁷² Stewart: 206.

⁷³ Jo, *Compliant Rebels: Rebel Groups and International Law in World Politics*: 8,13.

⁷⁴ Bridget Coggins, “Friends in High Places: International Politics and the Emergence of States from Secessionism,” *International Organization* 65, no. 3 (2011): 433–67, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818311000105>.

⁷⁵ Trace Lasley and Clayton Thyne, “Secession, Legitimacy and the Use of Child Soldiers,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 32, no. 3 (July 3, 2015): 289–308, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894214526541>.

recruitment of people under the age of eighteen may be useful, legitimacy and international support will significantly decrease⁷⁶, because it is universally considered abhorrent and a violation of children's rights. Therefore, militia with the aims of attaining secession or autonomy will be more likely to be inclusive in terms of governance in order to ensure some form of external support.⁷⁷

The legitimacy to which such de-facto administrations aim for is defined as - "a population's belief that its political institutions have a right to rule".⁷⁸ Legitimacy is thus achieved through support of the local population which in turn can be gained through goods and service provision.⁷⁹ However, this process is also closely monitored by the international community who will separately determine the legitimacy of a de-facto administration.⁸⁰ Those that have set up rebel governance structures and enjoy popular support have a greater chance of becoming legitimate parties after the conflict.⁸¹ In conclusion, the provision of goods and services can raise the popularity of the armed group, in turn increasing their legitimacy.⁸² Péclard & Mechoulan view this as a process in which the armed group is 'constructing' their own legitimacy through their institution and governance of the local population.⁸³

Podder states that legitimacy of rebel government is based partially on its performance.⁸⁴ Others view that the ability to rule and legitimacy "relies on a capacity to perform their power".⁸⁵ Mampilly agrees with these statements and argues that the 'effectiveness' of rebel governance is dependent on four conditions; the ability to enforce rule of law, mechanisms for conflict resolution, the ability to provide public goods beyond security and 'feedback mechanisms' - ensuring that the participation of civilians is possible and improved.⁸⁶ Mampilly's results show that sixty percent of his studied cases were, non-state armed groups with secessionist aims had effective governance structures.⁸⁷ This evaluation on governance,

⁷⁶ Lasley and Thyne.

⁷⁷ Lasley and Thyne; Stewart, "Civil War as State-Making: Strategic Governance in Civil War."

⁷⁸ Schmelzle and Stollenwerk, "Virtuous or Vicious Circle? Governance Effectiveness and Legitimacy in Areas of Limited Statehood." :450.

⁷⁹ Kalyvas, 2006, p. 124 as seen in Schmelzle and Stollenwerk.

⁸⁰ Ulrich Schneekener, "Militias and the Politics of Legitimacy," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 28, no. 4-5 (September 3, 2017): 799-816, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2017.1322334>: 800.

⁸¹ Reyko Huang, "The Wartime Origins of Postwar Democracy: Civil War, Rebel Governance, and Political Regimes" (Columbia University, 2012); De Zeeuw, 2008 as seen in Péclard and Mechoulan, "Rebel Governance and the Politics of Civil War."

⁸² Enrico Pizzichini, "Rebel Governance and Self-Determination: The Cases of ISIS and Hezbollah" (Leiden University, 2019): 13-14; Podder, "Mainstreaming the Non-State in Bottom-up State-Building: Linkages between Rebel Governance and Post-Conflict Legitimacy."

⁸³ Péclard and Mechoulan, "Rebel Governance and the Politics of Civil War." : 24.

⁸⁴ Podder, "Mainstreaming the Non-State in Bottom-up State-Building: Linkages between Rebel Governance and Post-Conflict Legitimacy." :217.

⁸⁵ Jeffrey, 2012 as seen in Martínez and Eng, "Struggling to Perform the State: The Politics of Bread in the Syrian Civil War." :133.

⁸⁶ Mampilly 2011 as seen in Péclard and Mechoulan, "Rebel Governance and the Politics of Civil War."

⁸⁷ Mampilly, "Stationary Bandits: Understanding Rebel Governance."

which is broader in terms of variables and conditions, are in line with the findings of Stewart.⁸⁸ Evaluations of general performance of administrations will not only reveal their current governance but can also form the “foundations of legitimate authority” after the conflict ends.⁸⁹

However, as Mampilly himself admits, there are other elements still that civilians might expect from an administration, such as an “opportunity to participate in the decision-making process”.⁹⁰ These have not been incorporated in the political and economic analysis that have so far been made of de-facto administration.⁹¹ This presents a need for comprehensive models to judge whether NSAG administrations are legitimate.

This literature review has explored why militia are created and how governance can occur when one party has a monopoly on violence. Governance can occur due to the militia’s need for self-preservation which can also organically result in mutual benefits for the militia and the citizens. Finally, it is found that the aims of a militia also greatly determine its methods of governance. Based on this, a hypothesis has been formed on behaviour that is expected of de-facto administrations that have secessionist/autonomous aims. The hypothesis that this study will seek to verify is whether: *administrations with the aim for greater autonomy practice good governance to achieve higher legitimacy*. This hypothesis will be investigated through both the sub questions, which are answered in the analysis and the results chapters respectively.

2.2 Good Governance, an Introduction and Conceptualisation

To answer the first research question, where the performance of the two de-facto administrations will be evaluated, this paper utilises the framework of good governance. This concept was first designed by the World Bank as a way to judge governance of the central authorities, thereby indirectly assessing the feasibility and ethical aspects of their investments in countries.⁹²

Studies have shown that the framework has a strong positive effect on stability, especially at low levels of development.⁹³ As a result, it is also strongly related to both development and economic growth.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Stewart, “Civil War as State-Making: Strategic Governance in Civil War.”

⁸⁹ Podder, “Mainstreaming the Non-State in Bottom-up State-Building: Linkages between Rebel Governance and Post-Conflict Legitimacy.”: 218

⁹⁰ Zachariah Cherian Mampilly, *Rebel Rulers: Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life During War* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2011): 17.

⁹¹ Péclard and Mechoulan, “Rebel Governance and the Politics of Civil War.”: 18.

⁹² World Bank, “Governance, The World Bank’s Experience.”

⁹³ Karl DeRouen and Shaun Goldfinch, “What Makes a State Stable and Peaceful? Good Governance, Legitimacy and Legal-Rationality Matter Even More for Low-Income Countries,” *Civil Wars* 14, no. 4 (December 2012): 499–520, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698249.2012.740201>.

⁹⁴ Stavros Zouridis et al., “Waarom Het Openbaar Bestuur Ertoe Doet,” 2017.

This framework is considered a robust means of evaluating the performance of any administration, since it is a technocratic way of looking at administrations, thus permitting an apolitical evaluation⁹⁵.⁹⁶ Therefore, the concept has been adopted by many inter- and non-governmental organisations (from now on: NGO).⁹⁷

Table 1. The different good governance frameworks per organisation

| Principle | EU | OECD | UN | WB |
|------------------------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|-----------|
| Accountability | X | X | X | X |
| Effectiveness and efficiency | X | X | X | X |
| Openness/transparency | X | X | X | |
| Participation | X | X | X | |
| Rule of law | | X | X | X |
| Control of corruption | | X | | X |
| Equity and inclusiveness | | X | X | |
| Coherence | X | | | |
| Responsiveness | | | X | |
| Consensus oriented | | | X | |
| Regulatory quality | | | | X |
| Political stability | | | | X |

Source: Van Doeveren.⁹⁸

The principles that actually constitute good governance are widely debated.⁹⁹ As seen in Table 1, prominent western based organisations with varying aims view certain principles as more important than others; it was the World Bank (WB) that first used this for aid conditionality, however the European Union (EU), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and United Nations (UN) have adapted it since. The UN’s model states that it comprises: rule of law, participation, equity and inclusiveness,

⁹⁵ This is important considering the politically sensitive nature of these administrators, as supporters of the militia view them as legitimate, however others view these militias as terrorist organizations (Larrabee, 2016; Nakashima, Ryan & Hudson, 2020)

⁹⁶ Carlos Santiso, “Good Governance and Aid Effectiveness: The World Bank and Conditionality,” 2001.: 6.

⁹⁷ Udo E Simonis, “Defining Good Governance: The Conceptual Competition Is On” (Berlin, 2004).: 2.

⁹⁸ Veerle van Doeveren, “Rethinking Good Governance: Identifying Common Principles,” *Public Integrity* 13, no. 4 (2011): 301–18, <https://doi.org/10.2753/PIN1099-9922130401>.

⁹⁹ Andrews, 2010 as seen in van Doeveren.: 301.

effectiveness and efficiency, responsiveness, consensus-oriented, transparency, and accountability.¹⁰⁰ This framework of principles by the UN has been chosen as the base model on which this thesis will build, because the organisation's Millennium Development Goals (MDG) are based on a broad mandate as all 191 member states support it.

2. 3 The Need to Adapt the Good Governance Framework

The United Nation's good governance framework has the right approach to development for this thesis as it has a broad focus on societal issues as seen through the MDGs.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, there are still two obstacles that remain, before the UN's conventional framework of good governance can be used for this research paper.

The first issue is a technicality where the good governance framework is designed for 'de jure' countries, where there is a recognition as legal and constituted government of a state.¹⁰² Unfortunately, the case studies in this thesis are de-facto regions. There is a growing need to recognise that there are de-facto administrations in the MENA region, not only will this contribute to stabilizing the region,¹⁰³ but also academically to increase our understanding of these groups. Recently there has been an increase in academic literature on the extensive governance activity that can take place in de-facto regions.¹⁰⁴ Since the de-facto administrations have taken over the role of government in the areas they control, this paper argues for a more pragmatic academic approach where the good governance framework can be utilized to evaluate de facto administrations like as if they were sovereign governments. The 'state' like nature of these administrations allow for the possibility of comprehensive apolitical analysis, as this results in the framework aligning effectively with this paper's first research question, with the aim being a comprehensive analysis of the SDC and SPC de-facto administration's ability to govern.

A second (more functional) obstacle to the use of the UN framework of good governance lies in the scope of the analysis. To date literature on NSAG governance range in terms of individual analysis,

¹⁰⁰ United Nations, "What Is Good Governance?," 2009, www.unescap.org/pdd/prs/ProjectActivities/Ongoing/gg/governance.asp.

¹⁰¹ Jeffrey D. Sachs, "From Millennium Development Goals to Sustainable Development Goals," *The Lancet* 379, no. 9832 (2012): 2206–11, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(12\)60685-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(12)60685-0): 2206.

¹⁰² Neal Doyle Houghton, "The Nature and General Principles of Recognition of de Facto Governments," *The Southwestern Social Science Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (1932): 177.

¹⁰³ Julien Barnes-Dacey, Ellie Geranmayeh, and Hugh Lovatt, "Rethinking Governance: The Case for European Engagement with Non-State Armed Groups" (London, 2020).

¹⁰⁴ Mampilly, *Rebel Rulers: Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life During War*; Podder, "Mainstreaming the Non-State in Bottom-up State-Building: Linkages between Rebel Governance and Post-Conflict Legitimacy"; Arjona, "Rebelocracy: A Theory of Social Order in Civil War"; Stewart, "Civil War as State-Making: Strategic Governance in Civil War."

Mampilly evaluates governance effectiveness, Arjona discusses conflict resolution mechanism, service provision and participation initiatives and Podder studied alternative bottom-up governance structures and the role of the capacity of governance.¹⁰⁵ Thus, the available literature available is all encompassing yet there have not been attempts at some type of broad overview of NSAG governance. A good governance framework for these NSAG would be a solution to this, as many of the governance aspects studied by the authors above could be included in one such analysis.

To do such an analysis however, good governance must better align with these de-facto administrations. Namely, the creation of this concept has been largely based on the governance of the most successful liberal states in Europe and North America. As such, a well-known critique of the framework questions how applicable it is to developing nations, especially conflict and post-conflict regions.¹⁰⁶ This point is reflected in the literature on governance by de-facto administrations, where Aliocracy and Rebelocracy are identified as recurring typologies of ‘rebel governance’. These types of governance are quite basic in comparison to that of the average nation state, because de-facto regions find themselves in active or frozen conflict regions where higher degrees of political instability have negative effects of economic growth¹⁰⁷ and thus less capacity to develop.

To address this, the thesis has chosen to revise the good governance framework to better fit the context of the cases studied. This modified framework is justified for two reasons, (a) a need for a more basic framework, and (b) many of the theoretical concepts within the good governance framework are interlinked,¹⁰⁸ some to such an extent that overlap can occur if not all of the principles are properly defined.

Thus, considering both administrations are de-facto governments, not officially recognised by the majority of countries and in active conflict zones, some principles can be seen as more vital than others. As such the simplification is justified through the literature (see chapter 2.4) and to a lesser extent on the frameworks of good governance by the EU, OECD and WB, with the more common principles chosen. In the new model a greater weight is given when determining good governance, to the remaining principles.

Researchers at the World Bank have to a certain extent recognised the need for a flexible framework, allowing for others to use their data to “construct alternative indicators corresponding to their preferred

¹⁰⁵ Mampilly, *Rebel Rulers: Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life During War.*; Arjona, “Rebelocracy: A Theory of Social Order in Civil War.”; Podder, “Mainstreaming the Non-State in Bottom-up State-Building: Linkages between Rebel Governance and Post-Conflict Legitimacy.”

¹⁰⁶ Inge Amundsen, George Giacaman, and Mushtaq Khan, *State Formation in Palestine: Viability and Governance during a Social Transformation* (RoutledgeCurzon, 2004).

¹⁰⁷ Ari Aisen and Francisco José Veiga, “How Does Political Instability Affect Economic Growth?,” *European Journal of Political Economy* 29 (2013): 151–67, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2012.11.001>.

¹⁰⁸ David Butcher and Martin Clarke, “Good Governance,” *Organizational Dynamics* 41, no. 3 (2012): 230–35.

notions of governance”.¹⁰⁹ Van Doeveren builds on this, claiming despite differences in the definitions of good governance, the functioning of the framework remains important for overall development.¹¹⁰ Based on this, the choice has been made to merge certain principles of the framework to simplify the analysis and better fit the research aims of this paper. The details of this aforementioned revision will be discussed in the methodology chapter.

¹⁰⁹ Daniel Kaufmann and Aart Kraay, “Governance Indicators: Where Are We, Where Should We Be Going?,” Policy Research Working Paper, 2007: 43.

¹¹⁰ van Doeveren, “Rethinking Good Governance: Identifying Common Principles.”

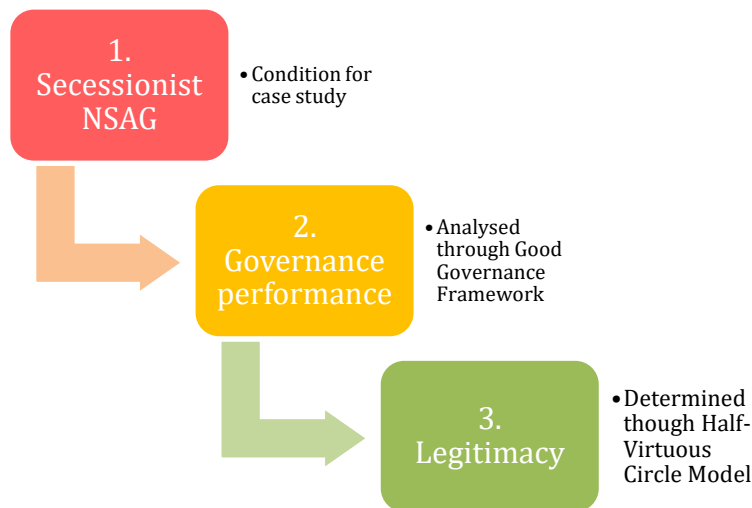
Chapter 3. Methodology

The following chapter will discuss the research methods that this study will use to analyse governance and determine legitimacy for the SDC and SPC administrations. The chapter begins with the overall research design, justification of the comparative case study method and how the cases were selected. Next both frameworks will be discussed and operationalised. Following that, methods of data collection will be outlined, namely reports and interviews. This section will explain the benefit of using interviews as a primary data source in conjunction with content analysis, after which the selection of interviewees and documents is explained. Finally, the manner in which the interviews and content analysis will be done is explained, along with how these contribute to the overall analysis of the cases. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the validity of the methods used.

3.1 Comparative Case Study

In the literature review the *process* illustrated in Figure 1 appeared, here secessionist NSAG (step 1) aim for greater governance performance (step 2) as a method to achieve legitimacy (step 3). Through this described process the hypothesis of this study predicts; *administrations with the aim for greater autonomy practice good governance to achieve higher legitimacy.*

Figure 1. Theoretical process



To study this theoretical phenomenon and expected behaviour of de-facto administrations further, empirical evidence is needed. Establishing whether legitimacy is reached by the NSAG, first the governance performance must be investigated (Secessionist NSAG is a condition), which is done through the good governance framework, depicted as step 2 in the figure below. Here studying multiple individual cases in

depth provides an opportunity to analyse factors and patterns that expand the general understanding of such phenomenon.¹¹¹ Rohlfling views comparative case studies as a suitable means to empirically test a hypothesis such as this.¹¹² The research method allows for the identification of possible parallels and contrasts within the empirical phenomenon which would either confirm or contradict the observed process in Figure 1.

In addition, a comprehensive understanding of their governance is required to answer why there would be different results for the administration in the second research question on legitimacy. This is important as development of institutions and governance in the particular socio-economic contexts as well as historical aspects of the cases is possible under the comparative case study design.¹¹³ Therefore, after each good governance principle, a 'cross case' part of the comparative case study is implemented as a reflection of the descriptive sub question. This comparative method is important to give insight into the input (governance) of the cases provide relative to each other and how this creates different outcomes (legitimacy). Cross-case analysis is able to shed light on these results and explain why one case might be similar or different to the other(s) based on the unit of analysis in the thesis.¹¹⁴ Here the causal mechanism, of governance performance to legitimacy will be applied, through the 'Half Virtuous Circle' model. The cross-case research method will assist the thesis in tracing how the administrations' legitimacy is determined through the aforementioned causal mechanism. This entails the explanatory part of the research paper as determining if this legitimacy process works in the same way for both cases answers the second sub question. The results of the second comparative sub-question will elucidate on whether autonomy seeking militias are more inclined to provide inclusive governance to gain international legitimacy, and thus achieve their aims of secession, as is argued by the literature.

Case selection

To select potential cases that would form the empirical basis to study the aforementioned process and causal mechanism a 'most similar systems' design was chosen. This research method was chosen as it selects cases based on similar independent (explanatory) variables yet with a different value on the dependent variable.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Albert Mills, Gabrielle Durepos, and Elden Wiebe, *Encyclopedia of Case Study Research* (2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks California 91320 United States: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2010), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412957397>.

¹¹² Ingo Rohlfling, *Case Studies and Causal Inference: An Integrative Framework* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): 2.

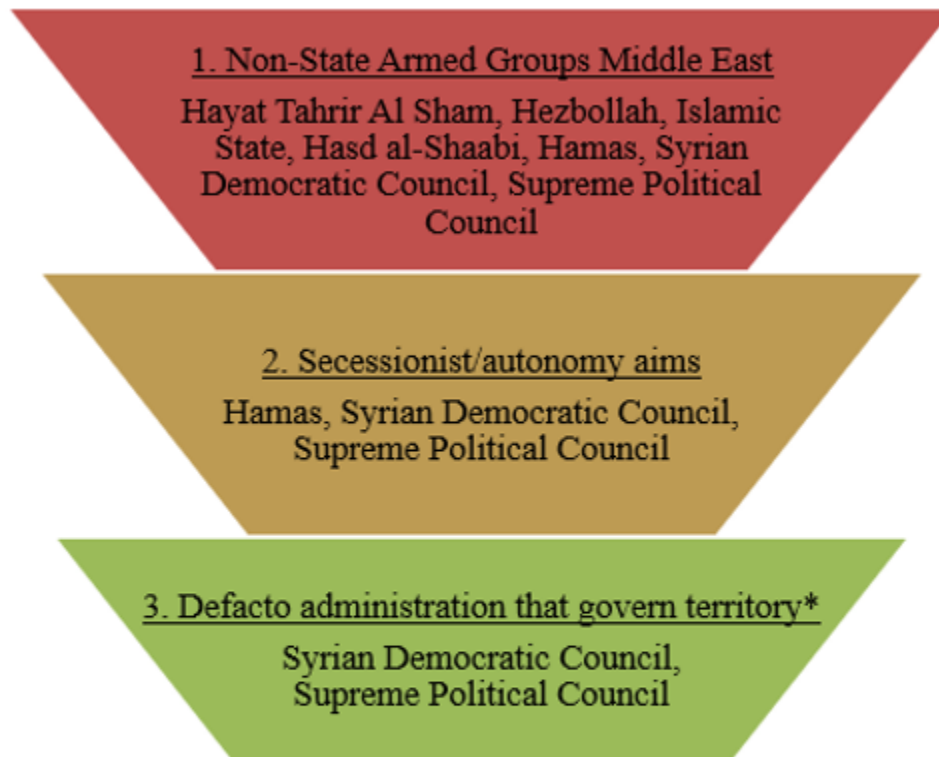
¹¹³ Andrew Bennett, "Case Study Methods: Design, Use, and Comparative Advantages," in *Models, Numbers, and Cases: Methods for Studying International Relations* (University of Michigan Press, 2004), 19–55: 19.

¹¹⁴ Samia Khan and Robert Vanwynsberghe, "Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Qualitative Social Research Online Forum: Cultivating the under-Mined: Cross-Case Analysis as Knowledge Mobilization" 9, no. 1 (2008): 1–18: 2.

¹¹⁵ Przeworski and Tuene, 1970 as seen in Jack S. Levy, "Case Studies: Types, Designs, and Logics of Inference," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 25, no. 1 (2008): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07388940701860318>: 10.

Based on a project by the European Council on Foreign Relations on governance of NSAG in the Middle East,¹¹⁶ a case selection process was started as seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Case selection through Scope Conditions



*Hamas, a relatively less current example of NSAG with secessionist aims, was elected to an internationally recognised Palestinian Legislative Council (UNSC Resolution 242 and 338). However, this group did not agree with the Oslo Accords on which the parliament was formed, rejecting a chance at officially governing Palestine. Based on the rejection of a chance to govern legitimately and infighting with the PLO's Fatah movement this case is judged to be less suitable for the phenomenon this thesis aims to study.

To further specify the phenomenon the study seeks to understand the “design criteria” are introduced through the scope conditions¹¹⁷ to select cases for this research paper. The first scope condition is that the NSAG must be located in the Middle East, this restriction is based on the area of interest of the author, as well as to limit the research design as to remain feasible in terms of resources and time. This second condition is that the NSAG's aim must be that of secession or greater autonomy, for this will greatly determine their governance behaviour this thesis aims to study. The final scope condition is, the fact that

¹¹⁶ Barnes-Dacey, Geranmayeh, and Lovatt, “Rethinking Governance: The Case for European Engagement with Non-State Armed Groups.”

¹¹⁷ Frank Biocca, Chad Harms, and Judie Burgoon, “Criteria for a Theory and Measure of Social Presence,” *Presence: Teleoperators & Virtual Environments* 12, no. 5 (2003): 456–80: 15.

these groups must be in physical control over an area, in which the group engages in de-facto governance. This is to ensure that the legitimacy is not artificially created by the international community but rather that it will be based on their own values and actions.

As seen in Figure 2, the two eligible cases studies that remain after the scope conditions are the Autonomous Administration of North East Syria (AANES) governed by the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) and the Houthi controlled territories governed by the Supreme Political Council (SPC). These two cases are found in Syria and Yemen, respectfully, countries which are currently embroiled in the two of the most prominent conflicts in the Middle East and the contexts of both de-facto administrations show significant similarities, such as economic sanctions, humanitarian crisis and the significance of non-state actors.¹¹⁸ Both militias receive limited significant external backing from states within the international community, with the US supporting the SDC and Iran supporting the SPC. Moreover, both conflicts involve multiple actors and the militia active in these particular cases are either hostile or neutral towards the governments. These contexts fit in well with the intended most similar case design.

Each militia also has the explicit aim of achieving greater autonomy, yet vastly different ideologies and the instruments of governance. This will create a difference in the principles of good governance within both cases that could explain the difference in explanatory variable, further supporting the suitability of the comparative case study approach.¹¹⁹

3.2 The Good Governance Framework and Operationalisation

This section will introduce the revised framework for this thesis, then the general approach to operationalisation will be discussed. Finally, the individual principles will be expanded on, first on how these principles originated and after how they will be measured through their indicators.

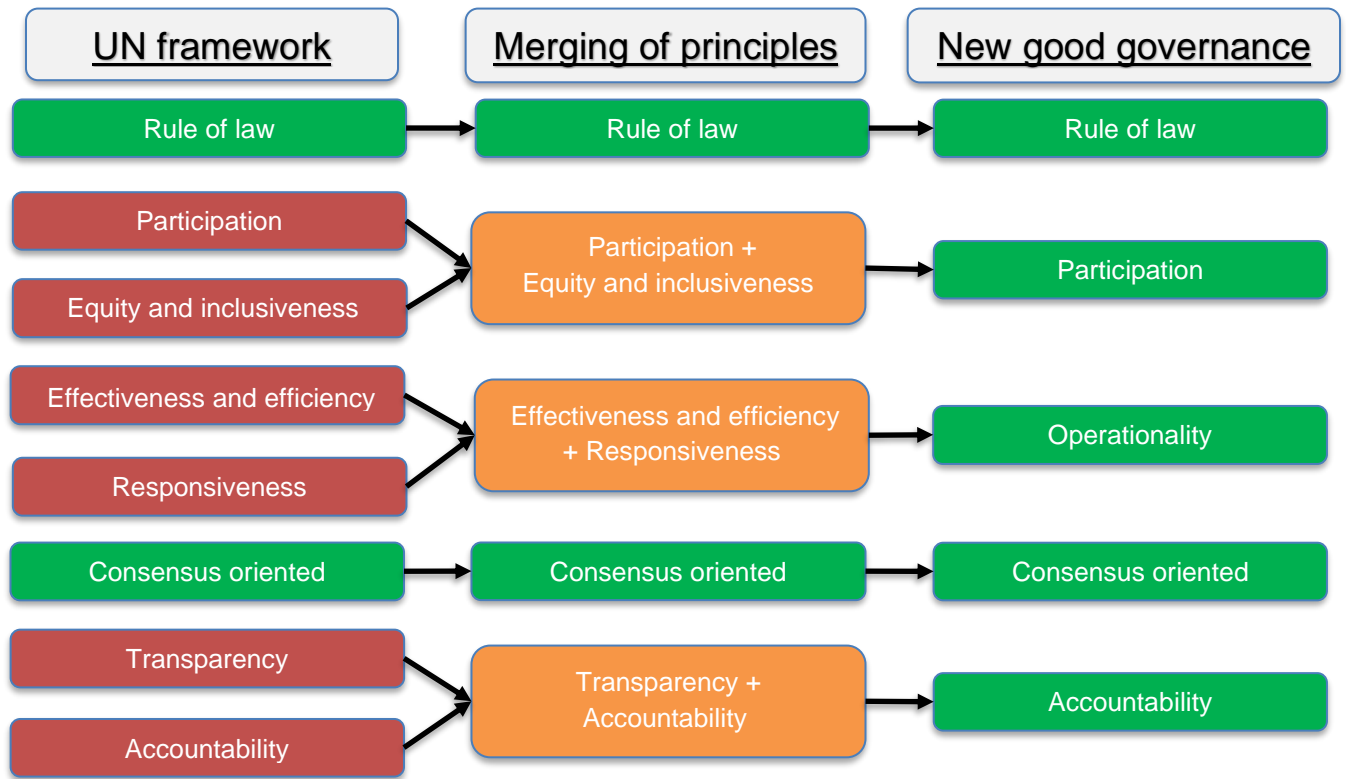
The newly revised good governance framework, made especially for de-facto administrations, and the alteration process itself is shown below in Figure 3. The figure has three columns (read from left to right), the first shows the complete UN framework with its eight principles. The second middle column is a visual representation of the merging process of the principles. The third column is the product of the merging process and shows the remaining five principles which this thesis will use. Thus, the rows in Figure 3

¹¹⁸ Amanda Guidero and Maia Carter Hallward, “Comparing Coverage in Syria and Yemen: Qualitative Analysis,” in *Global Responses to Conflict and Crisis in Syria and Yemen* (Springer International Publishing, 2019), 73–99, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-02789-6_5.

¹¹⁹ Juliet Kaarbo and Ryan K. Beasley, “A Practical Guide to the Comparative Case Study Method in Political Psychology,” *Political Psychology* 20, no. 2 (1999): 369–91, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0162-895X.00149:380>.

represent the necessary change that the framework and principles experience. Namely the change involves the merging of six ‘original’ UN principles (red) into three more concrete principles (orange) to form the new custom framework.

Figure 3. The revised good governance framework



Simultaneously in this section, the five principles of good governance are defined so as to become measurable variables. This process, known as operationalisation, will be done through the indicators which have been justified in the theoretical framework. Operationalisation is an essential process as difficulties in interpretation and measurement may arise if they are not operationalised.¹²⁰ Proper and clear operationalisation maintains validity through consistency and enables working with set methods to interpret the variables from the data that has been gathered.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Mike Allen, *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods* (2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks California 91320: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483381411>.

¹²¹ Simonis, “Defining Good Governance: The Conceptual Competition Is On.”: 10.

To operationalise the main aspects, the principles that determine good governance are individually discussed and given working definitions with reference to Burnell and Rothstein.¹²² Then, each principle will have three indicators that will be used for the analysis, these indicators are selected to be applicable for the de-facto governance and justified through literature. The content analysis codebook introduced later in the chapter will discuss more specifically what these indicators entail, as well as expand on how these indicators will be coded. The process for the analysing and evaluating of the indicators will be done in the same general way for each individual indicator.

A judgement can be made on the extent an indicator is present through four manners in the source material; 1) Evidence of resources or priority given to this indicator by the de-facto administration, 2) The quality/state of the indicator has changed since the administration was active, 3) Informal: public opinion has changed on the indicator/Perception or experience of interviewee and 4) Formal: legislation relating to the indicator.

To clarify this process in detail the principles will be discussed in the same order as Figure 3, first the potential changes will be discussed, then the indicators through which they will be analysed.

Rule of law

The first row and principle, that of rule of law remains unchanged in the revised good governance framework due to its prominence in the featured models of Table 1. Moreover, as seen in the literature review, Aliocracy and Rebelocracy both require rule of law, which is also seen as the primary foundation and first element of governance.¹²³ Without upholding the rule of law throughout a region, an administration will be considered to have failed in many aspects.¹²⁴

To define rule of law, this study will use the following interpretation of the concept: *the extent to which an administration is able to enforce its legal framework it has created, which must encompass human rights, independent judiciary and impartial security forces.*¹²⁵ This principle has three indicators, which capture the majority of the elements of rule of law¹²⁶. Based on the works of Botero & Ponce and the World

¹²² Peter Burnell, "Good Government and Democratization: A Sideways Look at Aid and Political Conditionality," *Democratization* 1, no. 2 (June 26, 1994): 485–503, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510349408403405>; Bo Rothstein, "Good Governance," in *The Oxford Handbook of Governance*, ed. David Levi-Faur, 1st ed. (Oxford University Press, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199560530.013.0010>.

¹²³ Max Weber, *Economy and Society, an Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Roth Guenther and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978): 56.

¹²⁴ Charles Sampford, "Failed States and the Rule of Law," *Jindal Journal of International Affairs* 1, no. 1 (2011): 119–47: 119.

¹²⁵ United Nations, "What Is Good Governance?": 2.

¹²⁶ Note: all three indicators for each principle contribute equally to the principle.

Bank¹²⁷, the following indicators will be used: ‘order and security’, ‘civil liberties’ and ‘access to civil justice’. Order and security represent the (lack of) unrest and the extent to which security exists for people and property, this can be provided by competent security services such as local police. Issues relating to local policing or militia forces fall under this indicator, examples include forced recruitment, looting or preventing crime. The second indicator is ‘civil liberties’, reflecting the rights of all peoples in the society. If the administration has created an alternate constitution, the rights could be enshrined here, although the extent to which these are guaranteed and ratified may vary from this formal document. Lastly, the indicator ‘access to civil justice’ is essential to the rule of law, with its elements including the right to a fair trial, a legally competent judge and the capacity of any citizen to attend court. The degree to which these individual indicators are observed (see Figure 6. Codebook) will determine the extent of the rule of law is present.

Participation

The second row is the first fusion of principles and combines equity and inclusiveness with participation, together forming the overarching principle referred to solely here as ‘participation’ (This term is kept as principle name due to the broad meaning of the word). Participation itself is key to good governance because without a reasonable level of input from citizens, the mandate and legitimacy of the governing body is weakened.¹²⁸

Participation is defined in this study as: *the extent to which all groups of the population within the jurisdiction are included in decision-making in governance directly or through intermediate institutions or representative.*¹²⁹ For this principle there are three indicators: ‘election and referendum turnout’, ‘coordination with civil society’ and ‘lack of discrimination’. First, elections and the turnout for referendums is a relatively straight forward indicator of the extent of citizens’ political participation in their administration. Voter turnout and if citizens choose to boycott the election, will reflect participation in governance. Second, civil society coordination will show the willingness of the administration to cooperate with citizens in projects to achieve better governance. According to Foley & Edwards, civil society is an essential element of democratisation¹³⁰ thus if the administration is able to coordinate with Civil Society Organisations (CSO) it ensures the participation of citizens through the process of facilitating societal issues

¹²⁷ Juan Botero and Alejandro Ponce, “Measuring the Rule of Law,” 2011.; World Bank, “Worldwide Governance Indicators,” n.d.

¹²⁸ Chris Skelcher, “Jurisdictional Integrity, Polycentrism, and the Design of Democratic Governance,” *Governance* 18, no. 1 (2005): 89–110, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0491.2004.00267.x>: 98.

¹²⁹ United Nations, “What Is Good Governance?": 2.

¹³⁰ Michael W. Foley and Bob Edwards, “The Paradox of Civil Society,” *Journal of Democracy* 7, no. 3 (1996): 38–52, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1996.0048>: 38.

into consideration in governance. The final indicator ‘lack of discrimination’¹³¹ reflects to a great extent the previously used principle of equity and inclusiveness. This reclassification is measured through the number of rights given to both genders, minority ethnicities, and those holding different religious beliefs or with tribal affiliations different than that of the administration. The manner in which these parties are treated determines their potential participation in governance. The degree to which these indicators are observed (see Figure 6. Codebook) determines the extent that participation is present within the specific case.

Operationality

The next merger is the combining of effectiveness, and efficiency and responsiveness, forming the new principle ‘operationality’. Although each of these concepts has its own distinct meaning, merging these concepts will not lead to a loss in distinction as each will be reflected to a certain extent in the indicators of the principle (see operationalisation). The new indicators are related to the type of governance NSAG are expected to employ, in their geopolitical and socio-economic situation, and to reflect the effectiveness, efficiency and responsiveness of the respective administration. These new indicators will reflect the extent to which an administration is able to ‘operate’.

Operationality is defined in this study as: *the extent to which the administration is able to react to the needs of society and its ability to create suitable policies and execute them in an efficient manner.* This is an overarching variable that is measured through three indicators. The first indicator, the ability to ‘address issues on the public agenda’ is based largely on responsiveness and effectiveness. The indicator relates to issues such as food availability, functioning public infrastructure and security which are the responsibility of the administration are basic needs of citizens. The administration’s ability to meet these obligations will determine their ability to act effectively. Next the ‘resources and budget’ indicator aims to relativize the capacity of the administration based on the available financial and material resources. The amount of taxes raised by an administration and the extraction and sale of resources is essential in paying for all provisions of governance.¹³² Thus, if an administration has limited resources, their ability to realise effective and efficient governance is greatly reduced. The final indicator ‘humanitarian coordination’, represents the extent to which the administrations can effectively coordinate and cooperate with the humanitarian organisations in their region. Both case study areas suffer from a shortage of resources and

¹³¹ It is important to note that ‘discrimination’ and the indicator ‘corruption’ related to the principle of accountability are adjusted to rectify the negative disposition of the words and ensure all indicators and their value are seen as positive, thus the term ‘lack of’ is added to both indicators.

¹³² Praveen Kulshreshtha, “Public Sector Governance Reform: The World Bank’s Framework,” *International Journal of Public Sector Management* 21, no. 5 (2008): 556–67, <https://doi.org/10.1108/09513550810885831>: 557.

humanitarian organisations play a key role in providing for citizens.¹³³ This makes humanitarian coordination a condition for increasing operability of governance.¹³⁴ The degree to which these indicators are observed (see Figure 6. Codebook) determines the extent the administration can be considered operational.

Consensus-oriented

The principle of consensus oriented has remained in the model due to its importance, as it “mediates differing interests to reach a broad consensus on what is in the best interest of the group and, where possible, on policies and procedures”.¹³⁵ This is especially important for our case studies, which find themselves in conflict areas where this principle could contribute to achieving ceasefires and peace processes.

Consensus Oriented is defined in this study as: *the extent to which the administration creates policies based on the societal agenda, incorporating different interests and creating widely supported agreements based not merely on the political agenda.*¹³⁶ Determining if an administration is consensus-oriented takes place through three indicators: ‘recognition of public agenda’, ‘decision-making process’ and ‘political opposition organisations. The first indicator is recognition and acceptance of issues faced by the society, which the indicator ‘recognition of public agenda’ reflects.¹³⁷ Thus, the ability of the local administration to identify regional problems is the first step to solving it. The form of decision-making process within the administration also shows how consensus-oriented the governance system is.¹³⁸ For example, if a law can only pass with a two-thirds majority vote with all votes equal, a large political mandate is required, and the law might have to be amended to ensure it is in the interest of everyone. The last indicator refers to the number of political parties with different ideologies which are active and permitted in the region under militia control. General discussion and variations in political thought permitted in a region is essential, for citizens can then collectively choose to support the party with the most popular package of policies.¹³⁹ The degree to which these indicators are observed (see Figure 6. Codebook) determines the extent of the consensus-oriented governance in the administration.

¹³³ Jacqueline Lopour, “Spotlight on Yemen’s Forgotten War and Humanitarian Disaster. Preventing the Next Syrian Refugee Crisis,” CIGI Paper Series, 2016: 1.

¹³⁴ Sarah Kenyon Lischer, “Collateral Damage: Humanitarian Assistance as a Cause of Conflict,” *International Security* 28, no. 1 (2003): 79–109, <https://doi.org/10.1162/016228803322427983>: 85.

¹³⁵ UNDP, 1997 as seen in John Graham, Timothy Wynne Plumptre, and Bruce Amos, “Principles for Good Governance in the 21st Century” (Ottawa, 2003): 3.

¹³⁶ United Nations, “What Is Good Governance?”: 3.

¹³⁷ Mary Louise McAllister, *Governing Ourselves? The Politics of Canadian Communities* (UBC Press, 2005): 21.

¹³⁸ Mampilly, *Rebel Rulers: Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life During War*: 17.

¹³⁹ Powell, 2000 as seen in Bjorn Lindberg, Anne Rasmussen, and Andreas Warntjen, “Party Politics as Usual? The Role of Political Parties in EU Legislative Decision-Making,” *Journal of European Public Policy* 15, no. 8 (2008): 1107–26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760802407623>: 1108.

Accountability

In the final row, the two principles of transparency and accountability will be merged, with transparency becoming an indicator for the general principle of ‘accountability’. Merging these principles is academically feasible because they are already highly intertwined,¹⁴⁰ because if accountability is to be upheld, the population must recognise and understand government involvement in particular activities such as budget allocation; thus, transparency is required.¹⁴¹ In order for governance to be considered ‘accountable’, it must be clear to citizens why certain actions are or are not taken, which is provided by transparency. If an administration is transparent, citizens are able to hold their leaders accountable when governments take illegal actions or pursue policies that are unsupported.¹⁴²

Accountability is defined in this study as: *the extent to which the administration follow accepted procedures, the openness involved in these processes and the ability for society to hold individuals responsible for their actions.*¹⁴³ The accountability of administrations is measured using three indicators: ‘transparency’, ‘civic monitoring organisations’ and ‘lack of corruption’. Transparency represents the extent to which there is openness and access to information regarding the work of the administration. Transparency relates to governance through the process of policy creation and implementation. Brandsma & Schillemans identify this indicator as essential for the protection of public interest - ensuring the best choices are made for citizens well-being, and its consequent creation of accountability.¹⁴⁴ Timeliness with regard to the dissemination of information and the amount of details released are examples of this indicator.¹⁴⁵ The second indicator is the amount of ‘civic monitoring organisations’ present in the region and is also used as an indicator of the intended transparency of the administration.¹⁴⁶ These civil society organisations may act as a means of ethically assessing released reports by the administration into the public governance of the region. Finally, the lack of ‘corruption’ in the administrations, which directly shows how accountable any

¹⁴⁰ John Gerring and Strom C Thacker, “Political Institutions and Corruption : The Role of Unitarism and Parliamentarism,” *British Journal of Political Science* 34, no. 2 (2016): 295–330: 316.

¹⁴¹ Sánchez, 2002 as seen in Organisation for Economic Co-operation (OECD), “Development Content Provider. Public Sector Transparency and Accountability: Making It Happen.” (Paris, 2002): 163.

¹⁴² Gijs Jan Brandsma and Thomas Schillemans, “The Accountability Cube: Measuring Accountability,” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 23, no. 4 (October 1, 2013): 953–75, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mus034>.

¹⁴³ Michael Johnston, “Good Governance: Rule of Law, Transparency, and Accountability,” 2006: 2.

¹⁴⁴ Brandsma and Schillemans, “The Accountability Cube: Measuring Accountability.”

¹⁴⁵ T Vishwanath and D Kaufmann, “Towards Transparency in Finance and Governance,” 1999.

¹⁴⁶ Jeremy Pope, “Dimensions of Transparency in Governance,” in *6th Global Forum on Reinventing Government: Towards Participatory and Transparent Governance*, 2005.

public authority is.¹⁴⁷ Observing this indicator is difficult because it is impossible to determine precisely the extent of corruption because it occurs off the record. Instead, estimates are based on the perceived level of corruption and the number of corruption cases that are identified by media, monitoring organisations or whistle-blowers. The degree to which these indicators are observed (see Figure 6. Codebook) determines the extent of the accountability present in the administration.

As a result, there are now five principles that constitute the revised good governance framework, shown in the right column in Figure 1. Rule of law and consensus oriented remain unchanged from the UN model, and participation, operationality and accountability are the modified principles. The adjustment of the framework makes a more suitable model for the two case studies in this paper because: (a) it recognizes the ‘de-facto’ status of the administrations in question; (b) places greater emphasis on fundamental elements of governance. This is done through the reduction of principles required for good governance and the creation of specific indicators for the context of the case studies (i.e. levels of conflict, development and governance institutions); and (c) simultaneously creating a more concrete and mutually exclusive principles for the framework.

To sum up, the principles for the revised good governance framework provide insights of the performance of governance by the de-facto administrations,¹⁴⁸ as the new model with five principles retains the elements of the original mechanism to measure good governance. The factor of ‘context’ is also given great emphasis, this will be done throughout the analysis chapter, to compensate for the structural critiques of the good governance model.

With individual principles operationalised, how good governance is determination will now be explained. This study bases its framework on the five principles mentioned above, these have a positive correlation to good governance, each equally contributing for one-fifth of governance. So if all the principles are observed to be present to a large extent, then the governance can be determined to be ‘good’.¹⁴⁹ To answer the first research question, the five principles are identified, analysed and qualitatively assessed within the areas governed by the Syrian Democratic Council and the Supreme Political Council.

¹⁴⁷ Finn Heinrich and A. J. Brown, “Measuring Accountability Performance and Its Relevance for Anti-Corruption: Introducing a New Integrity System-Based Measure,” *Crime, Law and Social Change* 68, no. 3 (2017): 359–81, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-017-9712-4>.

¹⁴⁸ Butcher and Clarke, “Good Governance.”

¹⁴⁹ Aart Kraay and Daniel Kaufmann, *Growth without Governance* (The World Bank, 2002).

3.3 Virtuous Half-Circle Model

With the first framework showing the extent of ‘good’ governance present in the two regions studied, the second theoretical framework will to answer the second sub question of this thesis; Based on the analysis of governance, which administration is more legitimate? Although here is no universal way to measure legitimacy,¹⁵⁰ Schmelzle & Stollenwerk have developed a model to study the ‘causal interplay’ relationship they observed between the effectiveness of governance and legitimacy of governance in areas of limited statehood.¹⁵¹ The Virtuous Circle Model¹⁵² will attempt to translate the output of the good governance framework - governance performance, here referred to as effectiveness into the legitimacy of the de-facto administrations.

This thesis will only focus on the positive causation as seen in Figure 4, between effectiveness (box a) and legitimacy (box b), and thus this partial model will be referred to in this thesis as the Virtuous Half-Circle Model. It is important to note that the authors of the framework encourage further research “to analyse the explanatory value of the model’s elements more systematically and for a wider variety of actors, issue areas, and world regions”.¹⁵³ As seen in Figure 4, there are four conditions (boxes 1 - 4) that a cases of de-facto administration must adhere to in order for the positive causal relationship between effectiveness and legitimacy to function. These conditions are all related to the ‘governance audience’, who in this study are defined as host country population, or in other words citizens.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Christian Von Haldenwang, “Measuring Legitimacy: New Trends, Old Shortcomings,” 2016: 1.

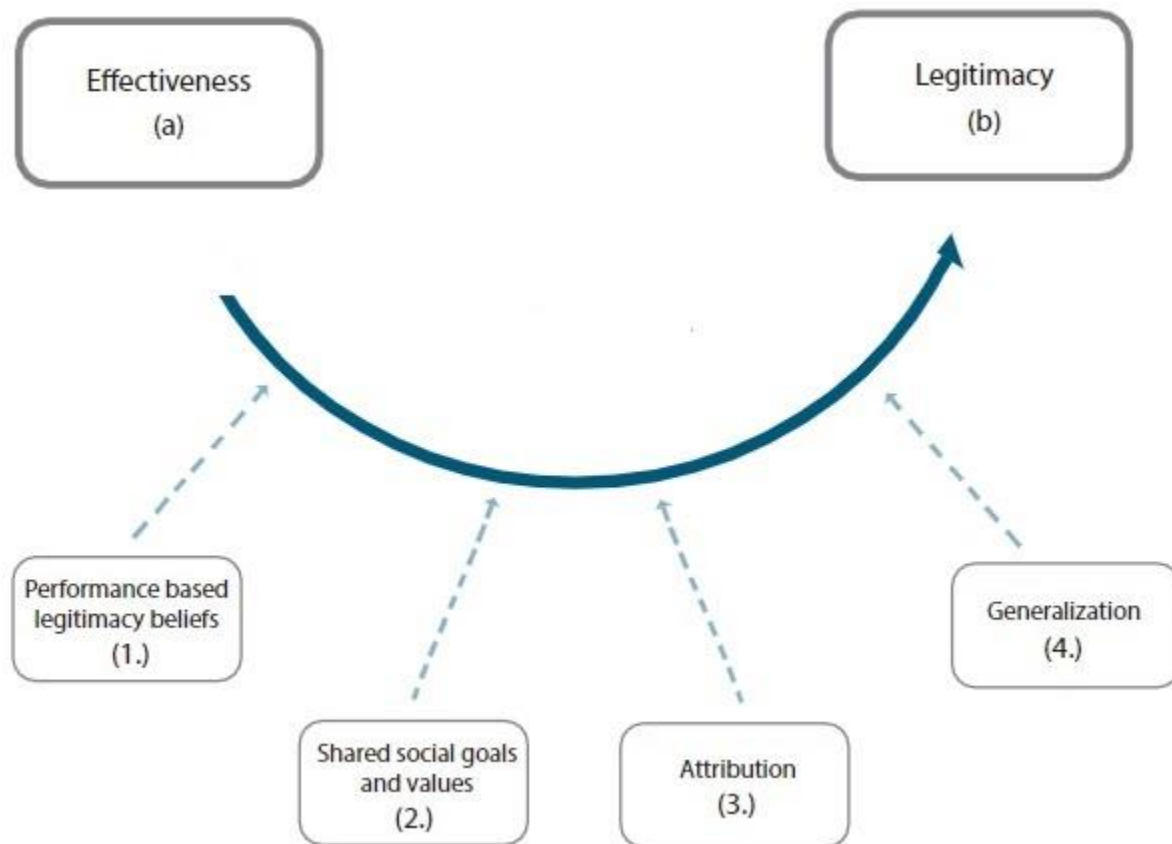
¹⁵¹ Schmelzle and Stollenwerk, “Virtuous or Vicious Circle? Governance Effectiveness and Legitimacy in Areas of Limited Statehood.”

¹⁵² Schmelzle and Stollenwerk: 458.

¹⁵³ Schmelzle and Stollenwerk: 464.

¹⁵⁴ Michael Tomz, “Domestic Audience Costs in International Relations: An Experimental Approach,” *International Organization* 61, no. 4 (2007): 821–40, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818307070282>; Katharina P. Coleman, “The Legitimacy Audience Shapes the Coalition: Lessons from Afghanistan, 2001,” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 11, no. 3 (July 3, 2017): 339–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2017.1353752>.

Figure 4. Half-Circle Model



Source: Schmelzle & Stollenwerk.¹⁵⁵

The first condition is ‘performance-based legitimacy beliefs’ (box 1) and requires the receivers of the governance to view the effectiveness of administrative institutions as part of overall legitimacy.¹⁵⁶ In other words, citizens must partially believe that the actions of an administration determine its legitimacy. The second condition deciding if the framework is applicable is whether or not the de-facto administration and the civilian population share the same “goals and social values”.¹⁵⁷ This condition is called ‘shared social goals and values’ represented as box 2 in Figure 4. The third condition is ‘attribution’, where the citizens must be able to link the results of governance to the party that was responsible for it (box 3). This is important as in conflict zones there can be a range of actors providing goods or services and credit and therefore legitimacy could be given to the wrong actor.¹⁵⁸ The final condition is that of ‘generalization’

¹⁵⁵ Schmelzle and Stollenwerk, “Virtuous or Vicious Circle? Governance Effectiveness and Legitimacy in Areas of Limited Statehood.”

¹⁵⁶ Schmelzle and Stollenwerk: 460.

¹⁵⁷ Schmelzle and Stollenwerk: 460.

¹⁵⁸ Ciorciari & Krasner, 2018 seen in Schmelzle and Stollenwerk.

where citizens must have had at least one experience with the administration in question in order to make judgement on their overall legitimacy.¹⁵⁹ In the results section of this research paper the conditions will be systematically analysed and discussed through the application of the findings in the analysis chapter.

3.4 Methods for Data collection

Literature search

The reports and documents form the source of secondary data, are analysed through content analysis, which is used to interpret meaning from qualitative texts.¹⁶⁰ Therefore, content analysis adheres to a naturalist paradigm in which realities are constructed and multiple views can exist.¹⁶¹ This is important because there is a lack of consensus on the legitimacy of the actors in the case studies, thus there will be a range of opinions reflected in the sources. To ensure views from across the narrative spectrum are represented the sources will be varied based on origin, organisation and type of document. An important note is that sources are very recent because the two case studies are contemporary and undergoing continuous change. For the Syrian Democratic Council case only sources from between 2015 and 2020 will be used¹⁶², the same time period holds true for the Supreme Political Council (2015 to 2020).

Papers and reports were found through internet searches with terms relevant for the two case studies and theoretical framework. The data was either openly accessible or accessed through the Google Scholar a search engine for academic literature, reports and books. Leiden University Catalogue was also extensively used, this is a database of academic papers of universities around the world. The selection criteria is as follows: terms that were used to find literature sources for content analysis include ‘de-facto governance in Syria/Yemen’, ‘Syrian Democratic Council’ and ‘Supreme Political Council’ as well as through synonyms such as ‘Kurdish/Houthi administration in Syria/Yemen’.

Due to the fact that five good governance principles were the focus of the analysis, an initially a screening had to be held as some articles focussed solely on one or two principles of governance, when a more comprehensive source would be more beneficial for the study. This results in Appendix 1, the reports,

¹⁵⁹ Schmelzle and Stollenwerk:460.

¹⁶⁰ Hsiu Fang Hsieh and Sarah E Shannon, “Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis,” *Qualitative Health Research* 15, no. 9 (2005): 1277–88, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>.

¹⁶¹ Lincoln & Guba, 1985 as seen in Del Siegle, “Qualitative Research Paradigm,” University of connecticut, 2020, https://researchbasics.education.uconn.edu/qualitative_research_paradigm/#.

¹⁶² The predecessors of the SDC did already engage in governance, however articles on these institutional are beyond the scope of this thesis.

articles and documents that will be analysed are listed. Think tanks comprise the largest type of source of these documents as they produce comprehensive and practical reports of ongoing processes connected to the case studies. United Nations reports are also used, the quality of these reports is considered reliable due to the fact that the supranational organisation is well-funded. However, the scope of information is limited by the fact that it often only covers countries as a whole, rather than single regions, as is the case with all sources used for the analysis of our case study in Yemen (see appendix 1).

Interviews

The primary data has been gathered through interviews with individuals that are indirectly involved in the two case studies. This method has been chosen as interviews with elite individuals have enabled a generation of reliable and valid qualitative data, thereby becoming a staple of political research.¹⁶³ Since this is a comparative case study analysis with socio-political contexts, interviews represent a suitable method of data collection.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, using interviews will complement the data derived from the reports used for analysis. This is because specific questions that relate to the principles used in the theoretical framework can be asked. Therefore, if there are any knowledge gaps in terms of a good governance principle in the reports and documents selected for content analysis, this gap can be filled through interviewee responses. Emphasis can be placed on certain principles in a given case study through asking prompts or probes to ensure that sufficient data is available for the entire analysis.

The interviewees have thus been selected through quota sampling; this will ensure that only relevant actors that have experienced and or have knowledge of the governance process will be eligible to be interviewed. The quota sampling determines the so-called ‘parameters’ of the population that are eligible for interviewing.¹⁶⁵ The selection of participants depends largely on the extent to which this person is representative of the elite target population but also to a certain degree on convenience, regarding whether a representative of one of the respective organisations is easily accessible to the author.¹⁶⁶ The aforementioned parameters/criteria for potential interviewees is an extensive insight into governance of region. To further define what validates as extensive insight; 1) actively working in the region in question, thus experienced first-hand governance of the de-facto administration or 2) an expert, prominent in the public service, research and or policy institution or Inter/Non-Governmental Organisations.

¹⁶³ Glenn Beamer, “Elite Interviews and State Politics Research,” *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (2002): 86–96, <https://doi.org/10.1177/153244000200200106>.

¹⁶⁴ Honorata Mazepus, “Interviews” (The Hauge: Leiden University, 2020).

¹⁶⁵ Oliver C. Robinson, “Sampling in Interview-Based Qualitative Research: A Theoretical and Practical Guide,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 11, no. 1 (2014): 25–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2013.801543>: 34.

¹⁶⁶ Alan Buckingham and Peter Robert Sanders, *The Survey Methods Workbook: From Design to Analysis* (Cambridge: Polity Press., 2004).

This selection process resulted in interviews with a range of professions, as seen in Appendix 2. As interviews were done anonymously, specific details cannot be discussed. However, humanitarian workers and journalists were interviewed based on the first aspect of the criteria; these are individuals actively working on the ground in Syria or Yemen, together forming one third of those interviewed. The second group was made up of those working with an IGO, these individuals fit both aspects of the aforementioned criteria, working in the country wherein the case study is as well as being experts in the field of governance. The last group which forms the majority of interviewees is chosen due to the last aspect, namely being involved in the public service and research and policy field.

Individuals and organisations were approached with an enquiry about their interest in giving an interview on one of the case studies in this research. This was done via telephone, email, LinkedIn or a contact form on their website. Before the interviews, a consent form had been provided to each interviewee in which the research aims are outlined, as well as a request for voluntary anonymous participation is included. Interviews will cease once enough insight has been gained into governance, and a ‘data saturation’ point is reached.¹⁶⁷

The majority of the interviews have been held remotely due to the COVID-19 lockdown, mainly through (video) calls, but also in exceptions in person meetings and emails. The interviews are semi-structured, allowing the interviewer to collect qualitative data with open ended question and the possibility to enquire further on a subject.¹⁶⁸ ‘Prompts’ have been used if the initial response was not satisfactory and to direct the discussion to a certain topic such as indicators.¹⁶⁹ If an interesting process or concept has only been briefly named, probes have been used to investigate that topic further. Moreover, the interviewees are considered ‘elites’ or experts in their field, so the language choice and structure of the questions has been well-prepared through multiple revisions as this can have a substantial impact on the potential quality of answers. Thus, the ability to write questions in advance, based on an understanding of the current context of the administrations through literature is essential for the author.¹⁷⁰

The interviews begin with broad questions about each principle to enable the interviewee to “volunteer perceptions and talk freely, while reserving the ability to ask more specific prompts and probes

¹⁶⁷ Benjamin Saunders et al., “Saturation in Qualitative Research: Exploring Its Conceptualization and Operationalization,” *Quality and Quantity* 52, no. 4 (2018): 1893–1907, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-017-0574-8>.

¹⁶⁸ William C Adams, “Conducting Semi-Structured,” in *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation, Fourth Edition*, 2015, 492–505: 494.

¹⁶⁹ Nigel Joseph Mathers, Nicholas Jeremy Fox, and Amanda Hunn, *Using Interviews in a Research Project* (Trent: NHS Executive, 1998): 2.

¹⁷⁰ Christiane Schmidt, *The Analysis of Semi-Structured Interviews. A Companion to Qualitative Research*, 2004:253.

in reaction to initial responses”.¹⁷¹ This can be seen in Appendix 1, where the questions are related to the principles and specific indicators; here justifications are given for each question and potential prompt. The analysis is based on determining the degree to which certain principles of good governance are present. Therefore, all questions start with ‘to what extent’ or ‘how’ and relate to enquiries regarding the quality of an indicator, or comparisons of particular indicators. Responses result in an answer that mentions the governance processes, the context of the case study and also the quality or state of a certain indicator, or more generally the principle. The exact questions may differ slightly as reference may be made to specific elements of case study governance. An example of this is when reference may be made to the ‘administration in the Houthi-controlled areas’ or ‘the autonomous administration of northern Syria’. The questions, prompts and probes are listed in Appendix 1 with their respective indicators and principles.

¹⁷¹ Beamer, “Elite Interviews and State Politics Research.”: 92.

Table 2. List of anonymous interviews and documents used for content analysis

| Case study: | Documents for content analysis | Anonymous interviews |
|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Syrian Democratic Council | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sary, G. (2016). <i>Kurdish Self-governance in Syria: Survival and Ambition</i>. London: Chatham House. - Khaddour, K. (2017). <i>How regional security concerns uniquely constrain governance in Northeastern Syria</i>. Beirut: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. - Hatahet, S. (2019). <i>The political economy of the autonomous administration of north and east Syria</i>. European University Institute. - Özçelik, B. (2019). <i>Explaining the Kurdish Democratic Union Party's Self-Governance Practices in Northern Syria, 2012–18. Government and Opposition</i>, 1-21. doi:10.1017/gov.2019.1. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interviewee 1, 2020. Journalist. <i>phone</i>, 18th of June. - Interviewee 2, 2020. Academic. <i>video-call</i>, 4th of June. - Interviewee 3, 2020. Academic. <i>phone</i>, 3rd of April. - Interviewee 4, 2020. United Nations. <i>video-call</i>, 18th of June. - Interviewee 5, 2020. Think-tank. <i>video-call</i>, 31st of May. - Interviewee 6, 2020. Humanitarian. <i>video-call</i>, 30th of June. |
| Supreme Political Council | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2019. <i>Rapid Local Governance Diagnostic in Yemen</i>. - Mansour, R., & Salisbury, P. (2019). <i>Between Order and Chaos - A New Approach to Stalled State Transformations in Iraq and Yemen</i>. London: Chatham House. - Salisbury, P. (2017). <i>Yemen: national chaos, local order</i>. London: Chatham House. - Clausen, M. L. (2018). Competing for control over the state: The case of Yemen. <i>Small Wars & Insurgencies</i>, 29(3), 560-578. - Yemen Polling Center, (2019). <i>Perceptions of the Yemeni public on security-related issues</i>. Survey findings, Sanaa/Aden. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interviewee 7, 2020. United Nations. <i>e-mail</i> 8th of June. - Interviewee 8, 2020. Think-tank. <i>video-call</i>, 3rd of June. - Interviewee 9, 2020. Journalist. <i>video-call</i>, 1st of June. - Interviewee 10, 2020. Academic. <i>video-call</i>, 12th of June. - Interviewee 11, 2020. Journalist. <i>video-call</i>, 2nd of June. - Interviewee 12, 2020. Diplomat. <i>in-person meeting</i>, 15th of June. |

Procedure

The output of these interviews are the transcriptions of the whole interview. Post-interview transcripts are vital to any research based on interview data, where via a transcription process, a written record of the interview is created which can then be analysed and coded,¹⁷² in the case of this thesis, that is content analysis. Since contextual factors in speech are not as relevant or feasible to this research, indexical transcripts with a timeline were chosen for the transcriptions.

Manual transcription is complex and time-intensive, especially when tapes accumulate.¹⁷³ As an alternative to manual transcription, this thesis employs the automated transcription software Otter. Automated transcription software has its limitations due to technical difficulties associated with recognising two or more voices at the same time and confusing certain words with others, which can lead to errors in the transcript.¹⁷⁴ However, to overcome these limitations, the method described by Parcell has been used to review the interview recordings while the automatically generated transcript is being read.¹⁷⁵ This enables the elimination of sporadic inconsistencies in the transcript generated by Otter and ensures its accuracy. Finally, the gathered primary data (transcripts) from the interviews are analysed through coding, which is described in the content analysis section.

3.5 Method for Data Analysis

Content Analysis

The reports and transcriptions for content analysis have been systematically analysed through coding, which allows the data to be summarised and synthesised.¹⁷⁶

Reports and transcriptions are analysed based on their content, using the same codebook. The codes are used to label concepts in the data and are created in relation to the theoretical framework and the case studies used within this thesis¹⁷⁷. The codes are ‘theory driven’ in that they originate from concepts discussed

¹⁷² Bill Gillham, *Research Interviewing: The Range of Techniques: A Practical Guide* (McGraw-Hill Education, 2005): 121.

¹⁷³ Gillham: 124.

¹⁷⁴ Gillham: 122.

¹⁷⁵ Erin Sahlstein Parcell and Katherine Rafferty, “Interviews, Recording and Transcribing,” in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods*, 2017: 5.

¹⁷⁶ Lety Elias, “Content Analysis Lab Session 1” (The Hauge: Leiden University, 2020).

¹⁷⁷ The documents have been fully analysed, unless certain chapters do not relate to case studies under examination here (for example, some documents choose to include other countries for comparison. This is not relevant for this research).

in the theoretical framework and literature review.¹⁷⁸ Although the questions are related to the theoretical framework, new concepts or items may arise in the interviews. This could occur due to the unique aspects of a given case, for example, and will demand that parts of the pre-set codes (indicators) are improvised by addition, editing or expansion.¹⁷⁹

Figure 5. Codebook for the analysis of documents, reports and transcriptions

| Indicator | Operationalisation - Measurement of indicator | Examples |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| Order and security | Sources stating the amount of public order and or perception of safety. This can include mention of the conduct of local policing or militia forces vis-à-vis the population. | “Security forces present with checkpoints preventing a number of attacks on civilian targets” / “The amount of petty crime has increased over the last years” |
| Civil liberties | References to the civil liberties of the citizens and whether they are protected. This includes freedom of speech, belief, press and assembly. | “Legislation created and ratified for the protection of media and journalists.” / “Public demonstrations are often repressed, with security service using excessive violence” |
| Access to civil justice | Sources discussing the ease of engaging with the judicial system. Elements include costs involved in legal aid/protection or the process’ transparency, fairness and representativeness. | “The administration has lengthy pre-trial detentions” / “Lawyers are provided to those who cannot afford normal representative” |
| Election and referendum turnout | Sources discussing the amount of participation of citizens in politics such as voting procedures, turnout as well as alternative manners in which citizens voice is represented can be evaluated | “IDPs are not able to gain residency permits for the de-facto state, and therefore cannot vote” / “Local authority leaders are chosen and divided through tribal structures” |
| Coordination with civil society | Mention of civil society organisations, their role and how the administration interacts with these. This includes practicalities like licenses and freedoms to operate and reach those vulnerable. | “requirements for CSOs are minimal, so there is significant CSO sector in the region” / “Administration actively engages with CSOs in capacity building projects” |
| Lack of discrimination | Sources make reference to any instances in the region where ethnicities, genders or religions are disadvantaged regarding governance. This can be based on policy, social structures and or promotion by the administrations rhetoric. | “Ethnic and religious minorities are actively invited to become representative for their community with the aim increase social cohesion” / “Reports show few minorities on administration boards, with female participation at all time low since start of the conflict” |
| Address issues on the public agenda | Sources state how well issues are being met by the administration. How issues facing the citizens are solved, needs are met. | “Food distribution centres have been set up by administration in vulnerable neighbourhoods” / “Fertilizer and other agricultural inputs have increased in price due to higher customs duties and or bribes demanded at border checkpoints” |

¹⁷⁸ Cynthia Weston et al., “Analyzing Interview Data: The Development and Evolution of a Coding System,” *Qualitative Sociology* 24, no. 3 (2001): 381–400, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1010690908200>: 384.

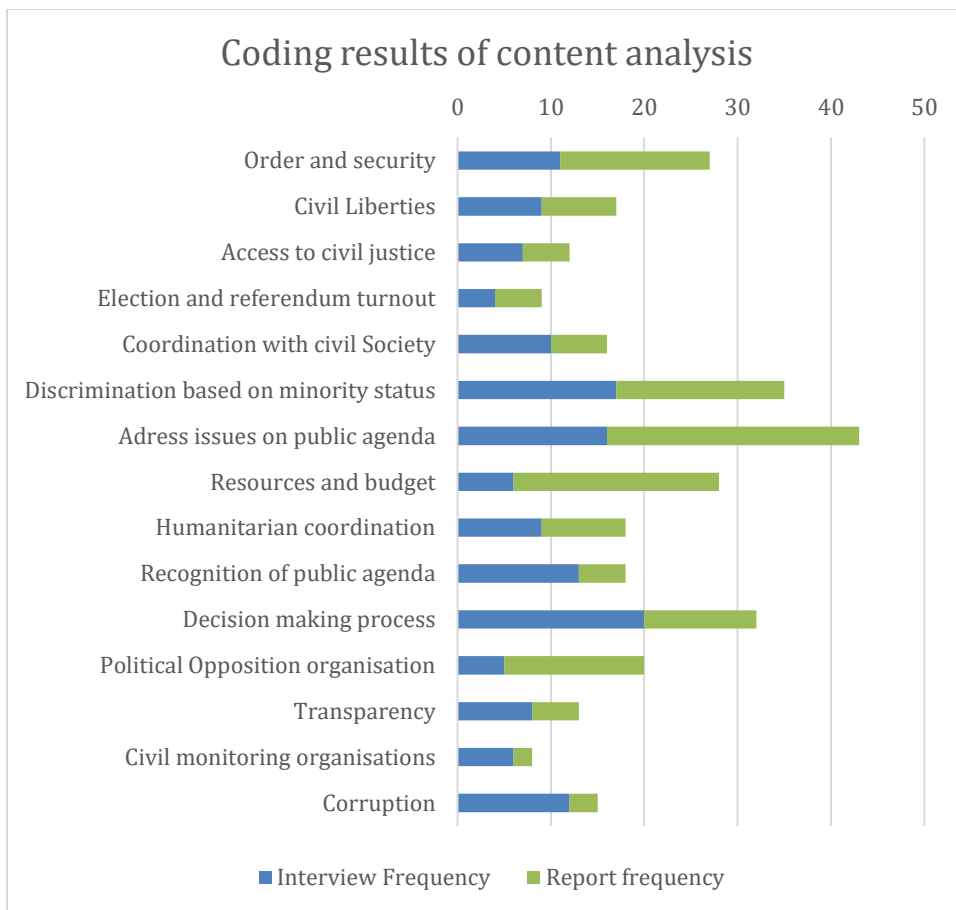
¹⁷⁹ Roger Sapsford and Victor Jupp, *Data Collection and Analysis* (London: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2006): 174.

| | | |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Resources and budget | Mention of the resources and budget available relative to the issues faced by the administration. Ability to raise revenue, management of public resources. | “Access to international market has ensured steady sale of petroleum, allowing for the imports of food and medical goods into the region” / “The administration has had difficulties in acquiring funds for public infrastructure projects” |
| Humanitarian coordination | Statements on the ease at which humanitarian organisations are able to work with the administration. This can include: Information sharing, security provision, prioritizing needs of vulnerable. | “Reports stating humanitarian needs are reducing in areas, with IDPs leaving camps” / “NSAG have provided humanitarian organisations access to the most vulnerable areas” |
| Recognition of public agenda | Sources mention the degree to which local issues are recognised and reach the political agenda. The ability of the administration to align with citizens on legislation and policies as well as respective redistribution of resources to tackle these issues. | “With economic conditions worsening, the administration has created public work programs to increase employment opportunities” |
| Decision making process | References are made to how decisions are taken in every level of governance and how inclusive this process is. | “Graph shows that level of decentralisation has decreased bureaucracy and layers of management, leading to effective decision making” / “Top-down decision-making process from within ruling parties has led to alienation of citizens with their ‘representative’” |
| Political opposition organisations | Sources discuss the extent to which organisations with different views are allowed to operate. This can include political parties; foundations, think tanks and news agencies. | “Shia Muslim communities have been able to open community centres and media organisations, banned under the previous administration” |
| Transparency | Sources discuss the openness of information regarding the administration and its respective governance processes. | “Legislation and budgets passed by the parliament is open to the public and available online” |
| Civil monitoring organisations | Data makes reference to governance watchdogs and civil society that involves the monitoring of developments of the public sector. | “Monitoring organisation have been able to operate freely and investigate possible human rights violations” / “The de-facto administration admits wrong doing by its militia and implemented disciplinary measures to prevent future incidents” |
| Lack of corruption | Sources refer to (perceived) corruption taking place within the administration and the scale of this. Allocation of public funds | “Accusations of embezzlement of public funds are common against the administration, yet these are continuously denied” |

In Figure 5, the categories are presented as the principles of the good governance framework used in this study and defined in the adjacent column as seen in the operationalisation. In the third column, the indicators are listed, along with description of how these are to be identified and measured. Regarding the labelling of the transcriptions and papers, paragraphs and sentences represent the main unit of analysis as they are labelled based on whether they reflect any of the variables or indicators of the good governance framework, as seen in Figure 3.

The transcripts and documents are highlighted when a relevant category is identified. After which all labelled text is gathered and organised first per principle and indicator. Per indicator all aspects are brought together to form a comprehensive analysis on that specific aspect of governance. To give practical insight into how such an analysis is formed if source disagree with each other, both narratives will be shown, alternatively if multiple sources concur with each other, both will be cited for the argument. To illustrate this in combination with the operationalisation discussed earlier how the labelling, coding and content analysis process is carried out, an example will be given; if a source states that: “the SPC administration has done little to assist civil monitoring organisation and, in some cases, reportedly blocked their operations”, then this sentence (unit of analysis) will be labelled as accountability, civil monitoring organisations. This observation will be added to the analysis as it is an instance where the administration has given no resources or priority to improving quality of this governance indicator.

Figure 6. Data source per indicator



The choice to combine two methods for data gathering is rooted in the expectation that sources vary in the type of information they convey. In Figure 6, where coding indicator results are highlighted per data

source partially confirms this. Although many of the indicators have a healthy balance of both data sources, the indicators of coordination with civil society, recognition of public agenda and all three indicators of accountability, interviews provide the bulk of data. In contrast, the indicators resources and budget as well as political opposition organisations are heavily dependent on the reports used. This is testament to the value that multiple data sources can provide a more balanced analysis.

3.6 Validity

To evaluate the research methods used here, the extent to which any conclusions are ‘valid’ are discussed in this section. Validity is defined in this research as “how accurately the account represents participants’ realities of the social phenomena and is credible to them”.¹⁸⁰ This chapter will thus discuss whether the methods employed in this research actually measures the intended principles and indicators.

The first type of validity to be discussed is ‘internal’. This is a measure of the accuracy and truth of results for the cases of de-facto administration in Syria and Yemen. Having a thorough research design means internal validity will be strong, with robust results which have high reproducibility.¹⁸¹ Applying the same methods and research design leads to the obtainment of similar results, indicating high internal validity. Another potential factor in reducing the internal validity of the study is the current and highly political nature of the issues. Hence, political views may percolate through the objective facts and subjects may frame the situation as more positive or negative than it is in reality.¹⁸² The range of sources used will limit this effect as much as possible.

To further increase the internal validity of the research, inter-coder reliability is utilised. This method is explained by Kurasaki as “a measure of agreement among multiple coders for how they apply codes to text data”.¹⁸³ Recognition of the need for this method arose in order to guarantee the replicability of the thesis. With coding and labelling of both the reports and transcription, achieving the same results is vital. The efficacy of the codebooks will be determined through coding the reports and transcriptions by the author three weeks after the original coding. The extent to which the results of this reflect the original

¹⁸⁰ Schwandt, 1997 as seen in John W Creswell and Dana L Miller, “Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry, Theory into Practice” 39, no. 3 (2000): 124–30, <https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip3903>: 124.

¹⁸¹ Arthur Schram, “Artificiality: The Tension between Internal and External Validity in Economic Experiments,” *Journal of Economic Methodology* 12, no. 2 (June 2005): 225–37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501780500086081>: 226.

¹⁸² Yair Omer and Sulitzeanu-Kenan Raanan, “The Politics behind Perceptions of Political Bias: The Intergroup Foundations of Neutrality Invocation and Reaction to Bias,” 2017.

¹⁸³ Karen S. Kurasaki, “Intercoder Reliability for Validating Conclusions Drawn from Open-Ended Interview Data,” *Field Methods* 12, no. 3 (2000): 179–94, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X0001200301>: 179.

findings of the author demonstrates their replicability. Refining the codebook continues until the replicability is satisfactory. This process improves the discriminant capacity of the coding scheme or reduces the error count.¹⁸⁴

The results of the Intercoder Validity Test can be seen in Appendix 4, here a random source has been chosen to be coded for a second time. When comparing the results of the coded texts, two irregularities have been found with regards to the categorisation of certain principles and indicators, both of these are highlighted in by the colour red. The first discrepancy is the fact that the text on the indicator of ‘humanitarian coordination’ has not been labelled in the second round of coding. The second is the portion of text that has been identified and labelled under ‘civil monitoring organisation’ in the original coding and labelled as ‘coordination with civil society’ in the second control round of coding. This is proof that the codebook is not perfect in replicability, yet out of 11 labels 9 were consistent with the previous round of coding. This proportion is of satisfactory validity to not require an overhaul of the coding book and process.

The observed process in the literature that prompted this research is investigated in this thesis, yet to determine whether these initial assumptions are correct for all situations in which they occur, we must look at external validity.¹⁸⁵ The greatest external validity issue of this research relates to the sampling methods. To identify individuals within the quota sample, elements of convenience sampling were used as other participants were not accessible to the author. Normally only used for pilot studies, this method partially influenced the selection of interviewees, meaning that the data is not generalisable to the overall population.¹⁸⁶ The justification for this method is that the ‘snowball sampling’ technique was not used, as this would create selection bias through mutual connections who have similar perceptions. Reliance on a social network to refer to further interviewees would create homogeneous interviewees with nearly identical political views on the governance in question.¹⁸⁷ Extensive efforts were made to ensure that the interviewees represented a range of political organisations and differed in their views on the situation.

¹⁸⁴ John L. Campbell et al., “Coding In-Depth Semistructured Interviews: Problems of Unitization and Intercoder Reliability and Agreement,” *Sociological Methods and Research* 42, no. 3 (2013): 294–320, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0049124113500475>.

¹⁸⁵ Schram, “Artificiality: The Tension between Internal and External Validity in Economic Experiments.”: 226.

¹⁸⁶ Marc Bornstein, Justin Jager, and Diane Putnick, “Sampling in Developmental Science: Situations, Shortcomings, Solutions, and Standards,” *Developmental Review* 33, no. 4 (2013): 357–70, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dr.2013.08.003>.

¹⁸⁷ Nissim Cohen and Tamar Arieli, “Field Research in Conflict Environments: Methodological Challenges and Snowball Sampling,” *Journal of Peace Research* 48, no. 4 (2011): 423–35, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343311405698>: 428.

Chapter 4. Analysing Governance

In this chapter, the analysis of governance is done through the revised good governance framework. The five principles will be analysed per case study after which differences in cases will be discussed. To get greater insight from this chapter, a background component is added in Appendix 6 and 7 to describe and analyse governance in Syria and Yemen prior to the conflicts, specifically focusing on areas now under militia control. This serves as a historical background to the cases, which is crucial to understanding the governance by the de-facto administrations as their decisions are a result of, or reaction to past governance.

4.1 Rule of law

Rule of law in the Syrian Democratic Council

Order and security

In the region under Syrian Democratic Council's (SDC) control, order and security is enforced by the armed wing, the Syrian Democratic Forces¹⁸⁸. Within the SDF there is the 'Asayish' - Internal Security Forces are the local police with the aims of order and security within the administrative boundaries.¹⁸⁹ To understand their approach to providing order and security to the populations under their control, this section will be structured through the development of the militias. In 2012 the YPG (the YPJ was created a year later) first started to control areas on the northern Syrian border, According to Interviewee 1, there was purely a military struggle to control territories with rival actors of the Syrian government and Syrian rebels, the focus here being solely on establishing security dominance over territory.¹⁹⁰

Interviewee 5 explains the process that was implemented to ensure order and security in a newly controlled area - a local council was created through elections and then parallel to that supervisors also known as 'Cadres' were installed to supervise and consult these newly created structures.¹⁹¹ These supervisors were trained by the Kurdistan's Workers Party in Turkey and had experience in organisational

¹⁸⁸ This group is comprised of various militia groups, most notably the Kurdish YPG/YPJ (People's/Women's Protection Units), the Al-Sanadid Forces of the Shammar tribe, the Syriac Military Council comprised of Assyrian/Syriac populations and finally the 'Liwa Thuwar al-Raqqa' - the Raqqa Revolutionaries' Brigade. Conservative estimates put the size of this umbrella organisation at 55,000 (SOHR as seen in Perry, 2015).

¹⁸⁹ Vittoria Federici, "The Rise of Rojava: Kurdish Autonomy in the Syrian Conflict," *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 35, no. 2 (2015): 81–90, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sais.2015.0023>: 86.

¹⁹⁰ Interviewee 1, 2020. Journalist. *phone*, 18th of June.

¹⁹¹ Interviewee 5, 2020. Think-tank. *video-call*, 31st of May.

community building¹⁹². This proved essential to the building of emergency institutions quickly in areas in order to stabilize it, most notably from areas recently liberated from ISIS.¹⁹³ The SDF had a very securitized approach, the supervisors focussed on stability and were not governance technocrats, and “their job was to ensure that everything is stable, and that they have an eye on the community”.¹⁹⁴

Another element that allowed the then PYD militias to be the “most organised group in north and eastern Syria” was the support it enjoyed from the US coalition,¹⁹⁵ providing not only airstrikes but also materials for the security forces, among which the Asayish was a benefactor. This ability to provide protection has even convinced some Arab tribes to align themselves with the administration, solely for security reasons as they do not trust the central government of Assad,¹⁹⁶ even though they might have more in common with the ideology of ISIS than that of the administration.¹⁹⁷

Civil liberties

In terms of civil liberties, the model of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) has undergone some developments since its creation relating to personal freedoms.¹⁹⁸ In 2014, a provisional constitution was created, known as the ‘Social Contract’. Here principles of rights and representation were formally incorporated into the administration along the lines of the Universal Declaration of human rights.¹⁹⁹ This was considered very progressive for the region²⁰⁰, according to Sary, as it contains “principles so far never applied in Syria and neighbouring countries, such as the inadmissibility of civilians being tried by military courts and the abolition of the death penalty”.²⁰¹

The general law on conscription called the ‘Mandatory Self Defense Duty’ first implemented in 2014,²⁰² is an exception on the progressive ideals of the Social Contract. Unsurprisingly conscription is not

¹⁹² Although the degree of power they hold is disputed by my sources (Interviewee 5 vs Interviewee 2)

¹⁹³ Interviewee 5.

¹⁹⁴ Interviewee 5: 2.

¹⁹⁵ Burcu Özçelik, “Explaining the Kurdish Democratic Union Party’s Self-Governance Practices in Northern Syria, 2012-18,” *Government and Opposition* 55, no. 4 (2020): 690–710, <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2019.1>: 2.

¹⁹⁶ Özçelik.

¹⁹⁷ Interviewee 2, 2020. Academic. *video-call*, 4th of June.

¹⁹⁸ Sary, “Kurdish Self-Governance in Syria: Survival and Ambition.”

¹⁹⁹ Autonomous Administration of North East Syria, “Charter of the Social Contract, Self-Rule in Rojava,” 2014, accessed June 6, 2020, <https://peaceinkurdistancampaign.com/charter-of-the-social-contract/>.

²⁰⁰ For an academic breakdown of this charter see Molenveld, M (n.d) “In pursuit of freedom, justice, dignity, and democracy” – Rojava’s social contract. MSc Thesis Sociology of Development and Change, Wageningen University and Research.

²⁰¹ Sary, “Kurdish Self-Governance in Syria: Survival and Ambition.”: 11.

²⁰² Rojava Information Center, “Translation: Law Concerning Military Service in North and East Syria,” 2019.

popular with the local population, which caused as many as 200,000 Syrian Kurds to flee into neighbouring Turkey.²⁰³ Considering the unpopularity of conscription, the SDF has actually refrained from implementing it in the recently liberated Arab regions of Raqqa and Deir Ezzor, although joining the militia on a voluntary basis is welcome.²⁰⁴ The need for conscripts is high and Human Rights Watch documented the use of child soldiers by the SDF, something which the SDF denied.²⁰⁵

Geography also has an effect on civil liberties in north eastern Syria with Interviewee 5 stating the example of Manbij, a majority Arab area that has been relatively stable, the administration is more comfortable in allowing for greater civil liberties and allowing civil society to operate.²⁰⁶ It's hard to prioritize that in the far east of Syria and Deir Ezzor, where governance can only exist in the sense of basic essential services, not in the sense of good governance due to the political instability.²⁰⁷

The dilemma for locals in engaging with the administration is that residents are provided with services, among which security is a major proponent, whilst the administration also puts a system in place to monitor them.²⁰⁸ Such monitoring is an essential tool for the Asayish to provide security, Interviewee 2 states that the administration has had to make compromises at various times, struggling “between wanting to give people their sort of full rights and trying to provide security”.²⁰⁹

Access to civil justice

As the AANES continued to develop, a judicial apparatus was created, both in terms of a civilian court system, but also within the SDF, where military courts were established.²¹⁰ In terms of the legal standards, the administration has attempted to create a judicial system according to the universally accepted norm, using the United Nations standards as a guideline. A concrete example of a policy change is their choice to eliminate the death penalty as a sentence.²¹¹ In terms of effectiveness of this system, Interviewee 3 notes that it is not perfect, however relative to the rest of Syria it is very good, dealing with issues such as gender

²⁰³ Gutman, 2017 as seen in Özçelik, “Explaining the Kurdish Democratic Union Party’s Self-Governance Practices in Northern Syria, 2012-18.”

²⁰⁴ Amy Holmes, “SDF’s Arab Majority Rank Turkey as the Biggest Threat to NE Syria” (Washington D.C, 2019): 19.

²⁰⁵ Human Rights Watch, “Syria: Kurdish Forces Violating Child Soldier Ban,” 2015.

²⁰⁶ Interviewee 5, 31st of May 2020.

²⁰⁷ Interviewee 5.

²⁰⁸ Kheder Khaddour, “How Regional Security Concerns Uniquely Constrain Governance in Northeastern Syria,” 2017.

²⁰⁹ Interviewee 2, 4th of June 2020: 1.

²¹⁰ Interviewee 1, 18th of June 2020.

²¹¹ Interviewee 2, 4th of June 2020.

representation, inheritance issues as confronting food price speculation, all very pressing topics in the region.²¹²

The judicial system has had difficulties in prosecuting the thousands of ISIS prisoners, as AANES courts are not recognised by countries of which many ISIS fighters originated, making it impossible to transfer these individuals.²¹³ Moreover, not all citizens in the region are able to access the judicial system either, as reports surfaced accusing militia of the SDF of “displacing civilian populations, looting, demolishing homes and private property and failing to address unsolved killings and disappearances”.²¹⁴

Interviewee 2 expanded on this criticism, citing the extent to which improvised explosive devices (IED) were left behind by ISIS,²¹⁵ as a reason for not allowing the local population of a recently captured town to return. The SDF prevents citizens from returning home based security reasons.²¹⁶ Instances of citizens returning to their homes against the aforementioned advice have died due to these IEDs in Deir Ezzor and Raqqa province.²¹⁷ Interviewee 2 claims the burden placed on the administration by the international community as unfair, as they need to ignore their security concerns for the lives of citizens, they would otherwise be accused of ethnic cleansing as they have been by the reports discussed above.²¹⁸

Rule of law in the Supreme Political Council

Order and security

In March of 2015, the Ansar Allah movement, also known as the Houthi movement, took over government and its institutions in Sana’a, supposedly without a shot being fired.²¹⁹ This was made possible due to the temporary alliance the movement had with the former president of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh. Such short-term alliances continued, first with the Islamist political party Islah, and later individual regional tribes. This

²¹² Interviewee 3, 2020. Academic. *phone*, 3rd of April.

²¹³ Interviewee 1, 18th of June 2020.

²¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, “Syria: Kurdish Forces Violating Child Soldier Ban.” ; ICG 2013, 2014 as seen in Özçelik, “Explaining the Kurdish Democratic Union Party’s Self-Governance Practices in Northern Syria, 2012-18.”: 12.

²¹⁵ Aaron Anfinson and Nadia Al-Dayel, “Landmines and Improvised Explosive Devices: The Lingering Terror of the Islamic State,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, April 15, 2020, 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1751998>; Interviewee 2, 4th of June 2020.

²¹⁶ Amnesty International, “Syria: US Ally’s Razing of Villages Amounts to War Crimes,” 2015.

²¹⁷ Wladimir Van Wilgenburg, “ISIS Leaves Behind Booby-Trapped Hospitals in Liberated Town,” *The Daily Beast*, 2016.

²¹⁸ Interviewee 2, 4th of June 2020.

²¹⁹ United Nations Security Council, “Children and Armed Conflict in Yemen,” 2019.: 3.

allowed the Houthis to expand their authority in a way to allow them to gain more control over the country.²²⁰

On the frontlines of this conflict, in Taiz the Houthis have been accused of indiscriminate use of artillery in civilian areas,²²¹ where the security situation has deteriorated further in the Taiz Governorate. In terms of security within the Houthi administered areas, the responsibility of security remained with the state according to local citizens.²²² Yet, those same respondents admitted that the central government did not provide security, “the Houthis, although not universally liked, were more visible on the ground in Sa’ada.”²²³ The perceptions of the security situation in Houthi controlled²²⁴ areas in Figure 7 show relatively safe scores, with the Al-Hodeidah governorate as an exception with 45% viewing the situation as ‘somewhat bad’.

²²⁰ Interviewee 12, 2020. Diplomat. *in-person meeting*, 15th of June.

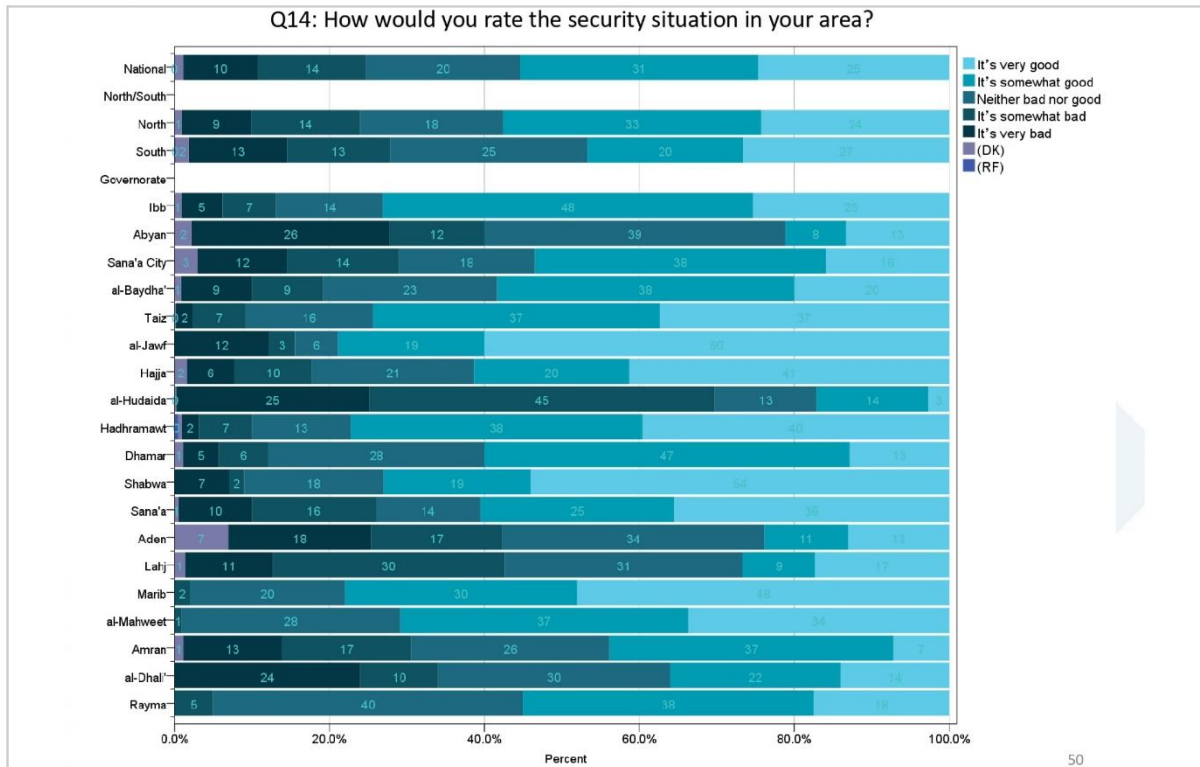
²²¹ Peter Salisbury, “Yemen: National Chaos, Local Order” (London, 2017); United Nations Development Programme, “Rapid Local Governance Diagnostic in Yemen” (Sana’a, 2019): 46.

²²² Maria-Louise Clausen, “Competing for Control over the State: The Case of Yemen,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 29, no. 3 (May 4, 2018): 560–78, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2018.1455792>.

²²³ Clausen: 556.

²²⁴ The governorates that are controlled by the SPC are as follows: Ibb, Sana’a city, Al-Baydha, Hajja, Al-Hodeida, Dhamar, Sana’a, Al-Mahweed, Amran and Rayma.

Figure 7. Perceived security situation per governorate



Source: Yemen Polling Center.²²⁵

Throughout their territories, the SPC used a structure of irregular militiamen or ‘Houthi neighbourhood watch’ to provide security in populated areas.²²⁶ Here residents note the relatively good security situation, when compared to other regions in Yemen.²²⁷ Again, this is corroborated by UNDP which shows that the security situation in Houthi controlled Hajjah has actually improved over time.²²⁸ These observations show that the Houthi’s are relatively successful in terms of internal security, with Salisbury noting that this is due to their security led approach to governance, diverting a significant amount of resources to it.²²⁹ However, the presence of Houthi security forces is also felt by citizens because they engage with open surveillance of citizens.²³⁰ Interviewee 10 states that “There’s arguably more security now, but the security apparatus itself is a source of limited liberties”.²³¹

²²⁵ Yemen Polling Center, “Perceptions of the Yemeni Public on Security-Related Issues” (Sana’a, 2019).

²²⁶ Salisbury, “Yemen: National Chaos, Local Order.”

²²⁷ Renad Mansour and Peter Salisbury, “Between Order and Chaos - A New Approach to Stalled State Transformations in Iraq and Yemen” (London, 2019).

²²⁸ United Nations Development Programme, “Rapid Local Governance Diagnostic in Yemen.”: 46.

²²⁹ Salisbury, “Yemen: National Chaos, Local Order.”: 15.

²³⁰ Interviewee 9, 2020. Journalist. *video-call*, 1st of June.

²³¹ Interviewee 10, 2020. Academic. *video-call*, 12th of June: 1.

Civil liberties

In the beginning, the Houthis were directly participating in designing the National Dialogue Conference, which would have lauded a new era for greater civil liberties for all Yemenis.²³² This is because previously under the regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh and the transitional period from 2011 onwards there were few civil liberties, yet citizens could in some cases voice their frustrations with the government.²³³ However, as the new constitution was about to be put forward to the people in a referendum, the Houthis intervened forcibly and blocked the implementation, as they feared this would reduce their influence if greater federalisation would take place.²³⁴

Interviewee 10 describes the result of the Houthi takeover, with the biggest threat to civil liberties previously being insecurity, now civil liberties have taken a sharp downturn under the Houthi Administration, with rules being implemented which limit individual liberties.²³⁵ Security institutions which exist in every single district are controlled by the Houthis, and there are widespread issues regarding civil liberties, with people on social media and press reporting violations.²³⁶ Based on this Clausen reports that the Houthi movement relies on repression as a governance strategy.²³⁷ Mansour & Salisbury make similar observations through on the ground interviews.²³⁸ Such ruling of force of the population is established through threats to those who oppose them.²³⁹ Interviewee 8 claims that the strict regulations by administration is based on the Houthi ideological beliefs that God chose the Houthis to rule society, which in turn has made it difficult to convince the movement to accept other opinions.²⁴⁰

Access to civil justice

The end of the Houthi-Saleh alliance saw a worsening of the civil justice system. As the Houthis took complete control, many Saleh loyalists were purged through detainments or killings.²⁴¹ The complete control of intelligence and security services by the Houthis allowed them to impose authority over their regions,

²³² Interviewee 12, 15th of June 2020.

²³³ Interviewee 8, 2020. Think-tank. *video-call*, 3rd of June.

²³⁴ Interviewee 12, 15th of June 2020.

²³⁵ Interviewee 10, 12th of June 2020: 1.

²³⁶ Interviewee 7, 2020. United Nations. *e-mail* 8th of June.

²³⁷ Clausen, "Competing for Control over the State: The Case of Yemen."

²³⁸ Mansour and Salisbury, "Between Order and Chaos - A New Approach to Stalled State Transformations in Iraq and Yemen.": 16.

²³⁹ Interviewee 11, 2020. Journalist. *video-call*, 2nd of June.

²⁴⁰ Interviewee 8, 3rd of June 2020.

²⁴¹ Clausen, "Competing for Control over the State: The Case of Yemen"; Salisbury, "Yemen: National Chaos, Local Order."

with disappearances, imprisonment and torture of those who opposed the Houthis.²⁴² However, such violations also occurred in other parts of Yemen, not controlled by the SPC administration.²⁴³

Previously, Yemenis in the Saleh era were accustomed to the judicial system being corrupt and politicized,²⁴⁴ however there was a slight improvement in the judicial process during the transitional process.²⁴⁵ This was quickly dismantled by the Houthi administration as they “weaponised (it) in their pursuit of (their) ideological goals”.²⁴⁶ This politicization of the judicial system is reflected in the case of journalists and activists, many of which are arrested and without formal legal procedures are brought to the court solely to hear their sentences.²⁴⁷ For these appellants the death sentence is a common occurrence, although some sentences were later reduced.²⁴⁸

Comparing the principle of rule of law for both cases

Based on the analysis the SDC is perceived to have a significantly higher rule of law than the SPC administration. In the indicator ‘order and security’, an effective securitized approach is seen in north east Syria. This is somewhat similar approach taken by the SPC in Yemen, who are able to provide better security than the government, however their score is reduced by reports of indiscriminate shelling of civilian areas. In terms of civil liberties, the social contract introduced by the SDC provides progressive ideals, but issues such as mandatory conscription remains. This is in stark contrast to the SPC, where violations of basic civil liberties are used as a strategy to ensure compliance. The last indicator is ‘access to civil justice’, where both administrations need to improve to raise the general principle of rule of law. The justice system in the AANES is good for Syrian standards, but there remain flaws in the accessing of the judicial functions. In Yemen the judicial system has been taken over by the executive – the SPC itself to ensure compliance, no longer acting as an impartial justice system.

²⁴² Mansour and Salisbury, “Between Order and Chaos - A New Approach to Stalled State Transformations in Iraq and Yemen.”; Interviewee 9, 1st of June 2020.

²⁴³ Mansour and Salisbury.

²⁴⁴ Interviewee 8, 3rd of June 2020.

²⁴⁵ Interviewee 10, 12th of June 2020.

²⁴⁶ Interviewee 10: 1.

²⁴⁷ Clausen, “Competing for Control over the State: The Case of Yemen.”

²⁴⁸ Interviewee 8, 3rd of June 2020 ; Interviewee 12, 15th of June 2020.

4.2 Participation

Participation in the Syrian Democratic Council

Elections and referendum

The biggest form of participation in governance in north eastern Syria can best be described as two levels of governance, one which is through democratic processes and the other has limited participation. When towns or villages are ‘liberated’ from ISIS, the first element of governance is the election of representatives from these areas to the SDC.²⁴⁹ This process is documented by Sary, in the case of Tell-Abyad in 2015, here the Arab communities were “were invited to put forward representatives for local councils and committees”.²⁵⁰ This resulted in an Arab taking the presidency for the local council, a position which is shared with a female joint president.²⁵¹ Although specific quotas based on ethnicity do not exist, if it's an Arab majority area, they have counsel there. Most of the council members are from the local area.²⁵²

The choice to employ such a structure of direct democracy is, to a large extent, down to the socio-ethnic aspects of the regions that the SDC now controls, which was done to validate their position as legitimate administration.²⁵³ However due to the mistrust between the administration and the local Arab communities, the administration found it challenging to devolve meaning authority, therefore a parallel structure was created of supervisors loyal to the PYD, who would advise these newly created democratic bodies.²⁵⁴ The interviewee notes that although the relations got better over time, with the greater empowerment of Arab communities, the parallel structure remained.

The PYD has since its creation undergone a process of greater decentralisation, in order to better meet the needs of communities across the region.²⁵⁵ Moreover, the long overdue general elections, which were postponed for security reasons, have been held in 2017. It must be noted that many Tev-Dem, - a Kurdish umbrella group of which the PYD is part, officials felt that holding elections so soon would create a weakened form of governance.²⁵⁶ However, the elections went ahead and town, district and canton

²⁴⁹ Interviewee 2, 4th of June 2020.

²⁵⁰ Sary, “Kurdish Self-Governance in Syria: Survival and Ambition.”: 12.

²⁵¹ Sary.

²⁵² Interviewee 1, 18th of June 2020.

²⁵³ Özçelik, “Explaining the Kurdish Democratic Union Party’s Self-Governance Practices in Northern Syria, 2012-18.”

²⁵⁴ Interviewee 5, 31st of May 2020.

²⁵⁵ Sary, “Kurdish Self-Governance in Syria: Survival and Ambition.”

²⁵⁶ Sary.

members' positions were open for candidates. The overarching organisation of which the PYD is a member of won by a great majority, with a voter turnout of 69%.²⁵⁷ However, a criticism of the election was that Arabs, which had 'recently' arrived in the region were not given full voting rights.²⁵⁸ Considering the huge amounts of IDP and overall geographic changes in north eastern Syria over the last years of conflict, this could have had significant effects on the results.

Coordination with civil society

Participation in governance takes place through other forms as well, namely through civil society. The success of this depends to some extent to the amount the administration is willing to let civil society organisations (CSO) operate.

The largest type of CSOs active in northern Syria are cooperatives, with around 150 cooperatives mainly focussed around agriculture, many such organisations can be responsible for the whole supply chain.²⁵⁹ Hevgirtin, one such cooperative is run solely by women, who receive a monthly wage of 50 to 75 dollars, which results in these women being able to be financially independent.²⁶⁰ A strong condition tied to such cooperatives is meeting the needs of the local community, any excess production is requested to be reinvested into the cooperation.²⁶¹ Committees and group gatherings that discuss issues such as the aforementioned one are viewed as a sign of a healthy civil society.²⁶² However, the security situation is another important factor that undermines this, with the decision to limit the operations of civil society to stable regions as perceived by the administration.²⁶³ Interviewee 4 comments that it is a stretch to call them Civil Society Organizations, as movements are run by interest groups, from individual ethnicities, nationalities or religions. Recently there have been demonstrations for a more equitable distribution of resources for such organizations.²⁶⁴

Another significant sector is western backed civil society, part of which arose due to geopolitics. Western donors did not want to directly support the AANES administration, therefore the choice was made

²⁵⁷ ANF English, "Northern Syria Election Results Announced," December 5, 2017.

²⁵⁸ Mneimneh 2018 as seen in Özçelik, "Explaining the Kurdish Democratic Union Party's Self-Governance Practices in Northern Syria, 2012-18."

²⁵⁹ Nathalie Colasanti et al., "Grassroots Democracy and Local Government in Northern Syria: The Case of Democratic Confederalism," *Local Government Studies* 44, no. 6 (2018): 807–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2018.1501366>: 817.

²⁶⁰ Hatahet, "The Political Economy of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria."

²⁶¹ Colasanti et al., "Grassroots Democracy and Local Government in Northern Syria: The Case of Democratic Confederalism."

²⁶² Interviewee 2, 4th of June 2020.

²⁶³ Interviewee 5, 31st of May 2020.

²⁶⁴ Interviewee 4, 2020. United Nations. *video-call*, 18th of June.

to support civil society in the region which could meet citizens needs and support the local governance structures.²⁶⁵ However, Interviewee 5 describes this relationship between such CSOs and the AANES as problematic for two reasons.²⁶⁶ The first is the fact that such international CSOs are able to pay local technocrats a lot more than what the administration is able to pay, causing a brain-drain in the local institutions. The second issue is that the administration views the parallel institutions being created as undermining their own authority, and this is exacerbated by the fact that these ‘western’ donor organisations write situational reports which are sent back headquarters. The administration is suspicious of these actions which are somewhat alien to their ideology. In summary however, Interviewee 5 views these problems are dwarfed when compared to the rest of Syria.²⁶⁷

Lack of discrimination based on minority groups

The final indicator relates to the broader context in which the AANES is set, which the (lack of) discrimination based on minority group very relevant. The opponents of the administration, namely ISIS, use the ethno-sectarian to its advantage, claiming the majority driven SDF are guilty of ethnically cleansing Arab communities.²⁶⁸ A former PYD leader refuted these claims stating they are not aiming to create an ethno-nationalist region, but rather provide all identities with local self-determination.²⁶⁹ The ideology of the SDC attempts to promote the participation of citizens and more specifically Arabs and other ethno-sectarian minorities into its governance process according to Özçelik.²⁷⁰ The aforementioned local representation process as well as the fact that around 50 to 60% of the SDF’s fighting components is Arab,²⁷¹ Syriac Christians are able to teach in their own language, something not allowed under Assad.²⁷² For the gender issue, quotas are in place where the leaders of institutions of the administration must have a co-leader of the opposite sex.²⁷³ Such measures are very challenging to the previously local practices, limiting women’s academic, professional or political career.²⁷⁴ According to Sary, this standard has been employed

²⁶⁵ U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Relations with Syria - Bilateral Relations Fact Sheet,” 2020, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-syria/>.

²⁶⁶ Interviewee 5, 31st of May 2020.

²⁶⁷ Interviewee 5.

²⁶⁸ Sary, “Kurdish Self-Governance in Syria: Survival and Ambition.”

²⁶⁹ Solomon and Srivastava 2016 as seen in Özçelik, “Explaining the Kurdish Democratic Union Party’s Self-Governance Practices in Northern Syria, 2012-18.”

²⁷⁰ Özçelik.

²⁷¹ Interviewee 1, 18th of June 2020.

²⁷² Interviewee 6, 2020. Humanitarian. *video-call*, 30th of June.

²⁷³ Interviewee 1, 18th of June 2020.

²⁷⁴ Özçelik, “Explaining the Kurdish Democratic Union Party’s Self-Governance Practices in Northern Syria, 2012-18.”

thoroughly, including in the armed forces.²⁷⁵ Based on the aforementioned facts one could conclude that this is successful to a certain extent.

This approach to participation and non-discrimination has provided two important advantages to the governance of the AANES. Namely by involving tribes and ethno-sectarian groups, some which were previously also marginalised, the SDC provides social mobility, which results in loyalty from those individuals and independence from the previous central government.²⁷⁶ Another advantage is the endorsement of such values meets the conditions that many western backers have for supporting the SDC.²⁷⁷

The intentions and representation in participation of governance has a number of faults, reflecting that the inclusive approach has not been entirely without elements of discrimination. This is due to a variety of reasons from educational, financial and in terms of authority. Although Syriacs/ Assyrians are able to teach in their mother tongue, protest arose from the choice to completely remove the curriculum from Damascus, as few recognised the diplomas of the AANES school system. This led to the administration forcing the school who protested to close.²⁷⁸ Moreover, the parallel tax system created for the Christians residing in northern Syria, as well forced conscriptions into the SDF,²⁷⁹ has made this minority feel second class, and although they support the AANES, “it doesn’t feel like a real democratic process to them”.²⁸⁰

Financially there are still some disparities reported between regions, the price for a permit to practice medicine is twice the rate in Raqqa (a recently liberated Arab region) than it is in Hasakah (A more stable, ethnically diverse region), with Hatahet reporting this for other disciplines as well.²⁸¹ In terms of participation, representation is broad, however devolving real authority within the administration’s institutions to the different ethnicities remain problematic.²⁸²

Interviewee 5 views the administration as very responsive and pragmatic, for on the one hand there is no conscription in Arab areas (although plans had been made), because it would prove too unpopular. On the other hand, the majority of Kurds see this choice as grossly unfair, making them the sole responsible for

²⁷⁵ Sary, “Kurdish Self-Governance in Syria: Survival and Ambition.”

²⁷⁶ Khaddour, “How Regional Security Concerns Uniquely Constrain Governance in Northeastern Syria.”

²⁷⁷ Sary, “Kurdish Self-Governance in Syria: Survival and Ambition.”

²⁷⁸ AFP, 2018 as seen in Özçelik, “Explaining the Kurdish Democratic Union Party’s Self-Governance Practices in Northern Syria, 2012-18.”

²⁷⁹ Joseph and Isaac 2018 as seen in Özçelik.

²⁸⁰ Interviewee 6, 30th of June 2020: 2.

²⁸¹ Hatahet, “The Political Economy of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria.”

²⁸² Interviewee 4, 18th of June 2020; Interviewee 5, 31st of May 2020.

security.²⁸³ This also goes for the general philosophy of Ocalan, widely incorporated into the governance of both Arab and Kurdish majority areas, with tensions remaining. This pragmatic strategy has been relatively successful according to Interviewee 3 as Raqqa and Manbij, both majority Arab regions have been integrated into the administration through this system of representation.²⁸⁴

Participation in the Supreme Political Council

Election and referendum

Initially the intent of the SPC seemed to strongly reflect participation, because the very nature of the National Dialogue Conference, in which they took part, was very inclusive of all groups and individuals within Yemen. With the Houthis blocking the final implementation of the draft constitution, Interviewee 12 reflects on this fact, stating that if the SPC really stood for greater participation “they would have done it before, saving the country from going into this bloody war”.²⁸⁵

The governance of the SPC administered areas is that the previously state-run institutions are now run by SPC ‘supervisors’.²⁸⁶ These supervisors are appointed by the Houthi movement to ensure that their interests are secured, with these appointees wielding all the power and cannot be criticized.²⁸⁷ This undermined the previous system where the governorate could choose their own representative. Interviewee 7 notes that the Local Authority Law guaranteed that the voices of people would be included in governance.²⁸⁸ However, under the Houthi administration these opportunities to elect leaders or voice opinions has been removed. As a result, the many of the local councils, and their employees, have themselves stopped working.²⁸⁹ Interviewee 7 continues with the observation that this has left community participation very weak.²⁹⁰ Summed up by UNDP “Although detrimental for local democracy and good local governance, the unplugging of local councils seems to suit local executives who enjoy greater powers than ever before”.²⁹¹

²⁸³ Interviewee 5.

²⁸⁴ Interviewee 3, 3rd of April 2020.

²⁸⁵ Interviewee 12, 15th of June 2020.

²⁸⁶ Interviewee 8, 3rd of June 2020.

²⁸⁷ Interviewee 8.

²⁸⁸ Interviewee 7, 8th of June 2020: 1.

²⁸⁹ United Nations Development Programme, “Rapid Local Governance Diagnostic in Yemen.”

²⁹⁰ Interviewee 7, 8th of June 2020: 1.

²⁹¹ United Nations Development Programme: 28.

Coordination with civil society

As local governance has declined some areas have experienced a greater role for Civil Society Organisations (CSO).²⁹² The situation of these CSOs in Houthi controlled areas is varied, however many of the civil society organisations have been closed by the SPC administration as there are many conditions tied to the required licenses.²⁹³ The difficulty in establishing an CSO is reflected through the fact that most of the NGOs operating in Houthi controlled areas have existed before the Houthi administration was established.²⁹⁴ The CSOs still operating under the SPC administration have reported that information sharing with local authorities is strenuous and the general political, legal and security environments are relatively worse than in the rest of Yemen.²⁹⁵

Most of the CSOs are donor based and thus largely independent from the administration, with the most effective ones based in Sana'a,²⁹⁶ the largest supporters of these civil society organisations are the international community.²⁹⁷ Those operating out of the capital Sana'a, are allowed to continue functioning despite not being pro-Houthi as per example of the aforementioned conditions of the SPC administration for CSOs to operate.²⁹⁸

From the perspective of those affected by the work of the CSOs, namely ordinary citizens, the picture is again varied across the Houthi governorates, as seen in Figure 8. Citizens from Hodeidah, Hajjah and Sana'a are the most positive about the impact of CSOs on their lives. However, the governorates with the worst scores in the whole of Yemen for public opinion on CSOs are also controlled by the Houthis.²⁹⁹ Considering the great disparities reflected in Figure 8, the differences in impact and ultimately opinion could be due to some logistics and geographical factors.

²⁹² United Nations Development Programme.

²⁹³ Interviewee 8, 3rd of June 2020.

²⁹⁴ Interviewee 8: 3.

²⁹⁵ United Nations Development Programme, "Rapid Local Governance Diagnostic in Yemen."

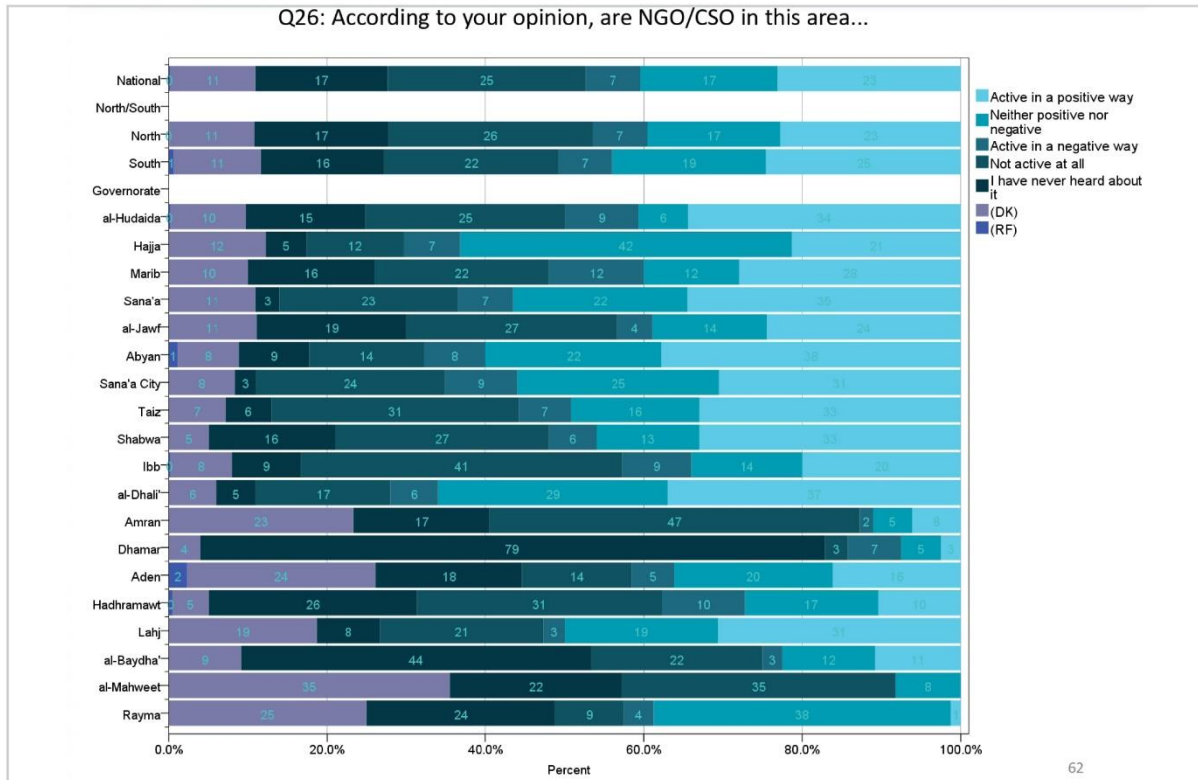
²⁹⁶ Interviewee 7, 8th of June 2020.

²⁹⁷ Interviewee 11, 2nd of June 2020.

²⁹⁸ Interviewee 9, 1st of June 2020: 2.

²⁹⁹ Yemen Polling Center, "Perceptions of the Yemeni Public on Security-Related Issues."

Figure 8. Opinions on NGO/CSOs



Source: Yemen Polling Center.³⁰⁰

Interestingly, the role of women in CSO is relatively prominent in Yemen. As young professional women were not given enough opportunity in politics, post national dialogue conference many chose to invest their time and talents in civil society.³⁰¹ Although this role of women can be perceived as a positive indicator, it is merely an externality of the lack women’s participation in the society as a whole.

Lack of discrimination

The matter inclusive participation is reflected in the degree of discrimination experienced by different groups of Yemeni society living in Houthi administered territories. The situation is complex, as the Houthi movement, a group that stands for a revival of Zaydi culture, claims to be superior over others according to

³⁰⁰ Yemen Polling Center.
³⁰¹ Interviewee 10, 12th of June 2020.

their literature.³⁰² However, the SPC has been observed to be downplaying the sectarian element of the conflict.³⁰³ Rather than viewing the Houthi movement as a religious movement, Interviewee 11 views (extreme) political Zaydism as a better label to use when referring to the ideology of the movement.³⁰⁴ In terms of religious views there are few differences between Zaydis and Sunni according to Interviewee 11, who says that the Houthi movement can include those of Sunni beliefs, just not in decision making.³⁰⁵ However, such choices are based mostly on trust according to Interviewee 8 who mentioned that those who are in charge are those that have been with the movement since the beginning of the conflict and are from their original stronghold governorate of Sada'a.³⁰⁶ Such marginalization is also shown with the rural urban divide, with the UNDP reporting that in Hajjah Governorate rural areas are systematically discriminated against.³⁰⁷

Women also face rigid restrictions due to ideological beliefs. These limitations were previously customary but under the Houthi administration have now become integrated into the legal structures as well.³⁰⁸ The survey done by Yemen Polling Center as seen in Figure 9, shows the perceptions on the situation of women's rights. The data shows that the rights of women are seen by the majority as deteriorating, with a portion viewing the situation as stable, and a minority expressing an improvement on the rights of women in the Houthi administered governorates.

³⁰² Interviewee 8, 3rd of June 2020.

³⁰³ Clausen, "Competing for Control over the State: The Case of Yemen.": 569.

³⁰⁴ Interviewee 11, 2nd of June 2020.

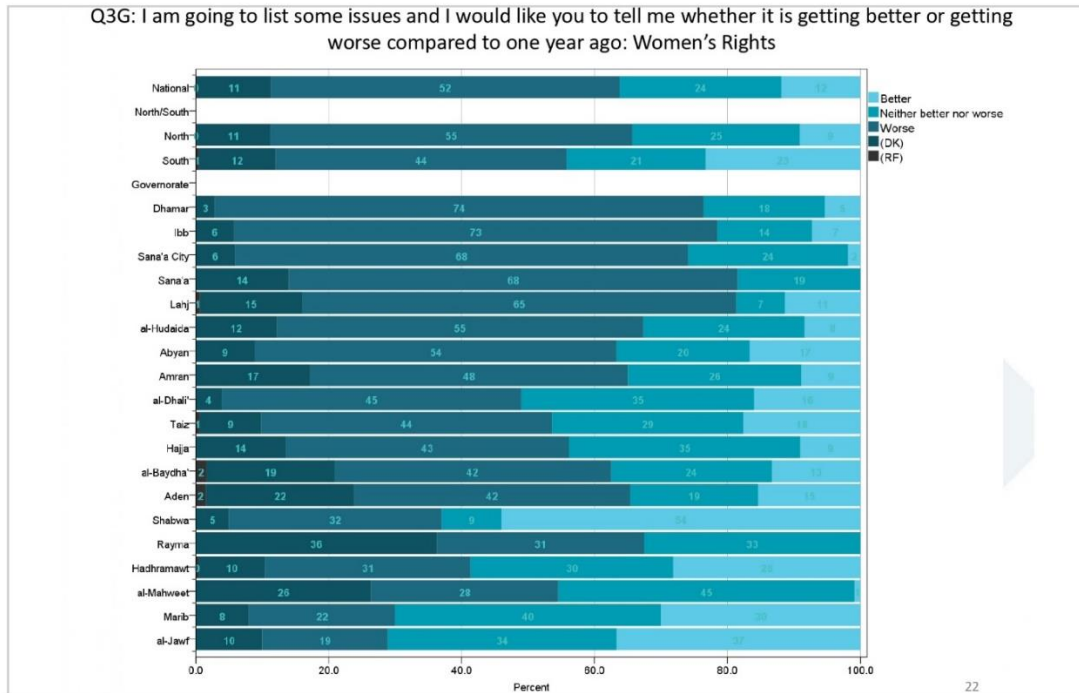
³⁰⁵ Interviewee 11: 1.

³⁰⁶ Interviewee 8, 3rd of June 2020.

³⁰⁷ United Nations Development Programme, "Rapid Local Governance Diagnostic in Yemen."

³⁰⁸ Interviewee 10, 12th of June 2020.

Figure 9. The situation of women’s rights



Source: Yemen Polling Center.³⁰⁹

Recent developments in around the Covid-19 virus has seen the Houthi administration declare that the first diagnosis was in a refugee community of Somali origin.³¹⁰ This was seen as mismanaging the situation by Interviewee 12 as the administration was “inciting the Yemenis against the refugees”.³¹¹

Comparing the principle of Participation for both cases

For the principle of participation there is again a significant difference between both the administrations. The variation is seen most clearly in the first indicator ‘election and referendum turnout’. This indicator was observed through local elections and the selection of council members in the AANES, although some instances of bias were reported in the analysis. In Yemen the opposite holds true, as no attempts to consult the population on policy were observed or reported. For the second indicator, the SDC has coordinated with western and domestic civil society, although some issues remain between the western CSOs and the administration. In Yemen, there are more stringent conditions that CSOs must adhere to, resulting in fewer

³⁰⁹ Yemen Polling Center, “Perceptions of the Yemeni Public on Security-Related Issues.”

³¹⁰ Interviewee 12, 15th of June 2020.

³¹¹ Interviewee 12: 3.

organisations operating in SPC regions. For the final indicator in Syria, a lack of discrimination is strived for by the SDC, however minor issues remain between the different ethnicities and religions. For the SPC regions a slight deterioration has been reported in the position of minorities.

4.3 Operationality

Operationality in the Syrian Democratic Council

Addressing issues on the public agenda

The ability to address issues on the public agenda reflects the extent to which the administration is effective at operating tasks essential for daily life. The effort of the administration, apart from the armed forces, is focussed on stabilizing and repairing areas affected by conflict, maintenance of general infrastructure, and financing the healthcare and education systems.³¹² These systems such as electricity and healthcare are under a lot of pressure, although power shortages were alleviated as the Tishreen hydro-electric dam was captured and medical services were improving since the start of the civil war.³¹³ Shortages of basic goods however, has led to price spikes in staple cereals, vegetables and fuel, most notable in the recently captured Arab areas,³¹⁴ despite the administration's best effort.³¹⁵ This has led to many viewing the services provided as good considering the situation in which the region finds itself,³¹⁶ however some view the cost of this as disproportionate to what is provided.³¹⁷ Surprisingly the living costs in the AANES region are relatively cheap, according to Interviewee 2 the average wage is \$150 compared to the average of \$70 in the Assad controlled areas, with the rent of a family sized house costing only \$30.

However, this public sector is not solely for providing basic goods to civilians but also served to create a means of communication between the local population and the newly created administration which started out as a militia and the local population.³¹⁸ According to Khaddour, this has inadvertently provided a governance mechanism which is a means for maintaining political control.³¹⁹ Interviewee 4 sums up the

³¹² Hatahet, "The Political Economy of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria."

³¹³ Sary, "Kurdish Self-Governance in Syria: Survival and Ambition."

³¹⁴ Özçelik, "Explaining the Kurdish Democratic Union Party's Self-Governance Practices in Northern Syria, 2012-18."

³¹⁵ Sary, "Kurdish Self-Governance in Syria: Survival and Ambition."

³¹⁶ Sary; Özçelik, "Explaining the Kurdish Democratic Union Party's Self-Governance Practices in Northern Syria, 2012-18."

³¹⁷ Hatahet, "The Political Economy of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria."

³¹⁸ Khaddour, "How Regional Security Concerns Uniquely Constrain Governance in Northeastern Syria."

³¹⁹ Khaddour.

ability of the AANES to address issues on the public agenda, stating that is often politized, therefore boiling down to a fight of narratives.³²⁰

Resources and Budget

An important aspect determining the operationality of the SDC stems from the resources that it has access to and the size of its budget. The core of the SDC's resources are built around oil sales, income tax and fees, and import duties.³²¹ Though the SDC is purportedly sitting atop 80% of Syria's natural resources,³²² it is nevertheless facing difficulties in translating its natural resource endowments into a stable budget. Oil features heavily in the resources to which the SDC has access to. A brief January 2020 glimpse into the SDC's finances showed that it had a total budget of 115,000,000 dollars of which \$72,000,000 (62%) came from the sale of oil.³²³ This mainly comes from the oil fields in the northeast that the SDC captured during its military campaigns against ISIS.³²⁴ However, a pervasive problem that the SDC faces in this regard is that much of the wells and oil infrastructure was damaged during the fighting in recent years.³²⁵ In fact, the al-Tanak and al-Omar oil fields produce a meagre one sixth of their pre-war production. This has led to instances wherein the administration has had to request that the central government supply equipment and pay the salaries of, in one instance, the Rmeilan oilfields.³²⁶

This unstable oil budget has the effect that the economic situation in the northeast remains precarious,³²⁷ with the AANES finding it difficult to grow its private sector. This is because most of it is geared towards food production, specifically grain, which the SDC utilises internally as opposed to creating an export economy.³²⁸ Other sectors, such as commerce and construction, are having difficulty in being established as stable sectors. This stems in part from the fact that the Syrian regime still controls the land registries of many of the areas in the north, which means that it can invalidate land transactions or construction projects.³²⁹ On the other hand, remittances flowing into the region from refugees and internally displaced people has set off a construction boom that has seen real estate prices increase considerably.³³⁰

³²⁰ Interviewee 4, 18th of June 2020.

³²¹ Hatahet, "The Political Economy of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria."

³²² Interviewee 5, 31st of May 2020.

³²³ Rojava Information Center, "Annual Report of Autonomous Administration Budget," 2020.

³²⁴ Özçelik, "Explaining the Kurdish Democratic Union Party's Self-Governance Practices in Northern Syria, 2012-18."

³²⁵ Hatahet, "The Political Economy of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria."

³²⁶ Sary, "Kurdish Self-Governance in Syria: Survival and Ambition."

³²⁷ Interviewee 1, 18th of June 2020.

³²⁸ Hatahet, "The Political Economy of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria."; Interviewee 2, 4th of June 2020.

³²⁹ Khaddour, "How Regional Security Concerns Uniquely Constrain Governance in Northeastern Syria."

³³⁰ Hatahet, "The Political Economy of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria."

This has, however, not stopped the AANES from levying taxes on nearly all professions and trades, from street vendors to small shops and public transport.³³¹ The AANES purportedly plans to spend this money on improving the provision of public goods, but people in the region feel that the quality of the public goods is out of proportion with the amount of tax collected.³³²

Humanitarian Coordination

The waves of humanitarian emergencies in Iraq and Syria from 2011 to the current day have burdened the northeast Syria with many internally displaced people (IDPs) and refugees (mainly from Iraq). By 2019, the UN estimated that 1.65 million people in the Northeast of Syria required humanitarian attention in the realm of healthcare, housing, food and education.³³³ This has led to the rise of a ‘humanitarian economy’ wherein thousands are employed by local NGOs, AANES affiliated aid agencies, and international governmental organisations.³³⁴ Interviewee 6 remarks that the local administration supports the work that CSOs do, itself also setting up the Kurdish Red Crescent, which gives medical attention to the local populace and to displaced peoples.³³⁵

The administration runs most of the coordination with the organisations in the Northeast through the administrative capital Qamishli, in a formalised system that it largely copied from the central government.³³⁶ The AANES did this through the creation of the Office for Humanitarian Affairs in 2015 to coordinate with CSOs, NGOs and UN organisations in addressing the needs of displaced people.³³⁷ This organisation holds the right to inspect humanitarian agencies and is the main office that issues approvals for humanitarian operations.³³⁸ Interviewee 6 makes the point that the need to coordinate is tedious, but that the AANAS never hindered the work being done by humanitarian agencies, making moving and working around the region easier.³³⁹ However, the politics and complexity of the issues in the North east, as well as the fact that the regions borders are not completely defined, means that the AANAS still has issues with coordination. One example of this is that during the Turkish incursion into the Northeast, NGOs operating in the area received advance warning not from the AANAS but from their respective governments.³⁴⁰

³³¹ Hatahet.

³³² Hatahet.

³³³ Hatahet.

³³⁴ Hatahet.

³³⁵ Interviewee 6, 30th of June 2020.

³³⁶ Interviewee 4, 18th of June 2020.

³³⁷ Hatahet, “The Political Economy of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria.”

³³⁸ Hatahet: 16.

³³⁹ Interviewee 6, 30th of June 2020.

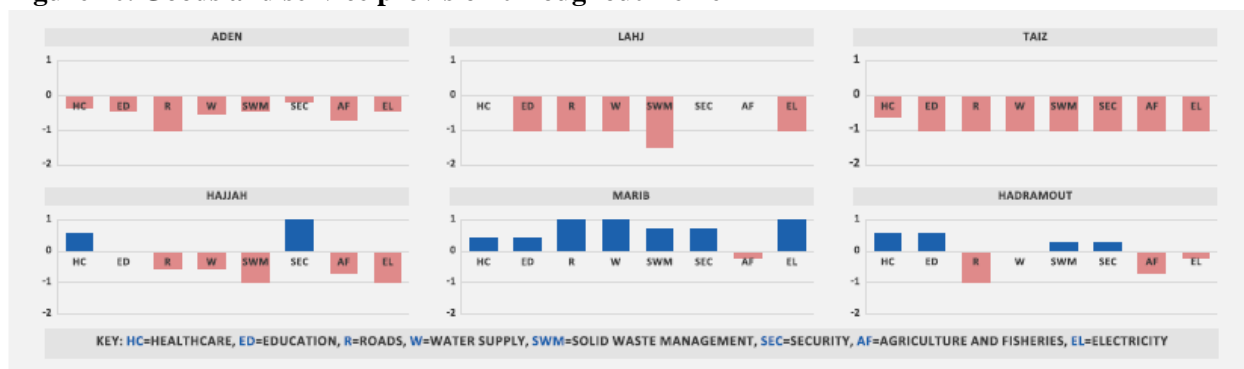
³⁴⁰ Interviewee 2, 4th of June 2020.

Operationality in the Supreme Political Council

Addressing issues on the public agenda

At the beginning of the Houthi-administration, electricity provision was temporarily improved, fuel prices decreased, as well as educational and healthcare services.³⁴¹ Considering these two issues were central to the initial Arab Spring protesters' demands, support for them was briefly increased.³⁴² This however was not to last, as the conflict gained momentum in terms of intensity, the institutions they inherited stopped providing services beyond security.³⁴³ This can be seen in Figure 10, where in conflict ridden Taiz, all services significantly decreased and in Hajjah only security and a slight improvement in healthcare are observed.

Figure 10. Goods and service provision throughout Yemen



Source: UNDP.³⁴⁴

Access to food, water and public services in the SPC administered governorates are generally worse than the rest of Yemen as seen in Appendix 3. Those interviewed for this research were even more critical, citing the unpaid salaries of public sector workers and the lack of services such as electricity and healthcare.³⁴⁵ Despite this, some local councils under Houthi supervision (Hajja, Hodeidah, Tiaz and Sana'a) are considered relatively 'functional' compared to the rest of Yemen, even if their activities largely

³⁴¹ Clausen, "Competing for Control over the State: The Case of Yemen"; Mansour and Salisbury, "Between Order and Chaos - A New Approach to Stalled State Transformations in Iraq and Yemen."

³⁴² Mansour and Salisbury, "Between Order and Chaos - A New Approach to Stalled State Transformations in Iraq and Yemen.": 46.

³⁴³ Mansour and Salisbury.

³⁴⁴ United Nations Development Programme, "Rapid Local Governance Diagnostic in Yemen."

³⁴⁵ Interviewee 7, 8th of June 2020; Interviewee 9, 1st of June 2020; Interviewee 11, 2nd of June 2020; Interviewee 12, 15th of June 2020.

exist of the coordination of relief operations.³⁴⁶ Overall however, the SPC administration is “not viewed as problem solving in any data that we have”.³⁴⁷

However, it must be noted that governance efforts by the Houthis has been largely undermined by intense air campaign by Saudi Arabia “has destroyed substantial parts of the civilian infrastructure”.³⁴⁸ Although this is not entirely to blame for the failure to address issues on the public agenda as Interviewee 11 notes that all factions are focusing on the war instead of public issues.³⁴⁹ This is further corroborated by Interviewee 12 who, citing an international diplomat who visited Sana'a last year, observed the total lack of economic activity of anything apart from the war economy.³⁵⁰

Resources and Budget

As the Houthis came to power in the capital, they were able to build up a dominant position in terms of military and economic capacity,³⁵¹ which actually continued in the beginning of the conflict, as their supporters grew in number and they inherited organisational capacity from the state institutions.³⁵² More specifically the SPC authority and control allowed them to control checkpoints, collect taxes and decide on who local budgets were spent.³⁵³

Through taxes and customs at checkpoints the de-facto administration has been able to gain a considerable amount of revenue, this is supposedly further increased by Houthis’ involvement in illicit activities such as fuel smuggling.³⁵⁴ The SPC administration has further increased taxation laws since it came to power, both increasing the amount of taxes for economic activities of businesses as well as created new taxes centered around khat sales, aid agencies³⁵⁵ and the most controversial: an Islamic income tax law also known as the ‘khums’ or one-fifth tax requires individuals and businesses to pay 20% on all resources

³⁴⁶ United Nations Development Programme, “Rapid Local Governance Diagnostic in Yemen”; Yemen Polling Center, “Perceptions of the Yemeni Public on Security-Related Issues.”

³⁴⁷ Interviewee 10, 12th of June 2020: 3.

³⁴⁸ Clausen, “Competing for Control over the State: The Case of Yemen.”: 568.

³⁴⁹ Interviewee 11, 2nd of June 2020.

³⁵⁰ Interviewee 12, 15th of June 2020: 5.

³⁵¹ Salisbury, “Yemen: National Chaos, Local Order.”: 15.

³⁵² Clausen, “Competing for Control over the State: The Case of Yemen”; Mansour and Salisbury, “Between Order and Chaos - A New Approach to Stalled State Transformations in Iraq and Yemen.”

³⁵³ Clausen, “Competing for Control over the State: The Case of Yemen.”: 568.

³⁵⁴ Salisbury, “Yemen: National Chaos, Local Order.”: 28.

³⁵⁵ Mansour and Salisbury, “Between Order and Chaos - A New Approach to Stalled State Transformations in Iraq and Yemen.”

and transactions.³⁵⁶ Mansour & Salisbury observe that the Houthi administration “have proven among the most effective taxers of all groups in Yemen”.³⁵⁷ These taxes are a reaction to compensate for the loss in export revenues of the oil sector.³⁵⁸

Simultaneously the local authorities under the administration of the SPC have seen their budgets decrease considerably, up to 70% in the Hajjah Governorate.³⁵⁹ This has been done because the Houthi movement has prioritized military spending over that of civilians.³⁶⁰

Humanitarian Coordination

In the areas controlled by the SPC administration all humanitarian coordination is done through the Supreme Council for Management and Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and International Cooperation (SCMCHA). However, as the UNDP notes, the capacity of this organisation and the local authorities remains quite low and the relationship between them and the aid organisations is considered weak.³⁶¹ Interviewee 7 concurs with this, stating that “formal mechanisms for a more organized and constructive relationship with local authorities are yet to emerge in many areas”.³⁶²

From the view of citizens in north west Yemen, just under half receive aid from international actors as seen in Figure 11 and 12. Moreover, the trust between these citizens and the aid organisations is mutual at best.³⁶³ Such conditions reflect the working relationship that the Houthi Administration has with humanitarian organisations; the World Food Program (WFP) is a case in point of this. When an agreement was reached between the SCMCHA and WFP, a system of Yemeni truck drivers and warehousemen was implemented to ensure food would reach all governorates controlled by the SPC. However soon reports of Houthi diversion of the food aid led to the WFP wanting to implement identification programs to enhance transparency, something the SPC administration did not agree with.³⁶⁴

³⁵⁶ Saleh Baidhani, “Houthis’ ‘One-Fifth’ Tax Sparks Accusations of Racial, Tribal Discrimination,” *The Arab Weekly*, 2020; Interviewee 10, 12th of June 2020.

³⁵⁷ Mansour and Salisbury, “Between Order and Chaos - A New Approach to Stalled State Transformations in Iraq and Yemen.”

³⁵⁸ Mansour and Salisbury.

³⁵⁹ United Nations Development Programme, “Rapid Local Governance Diagnostic in Yemen.”

³⁶⁰ Interviewee 11, 2nd of June 2020.

³⁶¹ United Nations Development Programme, “Rapid Local Governance Diagnostic in Yemen.”

³⁶² Interviewee 7, 8th of June 2020: 1.

³⁶³ Interviewee 7.

³⁶⁴ Interviewee 9, 1st of June 2020: 3.

Figure 11. Services of international organisations

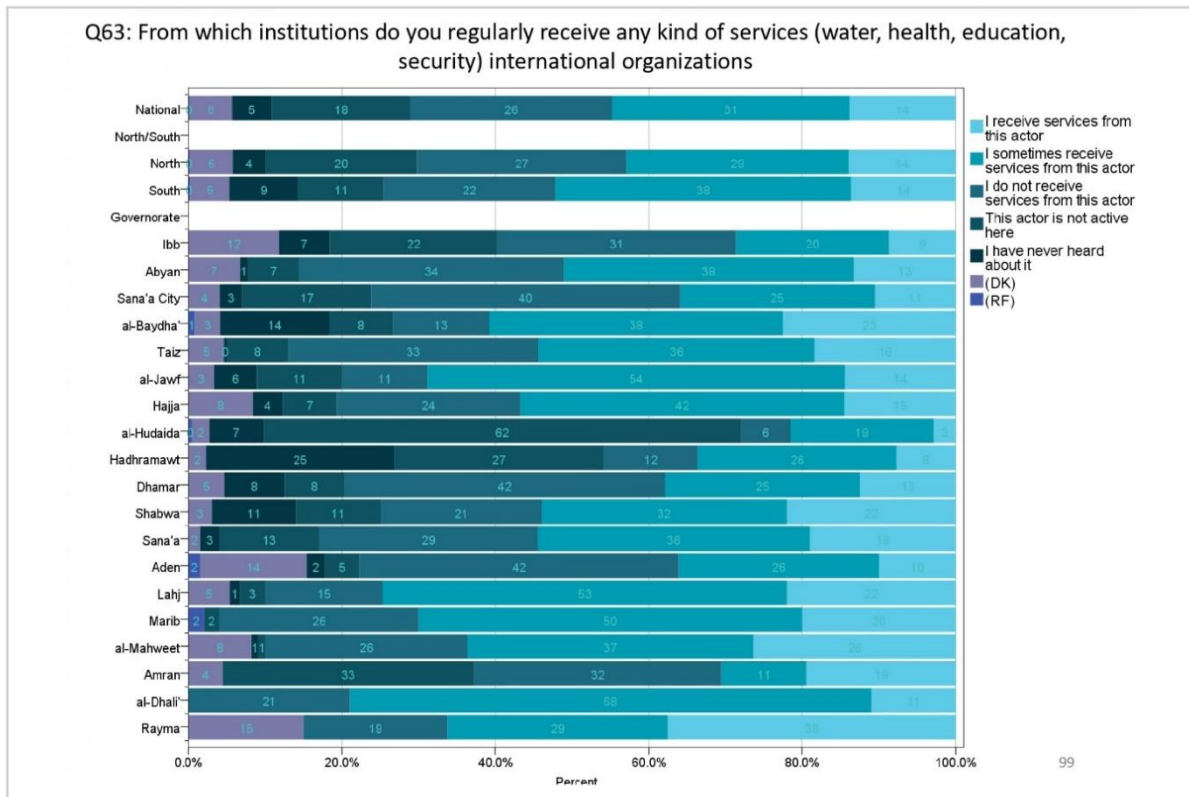
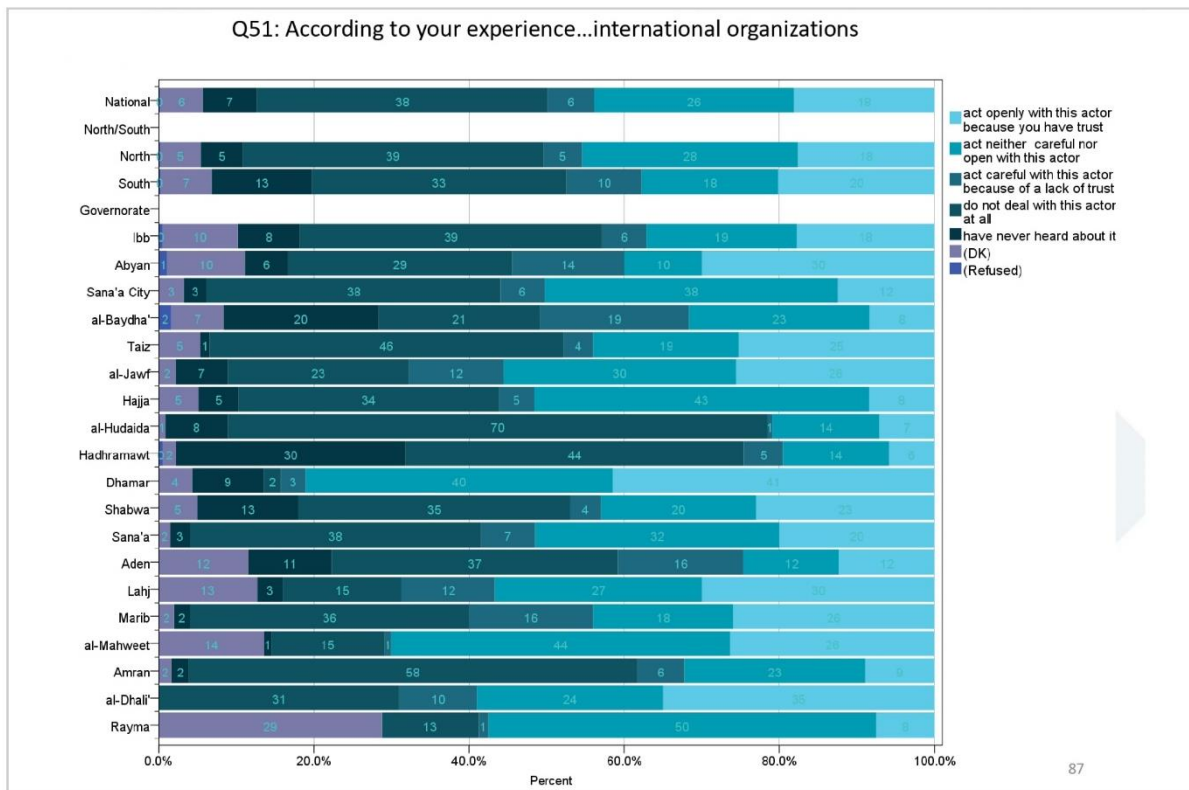


Figure 12. Experiences with international organisations



Source: Yemen Polling Center.³⁶⁵

All these aforementioned elements have led to strained coordination of humanitarian aid to areas in need, and reports of humanitarian activities being politicized has made cooperation more difficult.³⁶⁶

Comparing the principle of Operationality for both cases

In the comparison of the principle of operationality, there is a smaller difference in performance between the administrations than previous principles. For the first indicator the SDC has been able to alleviate some issues on the public agenda, unlike the SPC, which has withheld salaries for public servants and witnessed a general decrease in service and goods provision. The second indicator of resources and budget is partially responsible for the capacity of the administrations. Here the SDC has access to oil sales as well as taxes levied on the population, and scores well in this regard. The capacity of the SPC is considered the same, as the administration has proven to very effective at collecting tax revenue from the population. For the last indicator, SDC has an office that monitors operations of these humanitarian organisations with few complaints. In the other case study, the similar SPC office of humanitarian affairs has had issues that hampered coordination.

4.4 Consensus Oriented

Consensus oriented governance in Syrian Democratic Council

Recognition of public agenda

The first condition for governance to be consensus oriented is the willingness to recognize what the civilians in the administrative region view as issues that need to be addressed. There are two very important overarching issues, to which the AANES has not been able to recognise and therefore address. The first issue is that the majority of civilians in the region do not want the conflict between the PKK and the Turkish government to incorporate northern Syria.³⁶⁷ However due to the influence of and similar ideologies of the administration to the PKK this has not been addressed sufficiently. The second issue is partially external as

³⁶⁵ Yemen Polling Center, “Perceptions of the Yemeni Public on Security-Related Issues.”

³⁶⁶ Interviewee 11, 2nd of June 2020.

³⁶⁷ Interviewee 5, 31st of May 2020.

the Turkish and ISIS threats have meant that the unpopular policy of conscription has remained in place,³⁶⁸ which has forced many previous residents of northern Syria to immigrate to Europe.³⁶⁹

Despite this, there is really a determination to find consensus on issues facing the administration.³⁷⁰ The council system facilitates the recognition of issues on the public agenda through deliberations and discussions, being open to citizens who want to be involved and voice their opinions.³⁷¹ However, this open participation system has led to what Interviewee 2 calls the over representation, with many of the political parties in the AANES fragmenting to such an extent that there are too many agendas to take into account.³⁷² This has led to the process being too time consuming for some citizens to participate in.³⁷³

The delicate socio-political situation in north east Syria has forced the administration to be more responsive to demands of portions of the population under their control. There are two notable examples that reflect this, the first is the general law on conscription, which has not been implemented in the recently secured Arab majority areas of Raqqa and Deir Ezzor because this would create significant protests.³⁷⁴ The other relates to the ban on Polygamy, a policy that is welcomed in the Kurdish majority areas, however this proved very unpopular in Arab majority areas, where the leftist ideology of the SDC was too alien to the more conservative polity in areas only recently freed from ISIS rule.³⁷⁵

The extent to which the ideology of the PKK has percolated through the administration is also seen as a weakness in the ability to recognize the agenda of the ordinary citizen, with the leader of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan being placed in an almost ‘God like’ position.³⁷⁶ This has created a situation where some from the administration are unable to recognise that there are discrepancies between Kurds and Arabs, framing issues in a way that is not representative of the situation on the ground, much to the dismay of many Arab citizens of northern Syria.³⁷⁷

³⁶⁸ Interviewee 1, 18th of June 2020.

³⁶⁹ Sary, “Kurdish Self-Governance in Syria: Survival and Ambition.”

³⁷⁰ Interviewee 4, 18th of June 2020.

³⁷¹ Interviewee 3, 3rd of April 2020.

³⁷² Interviewee 2, 4th of June 2020.

³⁷³ Interviewee 3, 3rd of April 2020.

³⁷⁴ Interviewee 1, 18th of June 2020.

³⁷⁵ Interviewee 1: 3.

³⁷⁶ Interviewee 6, 30th of June, 2020.

³⁷⁷ Interviewee 6.

Overall, there is much to be gained in terms of governance if the ruling parties of the administration are able to become more flexible and distancing from the Öcalanist ideology.³⁷⁸ Although not necessarily out of choice, but rather necessity due to the situation in which the administration is, it has become more responsive. For instance, SDC officials meet with tribal leaders to hear the issues they are facing, and how these problems could be alleviated.³⁷⁹ Since the ruling parties of the SDC have been placed in a governing position, they have become more pragmatic and responsive to the local interests in their administrative region.³⁸⁰

Decision making process

The decision-making process in the AANES is complex, considering the different layers of governance structures. The local councils are a large element of the AANES, this structure has nurtured a highly decentralised form of governance.³⁸¹ These councils also provide further oversight of smaller decision-making bodies known as communes or ‘kominat’, together being responsible for all the basic services of the administration.³⁸² Through this system of local councils, individual issues can be addressed. This is done through the creation of committees for these issues, the example a committee for sports.³⁸³ Through such a ‘grass roots’ system,³⁸⁴ the administration hopes to further participation in governance on a local level.³⁸⁵ At these committees’ decisions are deliberated on, attempting to first gain a very high consensus before finally taking a decision.³⁸⁶ However, overshadowing these choices are the guiding ‘principles’ of the ideology that the administration follows.³⁸⁷ The choices of the local councils should not clash with the principles that the SDC stands for. To ensure this, there is a parallel decision-making structure according to Khaddour, which is run by the supervisors of the PYD.³⁸⁸ If the certain guidelines are followed then the council will achieve more autonomy in choice and risk less interference.³⁸⁹ As a result, some citizens choose not participate at all in this method of governance.³⁹⁰

³⁷⁸ Özçelik, “Explaining the Kurdish Democratic Union Party’s Self-Governance Practices in Northern Syria, 2012-18.”

³⁷⁹ Interviewee 5, 31st of May 2020.

³⁸⁰ Interviewee 5.

³⁸¹ Hatahet, “The Political Economy of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria.”

³⁸² Khaddour, “How Regional Security Concerns Uniquely Constrain Governance in Northeastern Syria.”

³⁸³ Interviewee 2, 4th of June 2020.

³⁸⁴ Hatahet, “The Political Economy of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria.”

³⁸⁵ Interviewee 2.

³⁸⁶ Interviewee 2.

³⁸⁷ Interviewee 3, 3rd of April 2020.

³⁸⁸ Khaddour, “How Regional Security Concerns Uniquely Constrain Governance in Northeastern Syria.”

³⁸⁹ Interviewee 2, 4th of June 2020.

³⁹⁰ Interviewee 3, 3rd of April 2020.

Another element that could be indirectly be considered related to governance are the cooperatives that operate throughout the region. These are seen as by the ruling parties of the SDC as “pillars of its alternative social economy structure”,³⁹¹ with every stakeholder in these cooperatives are considered members with equal voting rights regarding decisions in the organisation, which is closely related to the local community.³⁹²

The operating of the administration’s institutions also plays a role in the decision-making process. A prime example of this is the priority status that is given to security issues. This enables the Asayish to override any decision-making process, which leads to other projects being delayed.³⁹³ Moreover, citizens interacting with the bureaucratic institution complain of a slow and unstructured decision-making process.³⁹⁴ However, others have noted that decisions which are made by the administration, are often communicated through informal channels such as Facebook, which has become a primary means to interaction with civilians. This has even resulted in some decisions being reversed due to individual’s criticisms.³⁹⁵

The executive decisions making process of the SDC leaders remains a bit vague, Özçelik describes it as a “strict hierarchical party organization”.³⁹⁶ The belief is that it is confined to a select group of individuals, mirroring the central committee that the PKK has employed.³⁹⁷ However, the notion is that these elites have a large influence within the administration and economy.³⁹⁸ Summed up, on the local level issues there is a trade-off that takes place between inclusive decision making and the guiding principles,³⁹⁹ whereas the executive choices that face the administration are still made by a small group of elites. This has led to authoritarian criticisms of the ruling party in the SDC, the PYD and is seen as a reason for limitations of support from western countries.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹¹ Hatahet, “The Political Economy of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria.”: 1.

³⁹² Hatahet.

³⁹³ Sary, “Kurdish Self-Governance in Syria: Survival and Ambition.”

³⁹⁴ Sary.

³⁹⁵ Interviewee 1, 18th of June 2020.

³⁹⁶ Özçelik, “Explaining the Kurdish Democratic Union Party’s Self-Governance Practices in Northern Syria, 2012-18.”: 6.

³⁹⁷ Khaddour, “How Regional Security Concerns Uniquely Constrain Governance in Northeastern Syria.”; Interviewee 5, 31st of May 2020.

³⁹⁸ Hatahet, “The Political Economy of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria”; Khaddour, “How Regional Security Concerns Uniquely Constrain Governance in Northeastern Syria.”

³⁹⁹ Interviewee 3, 3rd of April 2020.

⁴⁰⁰ Sary, “Kurdish Self-Governance in Syria: Survival and Ambition.”

Political Opposition Organisations

To understand the current situation with the political opposition groups which are or were active in the AANES region, the creation of the administration must be understood. In the early stages of the Syrian civil war, the PYD which is related to the PKK ideology and had a large influence in northern Syria. The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), a political party from the Kurdish Regional Government of Iraq was represented in northern Syria through the Kurdish National Council (KNC). Initially these two parties agreed to cooperate to establish a Kurdish administration in 2012.⁴⁰¹ However, disagreements on stances that the predecessor of the AANES should take, created a fierce conflict over influence.⁴⁰² This eventually culminated in a law which banned all political activities or parties that did not adhere to the PYD's idea of what the administration should be. The 'militant' organisational resources that the PYD had possession of, meant that they were rapidly able to implement their mode of governance when Assad pulled his military forces out of northern Syria.⁴⁰³

This manner in which the PYD was able to cement its power in the administration, as well as the leftist ideology of the party has resulted in the fact that the administration has found it challenging to attract partners that are willing to cooperate as representatives for Arab and Christian communities of northern Syria.⁴⁰⁴ To organise demonstrations in the region controlled by the administration, permission must be granted by the Asayish.⁴⁰⁵ Such authoritarian aspects of governing have also meant that the PYD is able to appoint those who are closely affiliated with the party to council positions.⁴⁰⁶ Thus, the inclusive intentions that the administration has are undermined by the skewed power distribution.⁴⁰⁷ However, the hard stance that the administration has taken to parties that have tried to challenge its mode of administration is different in areas where there were few threats to its leadership. Namely in Afrin where they were more inclusive, choosing to partner with local leadership.⁴⁰⁸ Sary concludes with the recommendation that if the administration were more accepting of political opposition parties and a greater separation of military and civilian institutions, the administration would perhaps be included in formal peace talks regarding Syria.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰¹ Sary.

⁴⁰² Özçelik, "Explaining the Kurdish Democratic Union Party's Self-Governance Practices in Northern Syria, 2012-18."

⁴⁰³ Özçelik: 6.

⁴⁰⁴ Khaddour, "How Regional Security Concerns Uniquely Constrain Governance in Northeastern Syria."

⁴⁰⁵ Khaddour.

⁴⁰⁶ Khaddour.

⁴⁰⁷ Interviewee 4, 18th of June 2020.

⁴⁰⁸ Khaddour, "How Regional Security Concerns Uniquely Constrain Governance in Northeastern Syria."

⁴⁰⁹ Sary, "Kurdish Self-Governance in Syria: Survival and Ambition."

Consensus Oriented governance in the Supreme Political Council

Recognition of public agenda

The ability to identify what local citizens find important issues is required to be able to address those needs and ultimately gain support. The Houthi movement proved that it was very capable of recognising issues on the public agenda when it protested against the unpopular decision to remove subsidies on fuel.⁴¹⁰ Based on this the movement actually had “some credibility as an alternative political force”.⁴¹¹

However, this was before the Houthi movement was in the position of governing, as they took over state institutions, the SPC placed trusted ‘supervisors’ from ‘their’ Sada’a region throughout these institutions. These supervisors are thus suddenly in charge of governorates that were previously unknown to them, along with their aforementioned superiority complex, this created a “gap between them and society”.⁴¹² Moreover, executive decisions taken by the SPC leadership such as to deny the existence of the Covid-19 virus for the first weeks, shows a reluctance to recognise negative developments in society.⁴¹³ On the international stage similar patterns occur, where results of international conferences such as the Stockholm agreement have not been implemented in Yemen itself.⁴¹⁴

As seen in Figure 13, the population is hesitant to credit the Houthi administration for any services they might provide, as respondents were overall quite negative over the role of the Houthis and their supervisors when it comes to service provision, with Hajjah and Amran governorates as exceptions to this. Notable is that the population is more positive about the role of the local council when it comes to service provision (see Appendix 3) and that a higher degree of citizens who refused to answer such a direct question about those in control.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁰ Clausen, “Competing for Control over the State: The Case of Yemen.”

⁴¹¹ Alley, 2014 and International Crisis Group, 2014 as seen in Clausen.

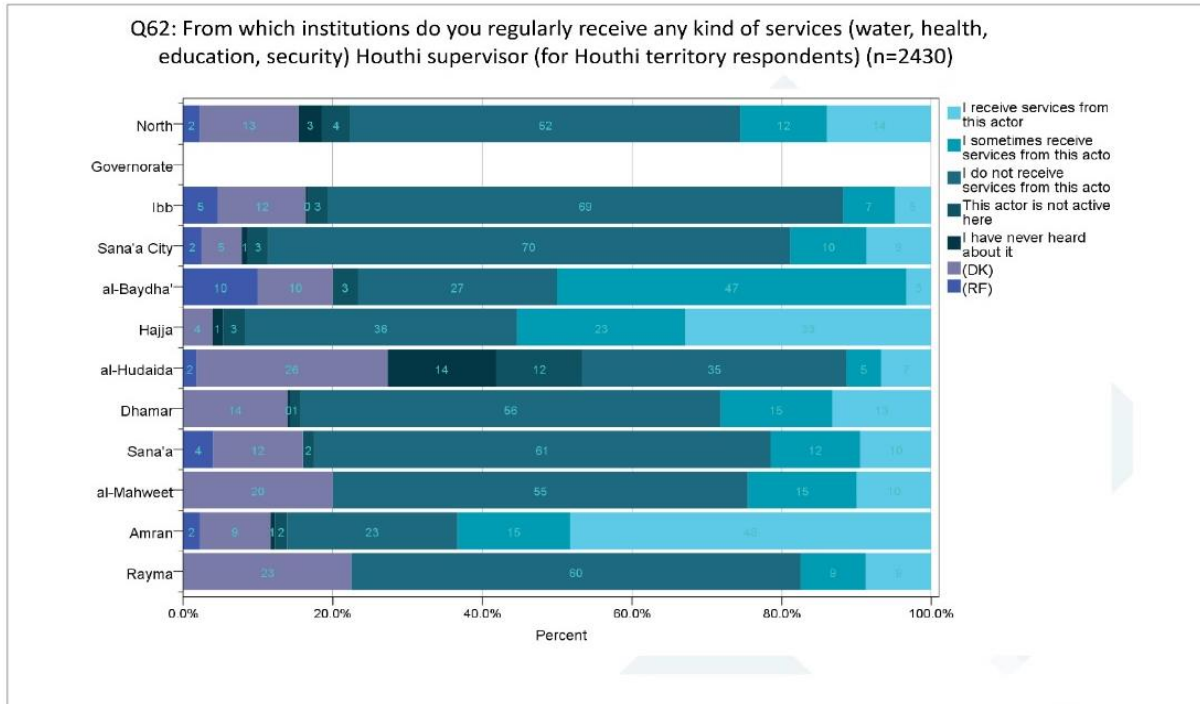
⁴¹² Interviewee 8, 3rd of June 2020: 4.

⁴¹³ Interviewee 9, 1st of June 2020.

⁴¹⁴ Interviewee 12, 15th of June 2020.

⁴¹⁵ Yemen Polling Center, “Perceptions of the Yemeni Public on Security-Related Issues.”

Figure 13. Service provision by supervisors



Source: Yemen Polling Center.⁴¹⁶

Reminiscing on similar research, Interviewee 10 notes that not a single individual referred to the Houthi administration as consensus oriented, stating that “there is a near total silence on political decision making”.⁴¹⁷

Decision making process

Although the state institutions remained largely intact, the appointment of supervisors known as Mushreffin created a parallel system of control than spanned from street level bureaucrats, such as the Aqil - a neighbourhood appointee responsible for security issues to leadership of national ministries and institutions.⁴¹⁸ Simultaneously opposition members within the decision-making process, such as the Islah party were removed.⁴¹⁹ This process has created a more centralised decision-making process monopolized by the SPC and individual Supervisors that tow the party line.⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁶ Yemen Polling Center.

⁴¹⁷ Interviewee 10, 12th of June 2020: 4.

⁴¹⁸ United Nations Development Programme, “Rapid Local Governance Diagnostic in Yemen.”: 21.

⁴¹⁹ Salisbury, “Yemen: National Chaos, Local Order.”

⁴²⁰ United Nations Development Programme, “Rapid Local Governance Diagnostic in Yemen.”; Interviewee 7, 8th of June 2020; Interviewee 8, 3rd of June 2020; Interviewee 11, 2nd of June 2020.

Executive decisions are made by the Houthi leadership of which the most prominent is Abdul Malik Al-Houthi.⁴²¹ The executive decision-making process is “pretty opaque” according to Interviewee 9, but the interviewee has observed a split in their opinion when it comes to issues such as prisoner swaps or strategies to defend the port city of Hodeidah.⁴²² Issues relating to civil governance however remain the responsibilities of individual institutions and the supervisors appointed to them.⁴²³

Overall, when it comes to the decision-making process, Interviewee 12 notes that although the Houthis were previously calling for broader consensus in decision making, now that they have the opportunity to implement this they have stalled.⁴²⁴

Political Opposition Organisations

The Houthi movement came to power through an alliance with the former ruling party of the General People’s Congress (GPC), this alliance was formalised through the SPC and the National Salvation Government.⁴²⁵ This cooperation gave the Houthi-Saleh alliance enough capacity to place President Hadi under house-arrest.⁴²⁶ This coup was followed by trying the President in court and the freezing of financial assets of the rival Islah party.⁴²⁷ Two years after this power grab, the alliance between the Houthis and Saleh was also broken, with the Houthis again ending on top.⁴²⁸

The temporary alliances that the SPC forms with rivals in order to later dispense of them is the only manner in which the movement represents inclusiveness.⁴²⁹ This has however taken a toll on the reputation of the Houthi movement, as Salisbury observes, the Houthis have become “increasingly unpopular among Yemenis”.⁴³⁰ This is because of their authoritarian stance, repression and disrespect to tribal leaders.⁴³¹

⁴²¹ Interviewee 11, 2nd of June 2020.

⁴²² Interviewee 9, 1st of June 2020: 1.

⁴²³ Interviewee 11, 2nd of June 2020.

⁴²⁴ Interviewee 12, 15th of June 2020.

⁴²⁵ Salisbury, “Yemen: National Chaos, Local Order.”

⁴²⁶ Clausen, “Competing for Control over the State: The Case of Yemen.”

⁴²⁷ Mansour and Salisbury, “Between Order and Chaos - A New Approach to Stalled State Transformations in Iraq and Yemen.”

⁴²⁸ Salisbury, “Yemen: National Chaos, Local Order.”

⁴²⁹ Interviewee 12, 15th of June 2020: 6.

⁴³⁰ Salisbury, “Yemen: National Chaos, Local Order.”: 15.

⁴³¹ Clausen, “Competing for Control over the State: The Case of Yemen”; Salisbury, “Yemen: National Chaos, Local Order.”

Comparing the principle of Consensus Oriented for both cases

Overall, both administrations have a relatively low performance on consensus-oriented governance. The de-facto governments were able to recognise what the local population demanded in terms of governance. Here the SDC has shown to be pragmatic in the ‘power-ideology trade-off’ to meet some demands of the populace, contrary the SPC has been more hesitant in stepping away from their ideology and has not shown to be as pragmatic in their governance. For the second indicator decision-making process, the SDC has moved to a more inclusive approach, yet this is somewhat undermined by the parallel structure of supervisors. In Yemen the decision-making process has only become more exclusive, with the supervisor system playing a major role in this trend. In terms of the second indicator, both de-facto authorities show hesitation to the possibility of real political opposition. In Syria the SDC is, however slowly engaging in talks with the central government and KDP affiliated parties, whereas in Yemen opposition is only included for short term gains, with the SPC later turning on these parties once the alliance is exploited.

4.5 Accountability

Accountability in the Syrian Democratic Council

Transparency

Transparency is paramount for accountability in any administration, because the transparency of governing mechanisms ensures that the citizens’ interest in the longevity of the system is maintained. Regarding the financial transparency, the budget of the AANES has been published once, showing only the rough outlines of the major proponents, this was done through Facebook to increase accessibility for citizens.⁴³² From this it can be concluded that primary revenue streams are from oil, import duties and income tax and fees.⁴³³ Another important aspect is kept away from the public, namely the distribution of this administration income among Kurdish and Arab areas, as most of the oil is sourced from Deir Ezzor province.⁴³⁴ Hatahet estimated that the current capacity of oil extraction is at 60%, with an increase not possible due to the administration not have the technical workforce and resources.⁴³⁵ However according to Interviewee 4, there is a very good reason that the administration is not transparent on the issue of oil sales, as it is sold domestically and

⁴³² Interviewee 1, 18th of June 2020.

⁴³³ Hatahet, “The Political Economy of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria.”

⁴³⁴ Interviewee 5, 31st of May 2020.

⁴³⁵ Hatahet, “The Political Economy of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria.”

internationally.⁴³⁶ Thus, being transparent on this issue would only reduce the number of buyers, leading to less revenue for the administration. A side effect of this lack of transparency is that it allows for nepotism, and businessmen close to the PYD party to financially benefit.⁴³⁷

Regarding issues of rule of law, the administration has tried to improve their transparency. According to Interviewee 2, one of the SDF commanders has diverted significant resources to finding a group of citizens that disappeared a few years ago.⁴³⁸ This was coupled with the administration's acknowledgement of responsibility and apology for the death of demonstrators in the town of Amude in 2013.⁴³⁹

Despite the administration not being transparent on every issue, they have demanded it of international NGOs operating in their administrative region. This is because they want to maintain authority over which regions benefit from NGO operations.⁴⁴⁰ Moreover, the AANES requests the income statements of every expatriate, to ensure they are taxed appropriately.⁴⁴¹

Civil monitoring organisations

Civil monitoring organisations are paramount in accountability as they act as independent organisations which supervise/audit funding, policies and the ratification of said policies. Interviewee 1 shines light on the general state of accountability within the SDC, noting that the party supervisors (Cadres) are in also tasked with checking institutions for corruption.⁴⁴² This parallel administrative structure acts as an internal monitoring body and has been effective in preventing corruption, in some cases also arresting or uncovering corruption by SDF personnel.⁴⁴³

In terms of financial monitoring, even though the tax system is clear, there is a general lack of oversight due to the fact that there is virtually no banking infrastructure in northern Syria, which has severely hampered any attempts at financial auditing.⁴⁴⁴ Another example that was brought up by Interviewee 3

⁴³⁶ Interviewee 4, 18th of June 2020.

⁴³⁷ Hatahet, "The Political Economy of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria."

⁴³⁸ Interviewee 2, 4th of June 2020.

⁴³⁹ North Press Agency, "Tragedy of Amude - Reconciliation Efforts Clash with Demand to Prosecute Those Responsible," 2020.

⁴⁴⁰ Hatahet, "The Political Economy of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria."

⁴⁴¹ Hatahet.

⁴⁴² Interviewee 1, 18th of June 2020.

⁴⁴³ Interviewee 1.

⁴⁴⁴ Hatahet, "The Political Economy of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria."

discusses how international NGOs have acted as a civil monitoring organisation in the administrations prison, in which many ISIS fighters are held. The administration gave full access to Human Rights Watch to monitor the prisoner's rights. The resulting reports concluded that in some cases, prisoner's rights were violated, this was acknowledged by the administration and resources were diverted to find methods to improve this.⁴⁴⁵

Lack of corruption

Overall, the reports and interviews seem to indicate that the AANES is actively working to stop corruption from taking hold in northeast Syria. This is being carried out through a security and administrative system of governance that actively makes it harder for corruption to take root in the region.

The SDC has implemented an administrative mechanism that keeps clerks and administrators switching between positions, never staying in one long enough to create clientelist networks that foster corruption.⁴⁴⁶ The SDC is also using a securitised approach to stopping corruption by embedding supervisors within public institutions.⁴⁴⁷ This approach also extends to the everyday level, with the 'cadres' working to root out corruption within the general society.⁴⁴⁸ Such approaches have fostered the feeling among the public that the AANES is free of corruption.⁴⁴⁹ It is also important to note that financial corruption is hindered by the fact that the region is rather poor, and were a member of the administration to suddenly exhibit an excess of money then it would indicate the possibility of corruption.⁴⁵⁰

Nevertheless, NGO and international aid workers in the region closely working with the SDC have indicated that corruption is a phenomenon that is talked about, but that they have never experienced it personally.⁴⁵¹ Public perceptions on corruption within the AANES also follow this trend. The Arab opposition parties in the region have indicated that the AANES may not face petty corruption among its officials, but that the higher ups are corrupt in their dealings with oil sales and smuggling networks.⁴⁵² There

⁴⁴⁵ Interviewee 3, 3rd of April 2020.

⁴⁴⁶ Interviewee 3.

⁴⁴⁷ Interviewee 4, 18th of June 2020.

⁴⁴⁸ Interviewee 5, 31st of May 2020.

⁴⁴⁹ Interviewee 3, 3rd of April 2020; Interviewee 5, 31st of May 2020; Interviewee 6, 30th of June, 2020.

⁴⁵⁰ Interviewee 2, 4th of June 2020.

⁴⁵¹ Interviewee 6, 30th of June, 2020.

⁴⁵² Interviewee 5, 31st of May 2020.

is also the feeling among the members of the populace that the resources earmarked for the public in order for them to meet basic needs is not being equitably distributed.⁴⁵³

Accountability in the Supreme Political Council

Transparency

Transparency is a condition for accountability, for procedures such as planning budgets and decision-making must be open to ensure integrity of the aforementioned governance elements. This is the case for the local governance processes that were enacted under Saleh in 2000.⁴⁵⁴ However, the overall accountability of this local governance has decreased throughout Yemen since the start of the conflict.⁴⁵⁵ This is reflected in greater discretionary powers of local executives in 70% of the institutions surveyed by Interviewee 7 - as the councils of these local authorities are less functional.

The SPC however does issue directives i.e. communicate through the press, although the decision-making process here remains opaque.⁴⁵⁶ The new taxation law of “Khums” is a case in point, the legislation is available for everyone, the implementation process is known, yet how it was created is unknown.⁴⁵⁷ The situation regarding the Covid-19 virus has presented a more negative light of the SPC approach, where the numbers of infected are not published.⁴⁵⁸ Nor is it shared with international organisations which prevents monitoring of the virus in the most populated parts of Yemen.⁴⁵⁹

Overall, there is little transparency in the Houthi controlled regions.⁴⁶⁰ As the SPC claims to spend their money on war, something which cannot be confirmed, the general observation is that Houthi officials have real estate, control over companies and public resources.⁴⁶¹

⁴⁵³ Interviewee 4, 18th of June 2020.

⁴⁵⁴ Interviewee 7, 8th of June 2020.

⁴⁵⁵ Interviewee 7: 2.

⁴⁵⁶ Interviewee 10, 12th of June 2020.

⁴⁵⁷ Interviewee 10: 4.

⁴⁵⁸ Interviewee 8, 3rd of June 2020; Interviewee 12, 15th of June 2020.

⁴⁵⁹ Interviewee 12, 15th of June 2020.

⁴⁶⁰ Interviewee 8, 3rd of June 2020; Interviewee 11, 2nd of June 2020.

⁴⁶¹ Interviewee 11, 2nd of June 2020.

Civil monitoring organisations

The local councils form the basis of governance in the SPC administered areas. Previously there were mechanisms in place that monitored and evaluated decisions and operations made by local councils, however the internal administrative accountability has been significantly weakened since the Houthi takeover.⁴⁶² Independent oversight has been virtually ineffective as local councils are “asked to rubber-stamp plans, budgets and reports prepared by local executives”.⁴⁶³ Moreover, the aforementioned lack of transparency by local councils has decreased the possibilities of accountability by civil society.⁴⁶⁴ This, along with the fact that civil society itself has deteriorated, with too little experience or resources to be effective in engaging and evaluating local governance processes has eroded the ability of domestic civil monitoring organisations to provide social accountability.⁴⁶⁵

The international community has supported various attempts of civil monitoring organisations within Yemen. The ‘National Enquiry’ is such a body that works to monitor human rights, however the SPC administration has rejected the request to cooperate with the organisation under the pretext that the National Enquiry is biased in favour of the central government.⁴⁶⁶ This decision has crippled the capacity of the organisation as the national enquiry cannot safely work throughout the country.

Journalism is another branch of civil monitoring which the Houthi administration has sought to control. Abductions, disappearances and formal sentences have crippled the capacity of independent journalism.⁴⁶⁷ According to Interviewee 12 the Houthi administration aims to “control the message” about developments occurring within their territory.⁴⁶⁸

Lack of corruption

Despite the fact that general economic activities have largely ceased, and a pure war economy is running, there are new roads, shopping malls and large estates. According to Interviewee 12 these belong to the

⁴⁶² Interviewee 7, 8th of June 2020.

⁴⁶³ United Nations Development Programme, “Rapid Local Governance Diagnostic in Yemen.”

⁴⁶⁴ Interviewee 7, 8th of June 2020.

⁴⁶⁵ Interviewee 7: 3.

⁴⁶⁶ Interviewee 12, 15th of June 2020: 8.

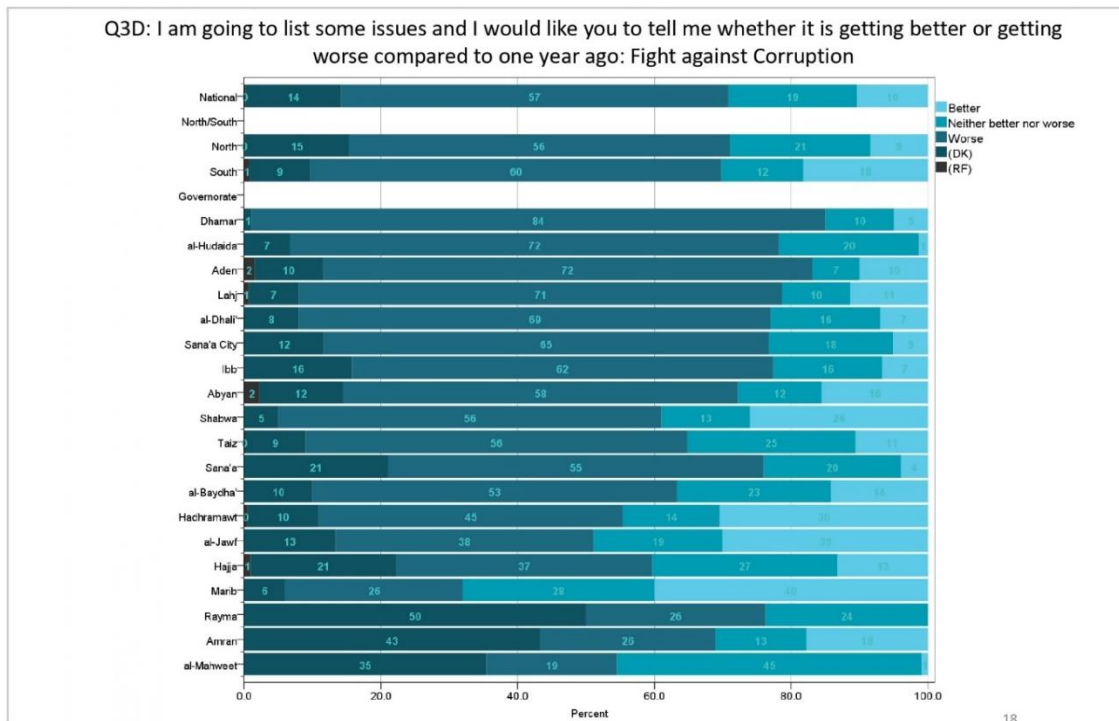
⁴⁶⁷ Interviewee 12.

⁴⁶⁸ Interviewee 12: 7.

Houthi leaders and are acquired through diverting public funds.⁴⁶⁹ Salisbury cross-referenced budgets previously released to financial figures currently declared by the SPC administration to see whether there is merit behind these claims. The author finds that declared customs revenues from the main port of Hodeidah are currently insignificant when compared to other governorates, despite the port being the main trade hub of Yemen.⁴⁷⁰ This indicates gross mismanagement of public resources raised by customs fees. Interviewee 8 has observed similar malpractices in the workplace, where through the supervisor system clear nepotism has become commonplace.⁴⁷¹ Here appointments of functions have taken place based on favouritism for those from the Sada'a region, rather than based on Merit.

Corruption is not easily measurable as it is hard to observe, however the perceptions of citizens, in SPC administered areas, on the fight against corruption are poor. As seen in Figure 14, a large majority feel that corruption is getting worse, with another portion of citizens refusing to answer. Apart from the three regions of Marib, Hadramout and Al-Jawf the whole of Yemen scores poorly on this indicator.

Figure 14. The situation on the fight against corruption



Source: Yemen Polling Center.⁴⁷²

⁴⁶⁹ Interviewee 12.

⁴⁷⁰ Salisbury, "Yemen: National Chaos, Local Order.": 28.

⁴⁷¹ Interviewee 8, 3rd of June 2020: 3.

⁴⁷² Yemen Polling Center, "Perceptions of the Yemeni Public on Security-Related Issues.": 18.

Interviewee 9, notes the irony of the situation, recounting the anti-corruption agenda the Houthis had, which they skilfully use to get into power.⁴⁷³ Now after 5 years of power in Sana'a the SPC has an image of diverting state funds for their war and officials,⁴⁷⁴ with even bureaucrats from the Saleh era showing frustration at the levels of corruption.⁴⁷⁵

Comparing the principle of Accountability for both cases

In summary of the above analysis, both administrations had areas of improvement, with those of the SPC administration being relatively more pressing. In Syria the SPC is not considered very transparent, despite some initiatives. In Yemen, there are even fewer instances where the SPC has been transparent. Considering the second indicator, the AANES has allowed for civil monitoring organisations to operate and make reports, whereas in the SPC administration institutional oversight has become ineffective and independent journalism is restricted. Finally, in terms of (lack of) corruption, the perception in Syria is that there is little 'street level' corruption but at higher levels some have expressed doubt. In Yemen, accusations have been raised against the SPC as public income declarations have changed significantly, and the perception is that corruption is rife and worsening.

Overall summary of the governance

The analysis of the extent to which good governance is present in both administrations is abstractly discussed here. Individual principles have been discussed in this chapter to provide an idea of the quality of governance in each de-facto administered area.

The Syrian Democratic council has been relatively successful in its role in providing security and applying the rule of law. Participation remains a priority in their approach but socio-ethnic differences still remain in the region of north east Syria. Operationally the AANES has, despite the economic situation delivered on the necessities in terms of goods and services. When discussing the SDC consensus-oriented approach there are certainly improvements to be made in decision making process and groups involved in this. The de-facto administration is to an accountable actor in some fields, yet in other areas improvements are necessary. Overall, the performance of governance can be considered moderate, with a slight difference between principles and some indicators that clearly require improvement.

⁴⁷³ Interviewee 9, 1st of June 2020.

⁴⁷⁴ Interviewee 9, 1st of June 2020; Interviewee 11, 2nd of June 2020.

⁴⁷⁵ Clausen, "Competing for Control over the State: The Case of Yemen."

In Yemen the SPC has been militarily successful but this has not directly translated into following the rule of law. With regards to participation, the results are varied in Houthi controlled areas but negative instances outweigh those that contribute to good governance. Operationality has been the SPCs strongest performing principle, based on its capacity to create funds for the administration, yet there are serious issues relating to the expenditure of these public resources. The SPC administration is not perceived as focussed on consensus-oriented governance, with decisions made largely by the higher leadership. The accountability of the SPC is very poor, with little transparency and widespread corruption. Generally, the SPC administration has poor performing principles laying little interest in good governance.

Chapter 5. Results of legitimacy and discussion

Results of legitimacy

This chapter will discuss whether the four conditions of the Half Virtuous Model are met by the de-facto administrations, which is necessary to be able to translate the performance of governance into legitimacy. The process to determine whether the conditions are met is based on the findings of the governance analysis in the previous chapter, as well as external sources. Once it is determined whether the conditions are met, the legitimacy of the de-facto administration can be discussed.

In Syria the first condition of ‘performance-based legitimacy beliefs’, is proven by Martínez & Eng, through the case of bread production and pricing.⁴⁷⁶ In the north east the race to provide bread in an accessible manner to citizens is viewed as a strategy to gain legitimacy at cost of the Assad regime by the SDC.⁴⁷⁷ This was initially also the case for ISIS, however this group struggled “to maintain popularity strictly through the provision of services and security”.⁴⁷⁸ This goes to show that performance in terms of goods and service provision is one of the values that determines legitimacy for the local population,⁴⁷⁹ which the administration has been able to recognise and to a certain extent been able to provide (see analysis). In the SPC administered regions of Yemen, citizens also have expressed that the provision of goods and services is important in creating support and legitimacy. This is proven by Mansour & Salisbury who interviewed residents who express that: “If they [SPC] paid just some wages and provided some services, and if they were seen to do so, they would be much more popular.”⁴⁸⁰ Moreover, the manner in which the SPC administration has established rule of law as a non-state actor has also had an effect on its governance, combined with their limited service provision and “limited ability to forge alliances and thus build internal legitimacy”.⁴⁸¹ These two processes in Yemen prove that actions are judged by the population based on performance. Thus, it can be concluded that for this condition, performance-based origin of legitimacy is accepted by both recipient populations of the de-facto administered regions.

To investigate if the second condition of ‘shared goals and social values’ is present for both governance actors and audience, a range of aspects must be discussed about the two cases. Within the AANES administration the provision of basic security services, judicial system and provision of basic goods

⁴⁷⁶ Martínez and Eng, “Struggling to Perform the State: The Politics of Bread in the Syrian Civil War.”

⁴⁷⁷ Martínez and Eng.

⁴⁷⁸ Eaton et al., “Conflict Economies in the Middle East and North Africa.”: 14.

⁴⁷⁹ Martínez and Eng, “Struggling to Perform the State: The Politics of Bread in the Syrian Civil War.”: 134.

⁴⁸⁰ Eaton et al., “Conflict Economies in the Middle East and North Africa.”: 15.

⁴⁸¹ Schmitz, 2015 as seen in Clausen, “Competing for Control over the State: The Case of Yemen.”: 568.

is recognised and appreciated by the majority of all groups in the population in north east Syria.⁴⁸² Considering the salience of multiple languages and religions in the region, the right to speak ones' mother tongue and freedom of religious expression is possible and promoted by the AANES. In this basic sense the goals and values overlap for the de-facto administration and citizens. However, the aims and values of the administration is not shared by all, this is reflected in the (perceived) limited participation in governance, more social and cultural policies on polygamy and the greater secessionist aims for north eastern Syria. Here tensions still remain reflected by mistrust and feelings of inequality,⁴⁸³ with not all the shared social goals and values between the administration and the citizens. In Yemen the Zaydis form over a third of the population and although the Ansar Allah movement is largely Zaydis, not all who believe in the Shia sect support the SPC.⁴⁸⁴ As seen in the previous chapter, the opposite also occurs, where Sunnis or other socio-ethnic groups can support the de-facto administration, when their goals have aligned. This is largely explained through the developments in the timeline in which the Ansar Allah movement has existed and engaged in governance. The revolutionary legitimacy the administration initially inherited from their role in the Arab Spring protests gave them popular support.⁴⁸⁵ Later, the SPC stance against the Saudi Arabian 'aggression' also won them support, especially in the north of the country.⁴⁸⁶ In terms of social norms, the administration eventually opposed the National Dialogue values which were relatively progressive and had a broad political mandate. This was done in favour of more conservative values (present especially in the north) that were previously only socially enforced, but are now increasingly brought into legislative enforcement.⁴⁸⁷ Thus, the initial stated goals and social values the Houthi movement had was certainly based on a mandate of support, yet the actions of the SPC administration are very different to their initial promises and have not been implemented. In sum, for the basic governance aspects that are easily attributed to the AANES such as provision of goods, this condition holds. However, it becomes debatable when analysing this condition for more politicized aspects or policies that are less visible to the local population. For the SPC there is support for the initially proclaimed values, but there has unfortunately not been proof of attempts to implement them.

The third condition requires 'attribution' for governance actions to the right actor. In Syria, the governance of the SDC administration has largely been credited and criticized where it is due. There is certainly an alternative to their governance in the region, the central government still plays a role through

⁴⁸² Özçelik, "Explaining the Kurdish Democratic Union Party's Self-Governance Practices in Northern Syria, 2012-18"; Sary, "Kurdish Self-Governance in Syria: Survival and Ambition."

⁴⁸³ Interviewee 6, 30th of June, 2020: 2.

⁴⁸⁴ Clausen, "Competing for Control over the State: The Case of Yemen.": 563.

⁴⁸⁵ Roland Popp, "War in Yemen: Revolution and Saudi Intervention," *Analyses in Security Policy*, 2015: 2.

⁴⁸⁶ Clausen, "Competing for Control over the State: The Case of Yemen.": 563.

⁴⁸⁷ Interviewee 4, 18th of June 2020: 1.

pre-conflict institutions in the region as well as the humanitarian sector in northern Syria. Nevertheless, in the analysis governance audiences were able to differentiate between all actors (Regime, SDC, ISIS and NGOs), in the allocation of credit for governance. This case is different for the SPC administration, where Interviewee 4 observes that the population is hesitant to attribute the provision of governance elements to the administration when it occurs, rather citizens choosing to praise the village elders or tribal figures. This discrepancy is further seen in the fact that Houthi supervisor's role in provision of services and overall operationality (Figure 13 in consensus oriented) is viewed negatively, yet the work of local councils is viewed upon with greater recognition (Appendix 3) even though the supervisors play a significant role in these local institutions. Overall, the AANES administration receives the required attribution for this condition to be met. However, for the case of the SPC administration there is a tendency for dismissal of credit to SPC governance where it is due, rather credit goes to local institutions themselves.

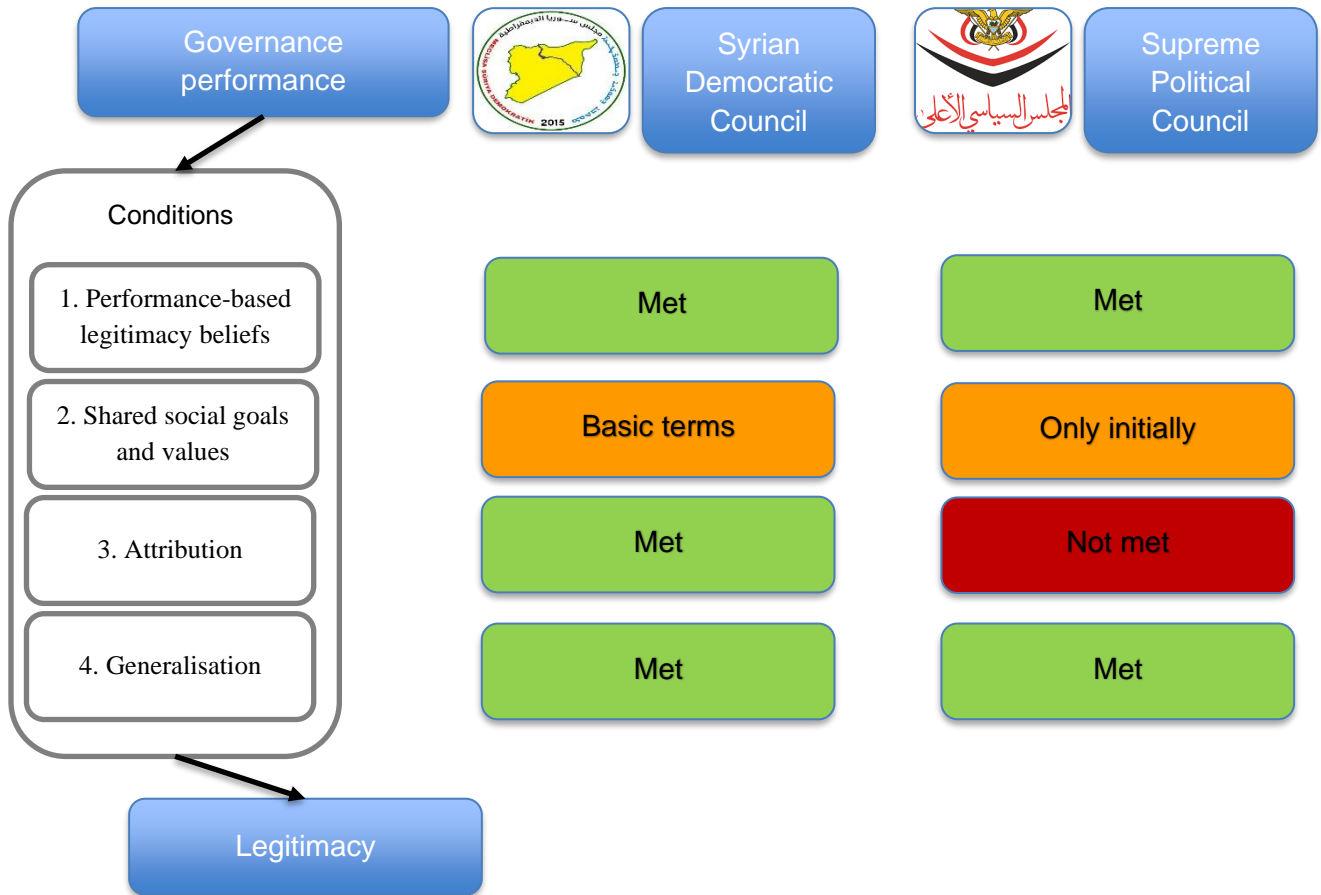
For the final condition of 'generalization' the perceptions expressed by citizens/sample must be based on experiences with the administration in question in order to make judgement on their overall performance-based legitimacy.⁴⁸⁸ The interviewees, academics and researchers' work chosen for the analysis represent an educated sample who are in active contact with or in a position that observes and studies the administration and its governance, means that their generalisation holds more value. These sources also form their views through direct interviews with the population. This allows them the ability to piece together individual policies and experiences to create a "general understanding of an institution".⁴⁸⁹

Overall, the previous good governance analysis with help of external sources was able to determine whether the conditions of the Half Virtuous Model were met. Figure 15 acts as a summary of the conditions for both cases. Here the conditions required to transfer governance performance into legitimacy are shown on the left-hand side of the table. To summarise the results; it can be seen that the SDC administrations has met 3 of the conditions, with 'shared social goals and values' met in basic terms. For the SPC administration the first and last conditions are met, however the second is initially met due to changes in policy, while the third condition is not met.

⁴⁸⁸ Schmelzle and Stollenwerk, "Virtuous or Vicious Circle? Governance Effectiveness and Legitimacy in Areas of Limited Statehood.": 460.

⁴⁸⁹ Mcloughlin, 2018 as described in Schmelzle and Stollenwerk.: 460.

Figure 15. Conditions of the Half-virtuous model



Based on this, only the SDC administration can be considered eligible for the process of turning effective governance into legitimacy, as the SPC does not meet the standards required, as stated by the creators of the model.⁴⁹⁰ Moreover, the Yemeni case showed few aspects of good governance on all principles, thus even without the application of the half-virtuous model, based solely on governance, the SPC would not be considered legitimate. The SDC can have its governance performance transformed into legitimacy. In the analysis it is concluded that the governance is moderate. While administration has not achieved enough legitimacy to no longer be considered de-facto, however it is starting to be recognised through informal mechanisms that foster international cooperation.

⁴⁹⁰ Schmelzle and Stollenwerk.

Discussion

De-facto administrations become more of a commonality across conflict zones, yet the extent to which these unrecognised states engage in governance has varied, along with their fate; either forced or peaceful reintegration or self-determination.⁴⁹¹ However, for all these cases of de-facto states, the majority of studies only skimmed the surface of analysis, focussing solely on one source of legitimacy and giving less weight to sources of this legitimacy. This research paper has attempted to bring the governance performance-based sources of legitimacy to the forefront of the analysis of these de-facto administrations, while giving enough weight to other sources of legitimacy through the second framework. In the case studies of this paper, the SDC's governance was deemed as decent and could be translated to legitimacy to some extent, whilst the SPC administration's performance was considered poor and did not meet the conditions required to let this performance determine its legitimacy.

In both cases of governance in the de-facto regions strong elements of alioocracy can be observed, with the administrations and their militia able to guarantee relative order and security (yet placing less priority to the other two rule of law indicators) as well as being effective in securing funds for their governance institutions. The good governance framework used in this study goes further in terms of analysis; towards what academia have coined rebelocracy. This is where both administration's governance performance becomes more inconsistent and the cases start to significantly diverge. In terms of participation, for the SDC this is formally well established yet done with some reluctance, whereas in the SPC administration participation is only done if absolutely necessary. Operationally the Syrian case showed political determination as well as to some extent results in providing for citizen's need. In Yemen this picture was very much reversed, with little priority given to service and goods provision. In terms of consensus-oriented governance, both de-facto administrations are able to recognise which policies bring the greatest social welfare gains, yet the SPC and to a lesser extent the SDC struggle to find a proper balance in the power/ideology trade-off. This is reflected through the use of supervisors as a means of aligning

⁴⁹¹ Adrian Florea, "Rebel Governance in de Facto States," *European Journal of International Relations*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066120919481>.: 13.

governance with their respective parties' goals. Finally, in terms of the principle of accountability, there is a general observation in both cases that increasing transparency could come at great cost, considering the economic pragmatism required to survive as administration. This however does not compensate the perceived corruption under the SPC administration in Yemen. Reflecting on the first research question, the SDC administration has been implementing policies that adhere to good governance, but this has not been fully achieved. For the SPC administration good governance intentions have been rarely observed, with few policies that would potentially accomplish this.

Applying the aforementioned governance analysis to the half-virtuous circle model allows for a less technocratic process to determine legitimacy. The model incorporated many socio-cultural conditions to the research, these aspects ensured the concept of legitimacy was not solely achieved through just one method but rather being a product of a broad range of governance factors. This multi-faceted approach to legitimacy analysis strengthens the overall results of this thesis. This can be seen with the second condition of shared social goals and values, which was particularly significant as both administrations barely met this condition. This shows that even if governance in and of itself is good on the outside perspective, if the target audience does not perceive it to be of value, it cannot be a source for legitimacy. In the results, the SDC administration was only barely legitimate due to their governance performance, whereas the SPC administration could not draw any legitimacy from their governance. Conversely, the half virtuous circle model included intentions and governance ambitions in the analysis of the de-facto administration, who without these distinctions would be solely perceived as bad governance actors, because policies (often due to contextual factors) could not be implemented and have their intended effect.

Limitations

This thesis certainly has some potential limitations, the first and foremost is the ambition of the author to attempt to analyse five different principles of governance to de-facto states to determine legitimacy, in a context where governance is only present in very basic terms. Indicators were created by the author, based on readings, observations and expected results, making this study very explorative. Another element that was a limitation is the politically sensitive nature of this

research, as the objectivity of sources can be hard to determine, requiring additional effort to ensure a range of sources are used.

This thesis might also be subject to one particular limitation over which the author has limited influence, which is that the territories being studied are still engaged in active conflict. Providing security in these regions therefore represents a burden on the resources of the administration. This situation means that governance may give less priority to increasing the living standards of the citizens. Principles determining good governance might be present to a lower extent, when comparing the score to that of the previous central government administration of the territories. On the other hand, it can be argued that since militia and their administrations are temporary actors which are continuously engaged in conflict, this would actually further increase the external validity of this study regarding militia and how they govern.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

To answer the main research question, according to governance performance, the SDC's governance was deemed as decent and could be translated to legitimacy to some extent, whilst the SPC administration's performance was considered poor and did not meet the conditions required to let this performance determine its legitimacy. Interestingly this is contradictory to the hypothesis, where de-facto administrations with ambition of self-determination are expected to practice good governance. This hypothesis only holds true for the Syrian case study, and not for the Yemeni case.

The revised good governance framework of this thesis might be applicable for other de-facto administrations, however indicators can be further adapted and refined. Certainly, other frameworks will be found and introduced to analyse governance in such dynamic environments, from those focusing on capacity building to others laying emphasis on internal legitimacy. The half-virtuous model incorporated many socio-cultural conditions to the research, these aspects ensured the concept of legitimacy was not solely achieved through just one method but rather being a product of a broad range of governance factors. This multi-faceted approach to legitimacy analysis strengthens the overall results of this thesis.

Overall, this paper used good governance as a method to evaluate these administrations, yet this is just one manner through which we are able to further understand governance in areas of limited statehood. Moreover, literature on the topic of governance by NSAGs and their respective de-facto administrations are still in its infancy, with important works⁴⁹² being published as this thesis was written.

⁴⁹² Florea; Zachariah Mampilly and Megan A. Stewart, "A Typology of Rebel Political Institutional Arrangements," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 65, no. 1 (2020): 15–45, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002720935642>.

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Appendix

1. Protocol and questions for interviews

| Good Governance Principle and relevant definition | Indicator to which the Question Contributes | Questions (*potential Prompts & Probes) and their justification |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Rule of Law - <i>the extent to which an administration is able to enforce its legal framework it has created, which must encompass human rights, independent judiciary and impartial security forces</i></p> | <p>Order and security Civil Liberties Access to civil justice</p> | <p>How would you describe the balance of security against civil liberties and the judicial process?</p> <p>This question touches upon all three indicators and enquires about their status.</p> |
| <p>Participation - <i>the extent to which all groups of the population within the jurisdiction are included in decision-making in governance directly or through intermediate institutions or representative</i></p> | <p>Elections and referendums Coordination with civil society Lack of Discrimination</p> | <p>To what extent does the administration ensure participation across demographics?</p> <p><i>*How does civil society play a role in this?</i></p> <p>The question asks for the degree of participation, indicator 1 and 3 are expected here. If the 2nd indicator is not touched upon, the probe will question the role of CSOs.</p> |
| <p>Operationality - <i>the extent to which the administration is able to react to the needs of society and its ability to create suitable policies and execute them in an efficient manner</i></p> | <p>Issues on the public agenda Resources and budget Humanitarian coordination</p> | <p>Relative to the capacity of the administration, to what extent are issues on the public agenda being addressed?</p> <p><i>*What is the role of humanitarian organisations in this?</i></p> <p>The initial question reiterates the dependence of the 1st and 2nd indicators on each other and demands a status report on both. If not already mentioned by the interviewee, the role of humanitarian sector is enquired on.</p> |

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Consensus-oriented - <i>the extent to which the administration creates policies based on the societal agenda, incorporating different interests and creating widely supported agreements based not merely on the political agenda</i></p> | <p>Recognition of public agenda</p> <p>Opposition political organisations</p> <p>Decision-making process</p> | <p>How consensus-oriented is the administration in identifying public issues, the different political ideas to approach these issues and the decision-making process?</p> <p>This question is designed to touch on all three indicators, however is quite loaded, therefore must be said clearly or repeated to ensure satisfactory output for all indicators</p> |
| <p>Accountability - <i>the extent to which the administration follows accepted procedures, the openness involved in these processes and the ability for society to hold individuals responsible for their actions</i></p> | <p>Transparent</p> <p>Civil monitoring organisations</p> <p>Lack of Corruption</p> | <p>In terms of accountability, how transparent is the administration, and what are the mechanisms that monitor and prevent corruption?</p> <p>For the last question, information on the first indicator is simply requested. The last part enquires about the 2nd and 3rd indicator simultaneously, although the first clause about accountability will already lay emphasis on corruption, so interviewee response should be sufficient on all three indicators.</p> |

2. Intercoder validity tests

Coding results of a sample source

| Categories identified | Coder | |
|---|----------------|----------------|
| Indicators | Coding round 1 | Coding round 2 |
| Order and security | | |
| Civil Liberties | X | X |
| Access to civil justice | | |
| Election and referendum turnout | XX | XX |
| Coordination with civil Society | X | XX |
| Discrimination based on minority status | | |
| Adress issues on public agenda | X | X |
| Resources and budget | X | X |
| Humanitarian coordination | X | |
| Recognition of public agenda | | |
| Decision making process | X | X |
| Political Opposition organisation | | |
| Transparency | X | X |
| Civil monitoring organisations | XX | X |
| Corruption | | |

3. Historical governance profiles of case study countries

Past governance in north east Syria

The governance in Syria will be explored before the conflict from the period of July 2000, where the government of Bashar al-Assad was inaugurated. This government remained in power up until the civil war starting in 2011. This timeframe has been chosen because the reign of Bashar al-Assad was long enough to study the reforms that were attempted to be brought in, and the change it brought in governance. The specific north east region in which the Syrian Democratic Council currently operates will also be discussed in further detail, to see what the impact of the previous polity was on governance in this region today.

To understand the Syrian government in the timeframe of 2000 up to 2011, this paper will first go further back into history to understand the legacy and institutions that it inherited. After WW2, the newly created nation state had various leaders, who attempted to gain and hold power through close ties with the military (Be'eri, 1982, p. 69). However, this trend was ceased in the 1963 coup d'état, the Baath party came to power in Syria. After a series of coups within the party, and Hafez al Assad would cement his power as undisputed leader of Syria in November of 1970. Hafez's ideology of Arab Nationalism, Pan-Arabism, Arab Socialist and anti-imperialist influences would greatly determine the future of Syria. Hafez would choose to govern a highly centralised state, not just in terms of bureaucratic institutions but also in terms of government involvement in the private sector. In the 1960's many key industries were nationalised. A trend that is still visible in Bashar's Syria.

This created a political economy where there were many interactions between business and politics within Syria. Subsequently the economy became stagnant and uncompetitive in terms of the good and services produced. A situation was created where the leader realised that reform was needed but it was not possible to implement it (Haddad, 2011, p. 46), Seifan (2011) refers to this as the "reform paradox" (p. 6). The effects of which have lasted through to the Bashar al-Assad period of governance. Another lasting legacy of the previous leader was the security apparatus also known as 'Mukhabarat' created by Hafez al-Assad it is instrumental in maintaining the influence and social control of the country (See Wedeen, 1998). So much so that, although Hafez did not prepare a power transition, it appeared irrelevant as Hafez's servants "unhesitatingly installed his son" Bashar al-Assad (Stacher, 2011, p. 198).

When Bashar al-Assad came to power after the death of his father in July 2000, many thought that it would start a new era with reforms to governance (Ghadry, 2005, p. 61; George, 2003). Assad emphasised the need for change before his succession and when in power announced that he would build a better society. This started discussions on human rights, reform efforts, and other topics in informal settings in private residences, where likeminded citizens, activists, artists and political thinkers met, this period of openness was known as the 'Damascus Spring' (Human Rights Watch, 2007). Briefly, civil society organisations were able to flourish in Syria, and a prominent result of this was the 'Declaration of the 99', by Syrian intellectuals. This called for: the end the state of emergency and martial law, a public pardon to political detainees, establishment of a rule of law that will recognize freedom of assembly, freedom of the press and freedom of expression and finally, free public life from the laws, constraints and various forms of surveillance imposed on it, and enable all to participate in the development and prosperity of the country (Kayal, 2000). Again, it must be noted that many of these rules and measures were created and ratified under Hafez's Syria. However instead of using these 'forums' as a means to engage in public debate to identify societal issues, the military intelligence arrested the most prominent figures who took part in these debates (Alvarez-Ossorio, 2012). With the majority of the opposition crushed, the new Assad regime had further cemented their position of power.

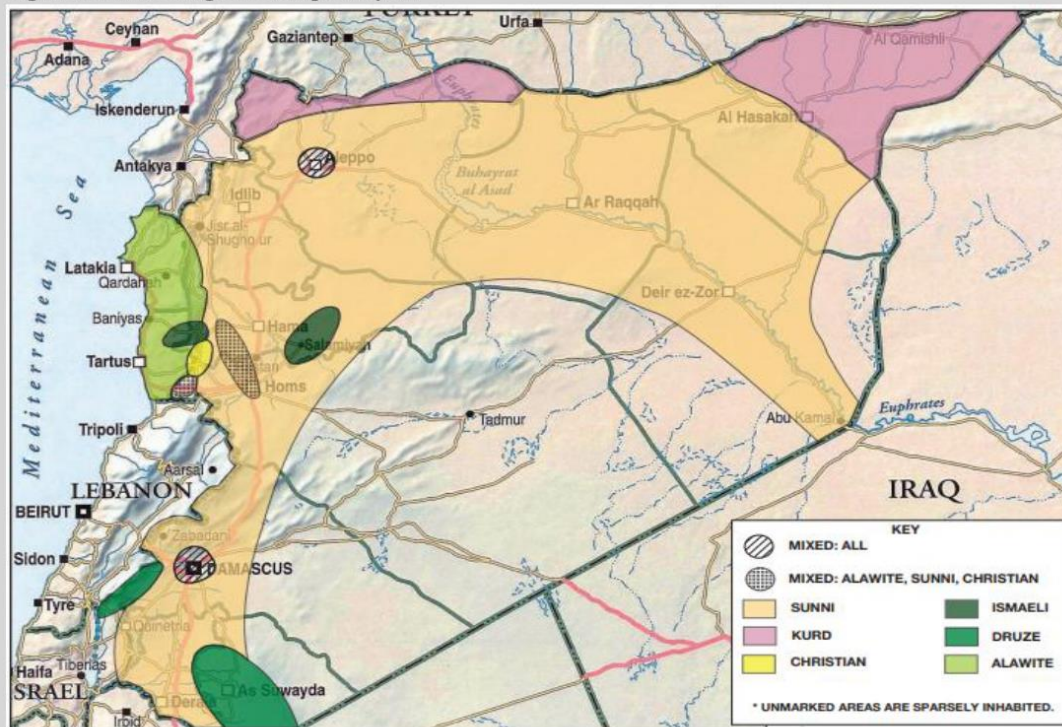
Reform did take place in aspects of the political economy, under Bashar the country moved away from the command economy through encouraging private sector development whilst reducing the social welfare burden of the state (Daher, 2018). This process of reform was further increased when the 'Social Market Economy' was introduced at the Baath party conference in 2005, in total over a thousand laws and decrees were passed (Lyne, 2012, p. 14). Although it had some limited short-term results, it harmed the middle and lower classes and threatened the stability that the regime so values (Haddad, 2011). This is because social services were reduced and the public sector capacity decreased. On top of this was the ongoing drought between 2007 and 2009, and with mismanaged water systems, hundreds of thousands migrated to the cities (Haddad, 2011, p. 46), which by this time were under serviced, in part due to these reforms. Thus,

effects of these governance reforms are seen as a contributor to the dissatisfaction of the protesters of 2011, the reforms being referred to by Hinnebusch & Zintl (2015) as the “seeds of rebellion” (p.291).

Although the state remained highly centralised in terms of decision making, internal geography of the country is diverse; the majority of the population of Syria lived in the west of the country, from Deraa and Damascus in the south-west to Homs, Hama and Aleppo in the north west. It is here that the majority of commercial activity takes place. The north and north east was a fertile region, and the Raqqah and Al Hasakah provinces were the ‘breadbasket’ of the country due to all the wheat grown there (Martinez, & Eng, 2017). In the province of Deir ez-Zor in the east, the majority of the oil deposits are located.

The ‘human’ geography or ethno-religious distribution is equally diverse as seen in Figure 1. The Alawites, a Shia sect of Islam to which the al-Assad family belong, live predominantly in the western coastal regions. Pockets of Druze, Christian and Ismaeli exist in the west, around Damascus and the cities of Homs and Hama. However, the largest population demographic are Sunnis, who live throughout the country, from Daraa in the south to Idlib in the north and to Raqqa and Deir Ezzor in the Euphrates valley. In the north, around the Turkish border areas are Kurds in the Aleppo and Hasakah provinces. Scattered throughout these Kurdish areas are some Armenians and Christian (Assyrian) settlements (Rabo, 2012, p. 80).

Figure 1. Ethno-Religious Groups in Syria.



Source: Holliday (2011).

It is the northern parts of the provinces of Aleppo, al-Raqqah, al-Hasakah and Deir Ezzor which the Syrian Democratic Council now rules that will be further investigated in terms of governance. The majority of the estimated 2 to 2.5 million kurds¹ (Halhali, 2018), live in the Jazira region. This region was of concern to the Syrian authorities, who viewed it as a security threat, due to the autonomous aspirations of the neighbouring Iraqi Kurds (Khaddour 2017). Simultaneously however, it was used as Leverage against Turkey by allowing the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) to

¹ This is hard to measure without official statistics being available, as well as the fact that many Kurds were not given citizenship.

operate in this region (Khaddour 2017). The PKK has, with the aim of independence, led an insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984 (Kayhan Pusane, 2015, p. 728). It was during this period of ‘turning a blind eye’ to PKK militants, where left-wing kurdish ideology first took hold in the region now controlled by the Syrian Democratic Council.

Despite this, both Assad governments ensured their security forces had a firm grip in the Jazira region, where they aimed to “contain and control local politics by keeping the region underdeveloped and dependent on Damascus” (Khaddour, 2017, p. 1). This was reflected in the fact that other than the agricultural sector, industry the region was never further developed. Moreover, the socio-economic policies of Damascus towards the Kurds, known as ‘Arabisation’, was also intended to control and subdue the population. Policies included the denial of basic rights and of the Syrian citizenship (Halhalli, 2018, p.29) but was further expanded after protests in 2004, where individuals wanting to develop real estate in Jazira, had to inform and request permission from the security agencies (Khaddour, 2017).

The tribal system is another important element in the governance in Syria, especially since the Syrian Democratic Council now controls swaths of land where tribal communities are located. These were formally given recognition and inclusion from the central government² for their help in an effort to suppress the Muslim Brotherhood in 1982 in Hama (Rae, 1999 as seen in Dukhan, 2014, p. 5). Thus, before the war, 12% of the elected parliamentarians were Bedouin, and in terms relative to their population they have twice the amount of representation (Chatty, 2010, p. 46). In the Jazira region, relations among various communities, including tribes have fluctuated. The relations are mainly determined by the urban middle classes of the different ethno-religious and tribal basis (Khaddour, 2017). Some tribes, such as the Shammar have chosen to align themselves with the Kurdish communities, whereas others have chosen closer relations with Damascus.

To conclude the governance in northern Syria the observation of Allsop & Van Wilgenburg (2019) can be used: “Arabist policies forged autocratic power relations that guaranteed control and stability rather than representation and participation. Stability came at the cost of freedoms of expression and representation of ethnic and religious minorities and diverse social classes” (p. 1). In terms of the governance in the rest of Syria, the emphasis of the critique lies more with the emergency laws which have been in place for the greater part of the rule of the Assad family, which have been used to abuse human rights and remain above the law (Ghadry, 2005). Moreover “transparency and accountability are non-existent, and corruption is rampant” (Ghadry, 2005, p. 62).

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² This included being part of the security apparatus.

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Past governance in north west Yemen

The governance in contemporary Yemen is based to a large extent on the countries now deceased, former president Ali Abdullah Saleh. He came to power after the Yemeni Civil War (1994) and ruled the country till just after the 2011 Arab Spring. In this time of relative peace, Ali Abdullah Saleh was the sole leader of the country, which provided a period of consistent governance to observe. Although Yemen was previously a divided country in his time, he has cemented his power and formed the institutions of contemporary Yemen. The process that formed Yemen is essential to understand the current developments in governance, therefore the history will first be explored.

In northern Yemen, the Ottoman Empire was removed after the first world war by the Zaydi³ imam Yahya Muhammad Hamid ed-Din and his son, Ahmad. To strengthen their influence on the region they employed the bureaucratic and military organisational structure of the former rulers and learned the instruments they employed for governance (Burrowes, 1991, p. 485). With this consolidation of territory and expansion came some border scuffles with Saudi Arabia. However, the borders were formalised through a treaty in the 1930's. In September of 1962, during the reign of the son Ahmed, a military coup d'état and rebellion created a civil war that lasted six years. Eventually the Zaydi kingdom was overthrown and the Yemen Arab Republic was established (UN Foundation, 2020).

With regards to the southern and eastern parts of contemporary Yemen, these only gained independence from the British in 1967. The National Liberation Front (NLF) was a Marxist paramilitary organization and political party which turned southern Yemen into the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), creating a Marxist-Leninist one-party state with the constitution based loosely on that of the German Democratic Republic (see Müller, 2015).

Unification was only a matter of time and in 1990 the Republic of Yemen was founded through unification of the North and South of Yemen. In this agreement, the south viewed decentralisation, from the central government to local councils as an essential condition out of fear that their influence would be reduced in favour of the more populous north (al-Awlaqi & al-Madhaji, 2018, p.18). However, as relations between president Ali Abdullah Saleh and his deputy Ali Salem alBeidh, former leaders of the northern and southern Yemen respectively, soured another civil war erupted in 1994. In this conflict the north was victorious and the conditions the south previously set were disregarded (Day, 2010, p. 6).

However, the divisions of the past never really faded, both culturally and politically, thus as demand for greater autonomy remained the Local Authority Law was ratified at the turn of the century (Rogers, 2019). This law laid the groundwork for greater power at local levels, with the responsibility of provisions of basic services now in the hands of local councils, making these public institutions the most important layer in governance (al-Awlaqi & al-Madhaji, 2018, p.20). These local councils did not however receive federal funding, and tax revenue had to be collected per district.

This has created a system of 21 governorates exist in Yemen, these in turn are subdivided into 333 districts (Mudiriyah)⁴. Citizens of these districts can elect a representative to the national parliament; however, the head of the governorate is still chosen by the president, Ali Abdullah Saleh (United nations as seen in Mitchell, 2012). This ensured that Sana'a remained in control of part of the decentralised decision making to some extent.

The central state kept power in regards to national issues such as the armed forces, foreign policy and monetary policy. Saleh, in a patrimonial manner ensured he appeased every interest group in Yemen enough to cement his power (Chase, 2003). Although the country never had many economic resources and the amount of social services offered were meagre (Clausen, 2018), Saleh, through his network he was able to serve his own interests as his rule turned Yemen into a "kleptocracy" where nepotism, bribery and fraud were becoming the norm (Etheredge, 2010, p. 137). Worth (2016) describes the president's way of governance as "part of a Mafia-style spoils system that substituted for governance" (p. 105).

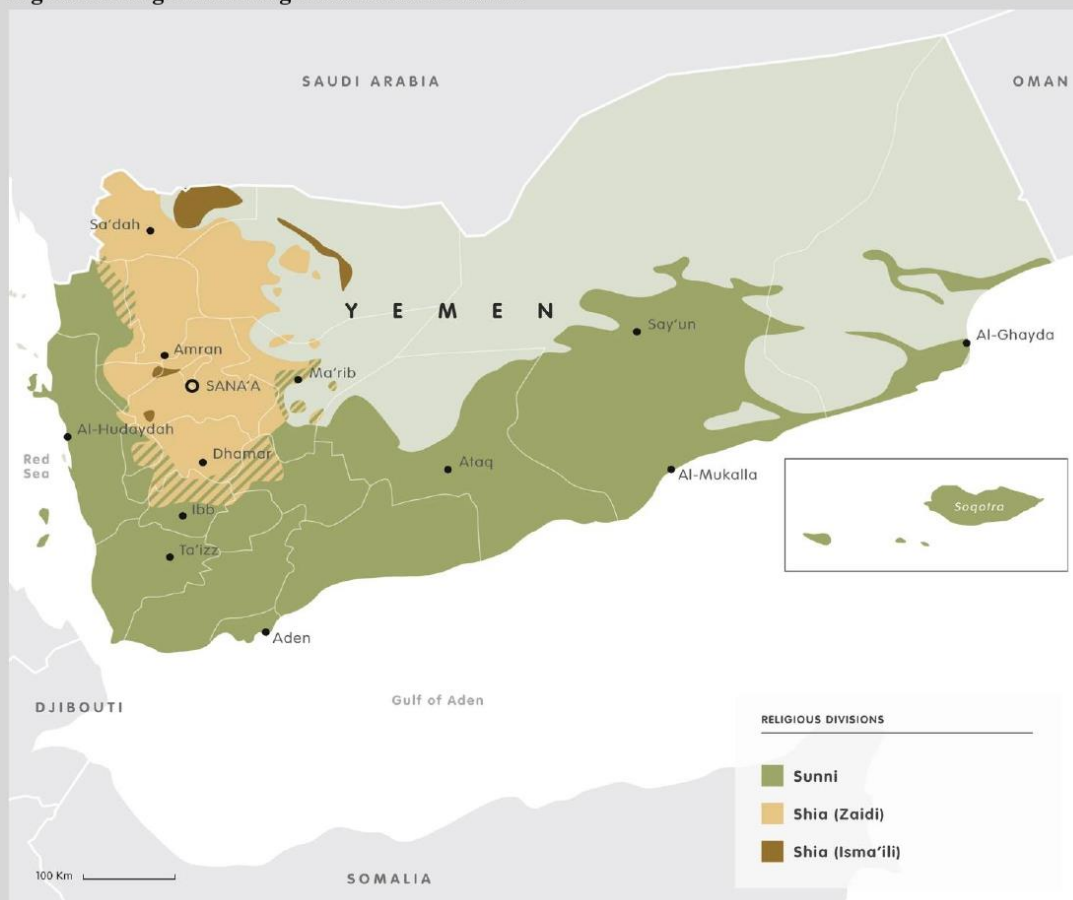
³ An old sect of Shia Islam

⁴ The local councils of the district and further 2,210 sub-districts (Uzlah/Markez) and these are further distributed all the way down to villages (Mitchell, 2012, p. 304).

The geography has had great influence on how Yemen has developed throughout history which can be seen in contemporary Yemen. Located at the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, the country has narrow coastal plains, where the cities of Aden and al-Hodeida are located. This is followed inland by a mountainous interior especially in the densely populated western half of the country, Cities such as Tiazz, Sada'a and the capital and Sana'a are here. In the north-eastern part lies one of the largest deserts in the world, referred to as the 'empty quarter' which is scarcely inhabited (Groucutt, et al., 2015).

In terms of human geography, the country is majority Muslim, with a division in terms of the denominations of Islam, as seen in Figure 2. The Sunnis live along the whole coast and on the island of Socotra, whilst the majority of Shia (Zaydi) live more inland in the mountains. Within the territory where the Zaydi strain of Islam is followed, are pockets of Ismealis.

Figure 2. Religions in the governorates of Yemen



Source: European Council of Foreign Relations (2019).

Another important social aspect is that of the tribal system, which has actually gained prominence “due to the corruption and weakness of the state institutions” (Al-Dawsari, 2012, p. 4). It is because of this that many of the conflict management systems in place in Yemen are carried out by tribes (Corstange, 2008), proving to be more effective than the government. The tribes in Yemen are also notably anti-ideological according to Al-Dawsari (2012), limiting the reach of groups such as Al-Qaeda.

Over the last 30 years, great social contests have taken place in Yemen between those who are considered Sayyid - an honourable title used to denote those who are descendants of the prophet, and those who are not (Haider, 2010). This aforementioned author stating that Zaydi scholars often belong to the Sayyid, whereas tribal leaders are usually not direct descendants of Mohammed (p.441).

A sectarian divide was exacerbated as Saudi Arabia sought influence in Yemen through Sunni groups, the majority Sunni neighbour effectively buying influence with tribes and Salafi schools (Jabbour, 2018; Ablahesh, 2018). In reaction to this, the newly created Houthi movement striving for greater Zaydi influence announced that these acts of the Saudis were directed against them. This battle for influence eventually led to physical skirmishes in 2009, between Houthi tribesmen and Saudi Arabian military (Murphy, 2010).

This chapter has provided detailed insight into the governance, politics and socio-economic relations within the relatively stable pre-war years of Syria and Yemen. Understanding the types of governance employed by the leaders of these countries, Bashar Al-Assad and Ali Abdullah Saleh respectively, will greatly assist in interpreting the results of the analysis of this thesis. The ability to 'benchmark' – compare the results of the governance by the two de-facto administration to a set standard, that of the governance that was present in the region before the conflicts will provide much needed context to the case studies.

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