

The Houthi Rebel Movement: Analysis on the Role of Wartime Social Order, Legitimacy and Greed in the Houthi Rebel Resilience in Yemen between 2017 and 2023.



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Abstract

Understanding Rebel's resilience and the factors that influence it can assist in clarifying the broader examination of civil war, its expected duration, and possible solutions to stopping the violence. It seeks to explore what makes some conflicts more intractable than others. Research on the rebel resilience of Houthi rebels in Yemen is still limited and needs further exploration. This research will investigate the factors that contribute to the Houthis rebel resilience of the Houthis using the concepts of wartime social order, legitimacy, and greed as the analytical frame to find how each factor contributes to the Houthis rebel resilience. Data was collected by conducting media analysis and OSINT for academic research analyzed through rebel governance, discourse, and rational choice theories. The analysis revealed that three components influence Houthi resilience. First, the Supreme Political Council and its different supervisory systems of security, finance, social, intellectual, and educational allowed the Houthis to apply a divide-and-rule strategy that sidelined other influential social actors in the Yemeni society and created a space where the rebels stayed dominant. The second revealed how the Houthis created several revenue-generating methods, such as taxation, to exploit citizens to fund their movement and benefit individually from these gains. The third and last finding explained how the Houthis used media discourse to legitimize their movement, mobilize popular support, and create a collective grievance by leveraging international events like the Israel-Gaza conflict, which most Yemeni people empathize with. These findings highlight how the Houthis effectively built and used a governance structure, created financial strategies, and formulated collective grievances through discourse to enhance their control, sustain their movement, and secure their position in the conflict, all of which factor into their resilience.

Keywords: Houthis, Houthi Rebels, Yemen, Rebel Resilience, Houthis, Wartime Social Order, Greed, Legitimacy, Resilience.

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I dedicate this work to every asylum seeker, internally displaced person, and refugee who has been forced to leave their home, family, friends, and loved ones in search of a safer and better life. The decision to leave everything behind and start anew was incredibly challenging, but it opened a world of possibilities and introduced me to remarkable people.

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List of abbreviations

AQAP - Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

CBY – Central Bank of Yemen.

GCC - Gulf Cooperation Council.

GPC – General’s People Congress.

IRG – Internationally Recognized Government.

NDC – National Dialogue Conference.

PLC – Presidential Leadership Council.

SPC – Supreme Political Council.

STC – Southern Transitional Council.

UAE – United Arab Emirates.

VNAG - Violent Non-State Armed Group.

Introduction

In 2017 the Houthis launched a campaign to seize the assets and companies of their enemies to assert their dominance and legitimacy and acquire financial resources. After killing the previous Yemeni President, Ali Abdullah Saleh, who attempted to betray their alliance, the Houthis became the dominant power in the areas they controlled. They used the judicial system to issue court orders to legitimize these illegal confiscations and delegitimize members of the Internationally Recognized Government (IRG), placing them on a wanted list and labelling them as traitors and agents of Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the United States. Rebel-controlled courts gave these individuals ten days to reconsider their loyalty and take advantage of the general pardon offered (almasdaronline 2022). The seizure campaign, which continued over the years, produced a significant financial empire for the Houthis, which they used to fund their war effort for the past nine years. Despite their illegal actions, the people did not challenge them, even if they disagreed with their actions (Al Islah Net 2022).

This effective combination of asserting dominance, leveraging institutional systems for legitimacy, and seizing assets to amass resources highlights the Houthis' ability to maintain control and sustain their operations. Such strategies are crucial to understanding their resilience in ongoing conflict. Their rebel resilience, which is built on a foundation of enforced social order, perceived legitimacy, and financial acquisition, has enabled the Houthis to endure and adapt in the turbulent landscape of Yemen, and this paper will focus on this topic.

Significance of the Study and its Aims

What is rebel resilience? Why is it important to study it? How does it resonate with the Houthis movement? Rebel resilience is the ability of rebel groups to adapt to challenges and change strategies. These challenges include recovering from battlefield losses, managing victories, responding to changing endowments, and reacting to new counterinsurgency strategies implemented by the state (Weinstein 2006, 260). For my research, I define rebel resilience as the method rebels employ to withstand a violent civil war and maintain strategic control in the areas they control.

The distinct question of rebel resilience is an understudied topic (Day 2019; Angelova 2014; Tominaga, Lee 2021) in the broader examination of civil war and insurgency, even though understanding the factor of rebel resilience and the factors that enable rebel groups to withstand the pressure of violent civil wars or counterinsurgency campaigns is essential. It assists in clarifying the broader question of the duration and possible termination and seeks to

explore what makes some conflicts more intractable than others. Additionally, it might help us better explain why some rebel groups and movements can endure different challenges to continue protracted armed conflict (Day 2019, 967).

This research contributes to the literature on the resilience of rebel groups. It looks at governance structures, discourse, and rational choice as tools that reinforce resilience. It contributes to the existing literature on rebel resilience in the Middle East, given that the Houthis operate in Yemen. It also touches on the fluidity and unconventional alliances as methods to strengthen a rebel movement, which can be an additional contribution to the current literature on rebel resilience. Moreover, the research will provide an underexploited opportunity to analyse some of the reasons of why the Yemeni conflict is still ongoing.

The Houthis are a violent non-state armed group (VNAG), and by that, I mean a “non-state armed groups that resort to organized violence as a tool to achieve their goals” (Mulaj 2010, 3), who managed to withstand a conflict for nine years and maintain control over a significant part of Northern Yemen as depicted in Image 2. Despite being at a military disadvantage for the most part (Stenslie 2015, 1), the Houthis used different methods that contributed to their resilience. They use informal institutions, such as the Supreme Political Council (SPC) with its supervisory system to inject overseers into formal institutions, like ministries, to maintain their social order (Shuja Al-Deen 2022, 1-10). They create discourse by utilizing significant international events such as the Israel – Gaza conflict to obtain legitimacy and create a collective identity that aligns with the majority of the Yemeni people who empathize with the Palestinian cause (Shuja Al-Deen 2024). Finally, they sustain their movement by acquiring financial resources, such as the seizure campaigns (Al-Batati 2023).



Image 1

Source: Anadolu Agency

Map of Yemen showing the different actors and the areas they control

Those methods motivated me to analyse and understand how they factor into the Houthis resilience. In this paper, I ask: *How did wartime social order, legitimacy, and greed factor in the resilience of the Houthi rebels and the continuation of the conflict in Yemen between 2017 and 2023?* The main objective will be to explore the different methods the rebel group used to stay resilient through understanding how wartime social order, the importance of obtaining legitimacy, and greed factor in the resilience of the Houthi rebels. Each concept will partially answer the research question. Together, the three will offer insight into Houthi rebel resilience.

In the paper's first chapter, I will explore the academic debate on rebel resilience and draw out my theories to form the theoretical framework. I will bring out my concepts from

there, forming my analytical frame. Then, in the second chapter, I will explain my research design and methodology, breaking my central research question into three sub-questions, illustrating my chosen methods, the data sampling, limitations, and ethical considerations of this paper. Then, in the third chapter, I will first lay my foundation by discussing how the Houthi movement started, developed, was radicalized, and became the de facto governing authority of Sana'a. After that, I will present my empirical data, which will be structured using my analytical frame. Then, in the chapter after chapter four, I will revisit the categories of described evidence and again use the analytic frame to explain and interpret the data and answer each of my three sub-questions. Then, in the same chapter, I will also reflect on my theories and how they helped me with their respective concepts to reach an answer to my research question. Finally, in the last chapter, I will highlight how the theories combined with the concepts answered my research puzzle. After that, I will mention this research's relevance and contributions to the literature on rebel resilience. Last but not least, I will offer potential future directions for further research that other researchers can take in the case of the rebel resilience and the Houthi rebel group.

Chapter 1: Academic Debate and Analytic Framework

In this section, I will first discuss the current literature on rebel resilience. Then, based on the existing knowledge and debate on the topic, I will draw out the theories which situate my paper and from there I will bring out my concepts of wartime social order, legitimacy and greed which will form my analytic frame, which will be used to describe and explain/interpret my data in chapter three and four concepts.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

Literature Review

Rebel resilience is an understudied topic in the broader examination of civil war and insurgency, even though it is important to understand the factors that enable rebels to withstand the pressure of violent civil wars or counterinsurgency campaigns. In her paper, Arjona (2014, 1361) mentions how studies that mention civilian and combatant choices in war zones have mostly neglected the role of wartime institutions. She starts by stating how war can weaken or sometimes destroy state institutions, allowing informal institutions to emerge, as literature (Ostrom 1990; Skarbek 2011; Volkov 2000). Nevertheless, why would non state armed groups need to create institutions? As scholars suggest, institutions can facilitate population monitoring and increase the odds of civilian cooperation and help in territorial control (Guvera and Davies 1985; Kalyvas 2006; Mao 1978). Armed groups who seize pockets of territory benefit from creating institutions to rule the local population (Arjona 2010). Moreover, Tilly (1978, 8-9) suggested that opposing sides in conflict should try to monopolize violence, extract resources from the civilians they control, and promote capital accumulation to overcome competitors. Additionally, he mentions that armed groups with a long-term vision need these institutions, especially those that can extract resources to fund their operations.

Furthermore, Arjona (2014, 1362) also mentions the importance of informal institutions in transforming chaos into order by presenting clear rules, thus establishing a wartime social order. This social order can include a narrow or broad intervention of armed groups in civilian affairs. Armed groups do not go beyond maintaining public order and collecting material contributions in the narrow intervention. In contrast, with the broader intervention, they would get involved in policies, economy, and private conduct. However, the state can still have a role even with a broader intervention. An example is the social order the Tamil Tigers established in the Tamil Elam State (Stokke 2016, 1021-1040). Informal institutions are used to deliver governance, but is it essential for rebels to see their governance as legitimate by the civilians in the areas they control? Loyle et al. (2023, 268) spoke about how rebel groups wield force

and often have a monopoly on violence, yet having legitimacy means making their governance more manageable and more effective. They suggest that zero-sum legitimacy drives rebels to undermine the state's legitimacy and strengthen their own. On that note, Ledwidge (2017, 18) writes, "It is the job of the insurgent to drain that [legitimacy] reservoir and refill it with his capital". His view starts from the same point as Loyle et al., with legitimacy benefiting the rebel group's warfighting aims.

However, Levi (2018, 1-9) suggests that some groups who do not rely on civilian support for their cause might forgo legitimacy and focus on expanding resources on surveillance. So, how do rebel groups decide? Scholars suggest that rebel groups' decision to seek legitimacy relies on their needs for civilian resources, their mobilization effort, and the demand of civilians for governance (Weinstein 2006; Loyle 2021; Florea and Malejacq 2018). Legitimacy-seeking rebel groups adopt different tactics to achieve this goal based on the behaviour that will most likely produce the desired outcome (Ledwidge 2017; Loyle 2021). Furthermore, rebel resilience literature discusses that financial means are important for rebel resilience and can prolong a war. So, what are the different financial revenues rebels can obtain?

In their article, Tominaga and Lee discuss how natural resources play an important role in state-rebel relations and how rebels who have access to natural resources have a more substantial capability to resist and fight; it also lowers their incentive to enter cease fire negotiations with the state (Ross 2004; Lujala 2010). The authors add that resource wealth can result in prolonged conflicts unless these resources need extraction, which needs capital (2021, 425). Moreover, they state that the unavailability of a revenue stream can shift the power balance between the rebel groups and the state. So, aside from natural resources, how can rebels finance their movement? Brown (2015, 6, 43-51) argues that rebels depend on local and international funding; the former comes from their supporters in the areas they control, and the latter comes from diasporas abroad. In late 2005, The Tamil Tigers started a fundraising campaign among their diaspora abroad and raised substantial amounts (Human Rights Watch 2006). For instance, reports estimate that in the late 1990s they collected between one and two million Canadian dollars (Bayman et al. 2001, 50).

Finally, another way rebels access financial resources is through taxation. Greed-based theories suggest that armed groups in areas lacking natural resources will engage in short-term opportunistic looting, which can be in the form of taxation (Collier and Hoeffler 2004). The

reasoning is that rebel groups attract opportunists more than true believers (Weinstein 2006). In their article, Revkin and Ahram (2020, 761-762) discusses how the group's ideology can determine their taxation or the costs of warfare. They discussed How the Islamic State drew its revenue from both methods. Ideologically, they took texts from the Quran that speak about the Zakat (annual tax) and Jizyah¹. Practically, they imposed a fee on merchants to finance damages from air strikes and offered the choice to put protective sandbags and barriers outside of shops and houses for a fee. These fees covered costs concerning warfare and other matters.

From the literature, I draw out three theories that are applicable to my case study: Rebel Governance Theory, Discourse Theory, and Rational Choice Theory, along with concepts such as Wartime Social Order, Legitimacy, and Greed. I will use these theories to create my analytic frame, which I will use to analyse my data and address my research puzzle: How did wartime social order, legitimacy, and greed factor in the resilience of the Houthi rebels and the continuation of the conflict in Yemen between 2017 and 2023?

1.2 Situating the Theories

Drawing from the existing literature, I will illustrate the theories that can help explain the how the Houthis built and maintained their rebel resilience. I will discuss three main theories: Rebel Governance Theory, Discourse Theory, and Rational Choice Theory. The objective of the first theory is to understand how and why rebels establish governance. In contrast, the second will focus more on the importance of discourse in legitimizing a movement. Finally, the last theory will concentrate on the economic incentives and greed that favour rebel resilience. From the theories I will pull out my concepts which can operationalize the theory. These concepts will be the foundation of my analytical frame which I will use throughout chapter three and four to analyse, explain and interpret my findings.

Rebel Governance Theory

Rebel governance is the “set of actions insurgents engage in to regulate the social, political, and economic life of non-combatants during the war” (Arjona, Kasfir, Mampilly 2015, 3). This theory emphasizes the importance of establishing governance structures rather than solely focusing on military strength. In chapter five of *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*, Weinstein states three rules for a rebel government to exist. Firstly, a rebel group needs to exercise control over a territory. Secondly, they must establish institutions that

¹ Jizyah is a kind of excise tax historically imposed by Islamic states on non-muslims in exchange for their protection as minorities

manage civilian relations outside the military apparatus. Finally, they need formal and informal rules that define a decision-making hierarchy and a taxation system (Weinstein 2006, 164). But why do rebels create governance systems? Rebels often create governance systems to pursue short- or long-term interests (Kasfir 2015, 22). They often also deliver crucial public goods and services to the population they govern and might even protect the communities from harm; an example is the Pat Jasan, a non-state actor in northern Myanmar linked with the Kachin Independence Organization era, burned opium poppy fields, arrested drug dealers, mobilized health campaigns and even operated rehab facilities (Brenner, Tazzioli 2022, 2). But why would a rebel group do such an action? Rebels may protect the communities they rule out of need to obtain legitimacy or to create a wartime social order. So, what is the role of wartime social order?

A Wartime social order is a part of the rebels governance techniques, which ensure the existence of predictability and, thus, order (Revkin and Ahram, 2020; Arias 2006; Arjona 2014). Moreover, these social orders can help rebels constituent civilians into imagined communities that oppose the state (Brenner and Tazzioli 2022, 2). Furthermore, they offer a parallel state structure and an alternative rule of law (Goldstein 2003) through creating a social contract (Arjona 2014, 1374). But why would rebels go through this process? Rebels need the civilians under their control, whether to recruit fighters, extract resources, or legitimize their political authority (Revkin and Ahram 2020, 1), which is why rebel governments sometimes insist on civilian support for their objectives. Civilians on the other hand may volunteer out of necessity for survival, which can prove beneficial for rebels (Arjona, Kasfir, and Mampilly 2015, 23). However, it is not always essential for rebel success, as demonstrated by the NPFL in Liberia (Reno 2015, 265-285).

Social order also examines establishing a social contract and the kind of order the rebel governing entity adopts. Arjona suggests that a social contract exists when order, created through predictability exists. A social contract is established when armed groups and civilians know the rules of conduct and understand the commitment and duties, they must follow towards one another (Arjona 2014, 1374). For instance, civilians will provide political and economic support, by paying taxes as one example, while rebels will operate institutions devoted to the civilians' everyday lives, such as hospitals (healthcare). However, whether the civilians are doing their part voluntarily or under duress is hard to determine (Revkin and Ahram 2020, 2). An example of that is the relations between drug traffickers and civilians in some favelas in Rio de Janeiro (Arias 2006, 293-325). In summary establishing wartime social

order and rebel institutions offers the rebels control over the order and establishes relationships between them and the civilians they govern, all of which can help the rebel group maintain its movement for extended periods and thus contribute to their resilience. Additionally, it can help them legitimize their movement. But governance alone may not be sufficient to establish legitimacy and may require additional methods such as discourse, which leads me to my next theory.

Discourse Theory

Described by Foucault, discourse refers to things that mean something and are true only when framed in a specific historical or discursive context. He argues that no form of thought can claim to be an absolute truth without some discourse involved (Foucault 2005, 53). This idea is foundational to Discourse Theory, which aims to understand the formation of discourses during and around wartime. The theory's objective is to give an explicit and systematic description of how individuals form discourse communities and how collective narratives on the 'origins of war, the enemy, victims, and perpetrators' are constructed and sustained. (Foucault 2013, 126-134). Discourse, in its underlying principle, is seen as a social process often formed by powerful groups. For various reasons, these groups attempt to convince their audiences that a specific incompatibility is threatening them, forming a dominant discourse (Demmers 2017, 132).

In discourse formation, actors use pre-existing symbols or other modes of discourse to create constrained meanings. Discourses involve the direct manipulation of information or communication as a form of strategic conduct, which might lead to the rise of deeply ingrained dominant discourses (Jabri 1996, 96). Manipulation of information can be a tool to legitimize violence as well. Apter (1997, 2) explains how discursive approaches can legitimize violence. He states, "People do not commit political violence without discourse," they have to talk themselves into it. "What may begin as casual conversation may suddenly take a serious turn." This kind of violence can sustain itself through using struggles to generate objects and meaning. In addition, people see sacrifice and even death for the sake of the movement as noble acts, which in turn help to legitimize it. Moreover, violence leaves a residue behind, allowing groups to retrieve memories and bring them to the foreground to rekindle and mobilize violence once again. Finally, He argues that political violence feeds on dividing factors, "it feeds on intolerance by making race, ethnicity, religion, language, class, doctrine, nationality, etc., decisive in reordering" (1997, 5).

Discourses formed through violent imaginaries also form and legitimize violence. In chapter one of "Anthropology of Violence and Conflict," Schroder and Schmidt (2001, 13) state that people need to imagine violence for it to occur. They argue that groups do not strike out randomly and would try to legitimize war from a moral and historical perspective. Even modern states with access to various media platforms cannot invent a war out of nothing. Here the role of narratives, performances, and inscriptions can come in handy to create violent imaginaries. Narratives involve keeping former and past conflicts alive by glorifying individuals, achievements, or benefits or by highlighting the group's perceived injustices, losses, or suffering. One can elaborate this type of social memory into a hegemonic ideology. Performances, on the other hand, relate to the performative quality in the public appearances of leaders or elites of the group during wartime, varying depending on the group and the needs of the war. Lastly, inscriptions refer to visual displays such as images, banners, or murals (2001, 14).

In summary, Discourse Theory illustrates how narratives, performances, and inscriptions shape and sustain collective identities and legitimize violence during wartime. By understanding the formation of dominant discourses and the manipulation of information, we can see how powerful groups establish their legitimacy and mobilize support, which can factor in the resilience of rebel groups. However, it does not fully address the motives that can lead rebels to start a rebellion or those that explain why people join these rebellions. The Rational Choice Theory further explores these motivation

Rational Choice Theory

Rational Choice Theory starts from the assumption that individuals in a rebellion will conduct civil war when they see that its benefits outweigh the costs and that wars will be sustained as long as they bring profit (Demmers 2017, 107). Rebellions are not cheap, and establishing a rebel army is expensive, so the existence of financial means available to be looted is essential. Rebel leaders use the looted resources to fund their movement, buy arms, and hire soldiers, making it possible to overcome the power of the state. This financing mechanism can help the movement sustain itself (Weinstein 2005, 4). Rational Choice Theory also explains how costs and benefits go beyond material resources and can mean, for example, money or health. The idea behind the theory is that people are rational agents who have a choice, even in war. Rational choice sees individuals as 'homo economicus,' rational human beings who think from self-interest and the desire for wealth perspective. Individuals view themselves as utility

maximisers who continuously set goals by calculating the costs and benefits. Utility maximisers can be fuelled by grievances or greed (Demmers 2017, 108).

Collier and Hoeffler argue why a rebellion might be greed-based and not grievance-based. They state that rebellions often start small, which increases the cost and risk of punishment. They further reason that grievance-based rebellions aim to achieve justice, which may need a large rebellion to achieve a military victory to reach this goal, making grievance-based rebellions less attractive. However, greed being the primary motivator could be more appealing (Collier and Hoeffler 1999, 6). Moreover, Collier and Hoeffler expand on why a rebellion is greed-based through the opportunity model. The first is the availability of finance, which can come from natural resources, diasporas abroad, or hostile governments. As stated above, financial means are essential for a rebellion to sustain itself. The second is an atypically weak government military capability, which can be determined by how much control a government has over its military or sometimes by the terrain they are engaging in with the non-state actor, which can play to its disadvantage. Finally, social cohesion, meaning the ethnic or religious diversity of a country, can sometimes widen or narrow the recruitment for a rebel group because a newly formed rebel army may depend at first on individuals who share their ethnicity or religious background until they develop other tactics that bring other opportunistic to join (Collier and Hoeffler 2004, 564-570).

Furthermore, Collier and Hoeffler further address how greed-motivated rebellions can overcome the three collective action problems that grievance-motivated rebels face. As Mancur Olson (1965) explained, these three problems are the enjoyment of public goods, the free-rider problem, and time consistency. Greed-based rebellions allow individuals to directly benefit from the act of looting and confine the gains to those who were a part of the act, thus tackling the enjoyment of public goods and the free-rider problems. Furthermore, rebels reap directly from looting, which they can use to pay off their recruits, solving the time-consistency problem (Collier and Hoeffler 1999, 7).

In this section, I illustrated how opportunities and greed can motivate rebels to initiate a rebellion. Through the work of Collier and Hoeffler on greed-based rebellions and the notion of utility maximization, I illustrate the importance of financial resources to motivate and maintain a rebel movement, thus contributing to its resilience. From the previous three theories I discussed, I draw out the concepts of wartime social order, legitimacy and greed, which make up my analytic frame and will be used to operationalise the three theories with the aim to

explain and make sense of my data and ultimately answer my research question: How did wartime social order, legitimacy, and greed factor in the resilience of the Houthi rebels and the continuation of the conflict in Yemen between 2017 and 2023?

1.3 Analytic Frame

Concepts and Definitions

Wartime social order is "the set of rules that structure human interaction in a given community during wartime, allowing for predictability to exist" (Arjona 2014, 1374). Arjona suggests that the existence of predictability can lead to social order, which can vary across multiple dimensions. She proposes a typology with the social contract between the armed rebels and the civilian population on one axis and the scope of the armed group's intervention in civilian lives on the other. This intervention can be narrow (Aliocracy) or broad (Rebelocracy). 'Aliocracy' refers to minimal intervention, where armed rebel groups leave control in the hands of existing institutions, except for matters of security (Arjona 2014, 1375). In contrast, 'Rebelocracy' involves broader intervention by the rebel groups, regulating all aspects of civilian affairs through formal and informal rules beyond security (2016, 166). However, "it is important to note that rebelocracy does not imply that sources of authority other than armed groups are absent" (2014, 1375).

Through this concept, I aim to analyse the unique and intriguing type of wartime social order that the Houthis have developed in their rebel governance. I will illustrate whether they have implemented an Aliocracy or a Rebelocracy typology in the order they established by mainly focusing on the Supreme Political Council (Al Majlis As Siyasiyy Al A'ala), an informal rebel institution that acts which created a supervisory system that injects uses Mushriffin (overseers)² to oversee state institutions. These Mushriffin operate across multiple rebel-controlled areas, under different categories and compromise of general and primary supervisors. Their main objective is to assert control, maintain order and sometimes establish legitimacy. But what is legitimacy and how can it be established?

Legitimacy, as defined by Weber, is "the prestige of being considered binding" (Weber 1964, 125), meaning that the acceptance of legitimacy validates the system and its rules. Weber identifies two forces that signify this concept. The first is the belief in the validity of the law

² A Mushrif is an individual who is part of a network of loyal individuals to the Houthi movement, who is chosen directly by Abdulmalek Al-Houthi and operates under the authority of the Supreme Political Council headed by Mohammed al-Houthi (Shuja Al-Deen 2022, 5).

because individuals agree with the content of the rule or accept the authority of the power establishing the rule. The second is the motivation of compliance due to belief in the rule or authority. However, Weber notes that compliance alone is insufficient to establish acceptance, as it can be achieved through coercion, indicating that having the monopoly of violence is sometimes necessary to establish legitimacy (1964, 124-130).

The concept of legitimacy is evident in the Houthis use of media as a tool of discourse. The rebel groups were able to utilize the Israel – Gaza conflict, a cause that most Yemeni people empathize with, and paint themselves as the defenders of Palestine by creating a blockade and attacking shipping in the Red Sea near the Bab Al-Mandab strait (Keating 2024). The Houthis claim that these attacks are in solidarity with Palestine and Hamas. They also launched a recruitment campaign to welcome individuals to join Al-Aqsa Flood training sessions, which span between ten and thirteen days and teach participants how to properly use a weapon (Rushdi 2023). In early December 2023, the rebel group celebrated the graduation of the first batch of Al-Aqsa flood training, which consisted of about 16,000 fighters (Saba News Agency, 2023). Recruitment can strengthen a rebel group's legitimacy and create more loyal followers. This process can be a factor that contributes to the resilience, but it does not speak to the motivations behind starting and joining a rebellion. Here greed can elaborate on that.

Greed in rebellions is the proposition that individuals will conduct civil war if the perceived benefits outweigh the costs (Collier and Hoeffler 1999, 1). Rebel groups who manage to get noticed will often not admit that their movement is greed-based and will instead use the narrative of grievance because it places considerable emphasis upon good public relations in the international community, is more functional externally, and can help to ensure that recruits will stay part of the movement when material benefits start to diminish as the movement grows bigger. Furthermore, Greed introduces a profitable opportunity for rebels to obtain wealth by capturing resources extra-legally (1999, 1-2). Greed resonated in the Houthi rebellion movement. The group has created a custom system in the areas, resulting in a dual custom system. Trucks coming from Oman or Saudi Arabia would have to pay customs when they come into the country and when they go through Houthi-controlled areas. Additionally, drivers are also extorted at many of the checkpoints and are asked to pay a fee (bribe) in the rebel areas, so they are allowed to pass with their goods (Salisbury 2023, 25). The Houthis also imposed a levy known as *Khoums*³ or *Al Majhud al Harby* industries and other economic activities, such

as fishing industries, which are pocketed directly to Houthi families and other allied leaders (Al-Batati 2023). This illustrates how greed is playing a big role in the Houthi rebellion.

This section explained the concepts I will use to operationalize my theories with the aim of analysing and explaining my data. But before I present my empirical data, I will first discuss how I collected it. In chapter two I first discuss how I broke my main research question into three sub-questions, each addressing one part and can be answered through one of the three concepts discussed here. I will then describe how I analysed the data and sampled it. After that I will discuss the limitations and ethical implications of this paper.

Chapter 2: Research Design & Methodology

The research is built upon qualitative data collected from media report analysis (International news outlets and Houthi news outlets), NGOs such as the International Crisis Group, research centres, and think tanks, such as the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies. The objective here is to start untangling and eventually answering the research question: How did wartime social order, legitimacy, and greed factor in the resilience of the Houthi rebels and the continuation of the conflict in Yemen between 2017 and 2023? To do that, I first broke the research question into three sub-questions.

Sub-questions

Each of the three sub-questions addresses one my three concepts wartime social orders, legitimacy, and greed, which I will use to answer my main question.

Sub-question 1: How did the Supreme Political Council an informal institution, contribute to social order and predictability, thereby enhancing their resilience between 2017 and 2023?

- What is the supervisory system? And what is its different categories?
- How did the Houthis use the supervisory system to interact with the civilians and civil society organizations in the Houthi-rebel-controlled areas?

Sub-question 2: How did the Houthis use discourse through communication channels and major international events to legitimize their movement and enhance their resilience between 2017 and 2023?

- How did the Houthis use media and online communication channels to create discourse that delegitimizes the Yemeni government and its allies between 2017 and 2023?
- How did the Houthis leverage major events, such as the Israel-Gaza conflict, to legitimize their movement and reinforce their resilience through public support and financial campaigns?

Sub-question 3: How does greed resonate in the Houthi rebel movement and contribute to its resilience and growth between 2017 and 2023?

- What methods did the Houthis use to generate revenue and sustain their movement?

2.1 Data Analysis

The data collected for this research were mainly from secondary sources. The main methods used were media analysis and Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) for academic research. Each method collected data aimed at solving the sub-questions. Through media analysis, I analysed how Houthi media outlets such as Al Masirah are using strategic discourses through their programs, one of which show how Houthis are organizing rallies and protests to advocate for Palestine. I also looked at international media reports, which provided insights into the timeline of my research since they reported on major events, such as the tensions between the UAE and the Yemeni government amidst the UAE's support to the Southern Transitional Council in 2018. The objective of the first was to look at how Houthis are utilizing their media outlets to delegitimize the IRG and their allies and legitimize their own movement, while the second was focused on events that contributed to the dominance and growth of the Houthis.

The second method was OSINT for academic research. The data collected from NGOs, research centres, and think tanks, mainly from the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies and the International Crisis Group, provided insights into the formation of the Houthi wartime social order and its governance structure. It mainly addresses The Supreme Political Council, an informal institution that the Houthis created that operates a supervisory system in different areas, namely security, finance, social, intellectual and educational affairs. The data also looked at the financial strategies the rebel group use to extort money for the movement. It discusses how the group exploited different financial resources and created an informal tax system in order to benefit from the Yemeni community, which is already in poverty and a dire humanitarian situation (United Nations Press 2024). For instance, the rebel group created an informal levy system called Al Khumus⁴, where money is extorted from private businesses and goes to Houthi leadership, to distribute it to those in need, but there is no solid evidence that the money goes to anyone else aside from the rebel leaders.

2.2 Data Sampling

The data collected from the secondary sources was selected to address the two main parts of this research. The first part provides background information, briefly mentioning the conflict in Yemen, expanding on the Houthi movement, its origins, radicalization, utilization

⁴ The idea of the Khumus differs in Sunni and Shia Islam. In Shia Islam, this tax is paid by anyone who has reached puberty and is sane and is split between charities that support Islamic education and anyone who is descended from Muhammad who is in need.

of the Arab Spring, and eventual takeover of Sanaa. It also addresses the different actors and alliances in the Yemeni conflict and their interconnections. Finally, it highlights significant events within the timeline researched (2017-2023) and how these events contributed to the Houthi resilience. The second part focuses on the factors that led to the Houthis' resilience. It begins by discussing their governance structures and how the group established control and imposed order. It then explains how the group used discourse to build and obtain legitimacy for their actions. Lastly, it explores how the Houthis exploit various financial resources for their own greed.

During the research, a significant amount of data was encountered, some of which fell outside the scope of this study, such as data related to the Houthis' attacks on the Red Sea and the American response to these attacks (Blanchard 2024, 1-4). The data collected was constructed around the research puzzle and aims to produce an explanation for it. In the next section, I will explain the limitations I faced in conducting this research, as well as the ethical considerations that I kept in mind while I was researching the topic of Houthi rebel resilience.

2.3 Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Given that Yemen is still in active conflict and that I hold refugee status, meant that conducting this research in Yemen was not an option. I planned to conduct online interviews. However, the participants I was planning to interview were concerned that our online calls would be monitored by Houthi channels and that it would pose a danger to their lives. I then tried to conduct similar interviews with recent asylum seekers who had lived in Yemen during the timeframe of my research. Unfortunately, they also had similar concerns that if their anonymity were jeopardized, it would put their families in immediate danger. Despite assurances, these concerns could not be adequately addressed.

That then led me to use secondary data such as reports from media outlets, NGOs, think tanks, and research centers, which can carry some biases in their reporting based on the author or media channel producing them. For instance, I cite the New York Times when talking about the U.S. naval coalition in the Red Sea. Given that it is an American newspaper and the positionality of the U.S. in the Yemeni conflict, it could present narratives that paint the U.S. in a positive light. Such things may have limited the outcome of my research.

In terms of ethical consideration, first it is important to mention that ethics and morals are crucial factors that researchers must consider when conducting and designing research to produce intellectually coherent and compelling papers (Mason 2017, 42). Throughout this

research and its design, I aimed to discuss the topic without promoting political narratives or guiding the reader toward specific conclusions. My objective is to explore and contribute to scholarly knowledge about rebel resilience and non-state armed groups in the Middle East. However, I acknowledge that my positionality as an individual who had to flee Yemen because of the ongoing civil war might introduce potential biases. I have made conscious effort to minimize the impact of these biases and strive to present an objective analysis.

The following chapter will briefly explain how the Yemen civil war started. I will then explain who the Houthis are and how their movement started, was radicalized, and eventually became the de facto government of Sana'a. I will then describe my empirical findings, which will discuss the different actors and alliances formed, structured using the concepts of my analytical frame to connect the two together and help make sense of the data.

Chapter 3: Presentation of Empirical Data & Data Analysis

Yemen's civil war began in 2014, when the Houthi rebels successfully took control of the capital Sana'a on 21 September 2014. The group which first entered the capital under the umbrella of peaceful protests which demanded lower fuel prices and accused the government of corruption seized the presidential palace in January under claims that Hadi failed to meet their demands (Ghobari 2014). They then forced President Hadi and his government to resign and put him under house arrest (Bayoumy, Ghobari 2015). Hadi managed to escape, he fled to the Southern city of Aden, renounced his resignation and declared Aden the temporary capital of Yemen (DW News 2015). He then flew to Saudi Arabia and appealed to ask for their assistance in to provide immediate support to defeat the Houthis. The Kingdom then formed a coalition of ten countries and launched operation "Decisive Storm" (Abdullah 2015). The coalition successfully liberated most southern cities in Yemen and maintained two strongholds in the north, particularly in Ma'arib and Al Jawf (Almedia and Knights 2016).

In this chapter I will firstly discuss the history of the Houthis, their origin, radicalisation and development from a cultural movement to a non-state armed group which will provide an empirical foundation and help ground my analysis. I will then move on to on to briefly explain actors, alliances and major events between 2017 and 2023, which will be structured using my three main concepts, wartime social order, legitimacy and greed.

3.1 The Houthi Rebels: Origins, Development, and Radicalisation.

The Houthis emerged as a "cultural revivalist movement" in the 1990s for the Zaydi sect, who make up around 35 percent of Yemen's population (Gordon 2024). This movement aimed to counter the increasing financial and religious influence of Salafism brought by Saudi Arabia and to oppose President Saleh, whom they accused of stealing public wealth and distributing it among his family (Glenn 2015, updated by Nada and Rowan 2022). Primarily located in the highlands of Yemen, specifically in Saada, the group was originally led by Hussein Badr Al-Din Al Houthi, after whom the Houthis were named. Al Houthi, who represented the Al-Haqq (Truth) party between 1993 and 1997, left parliament and formed the Believing Youth, a group of Zaydi youths that served as an alternative to the growing Wahabism network (Zeidan 2024).

Zaydism is similar to mainstream Sunnism but differs in a few aspects. It teaches that the Muslim umma must be led by a sayyid who is part of Ahl Al-Bayt, meaning direct descendants of the Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima and her husband, Ali.

Descendants of the Prophet are associated with the Bani Hashim clan and are known as Hashemites. Leaders in the Houthi movement claim that they are of Hashemite descent and follow the Hadawi Hashemite movement⁵ (The International Crisis Group 2022, 4). What started as a cultural movement would develop into an insurgency in 2003. But why?

The American invasion of Iraq in 2003 marked a pivotal moment that radicalized the Houthis. They adopted the slogan: “God is great, death to America, death to Israel, curse the Jews, and victory for Islam.” Viewing Saleh as a supporter of the U.S. because he did not express disagreement towards the American invasion of Iraq, the Houthis launched insurgency campaigns against the government, spanning over six years from 2004 to 2010 (Boucek 2010, 5-8). During the first year of these insurgencies, Yemeni forces killed Hussein Badr Al-Din Al-Houthi. The killing of the father of the Houthi movement further radicalized the movement further⁶. His father, Badr Al-Din Al Houthi, took on his role but was primarily seen as a spiritual leader until 2010 when he died due to old, after which Abdul-Malik Al-Houthi, who commanded the fighting forces in the six-year Saadah war became and still until today the leader of the Houthi rebels (Australian National Security n.d). In the same year and with the objective of focusing their resources on fighting the growing presence of the AQAP in Yemen, Saleh, and his government offered Abdul-Malik Al Houthi a ceasefire agreement, which he and other tribes around Saadah accepted (Worth 2010). But did that end the instability in the country? The answer is no.

Inspired by the Arab Spring in 2011, a nationwide protest erupted in Yemen in February 2012. The Houthis joined these protests in Sahat al-Taghyeer (The Change Square) under the banner of Shabab al-Sumud (The Steadfast Movement), advocating against the regime and presenting themselves in a new light. This involvement propelled the group from Saada onto the national stage (Winter 2012, 16), a boost that would prove significant in 2013. The protests culminated in the resignation of Saleh and the signing of the GCC agreement (The Gulf Cooperation Council: Al Mubadarrah Al Khalijiah), which transferred Saleh’s power to his

⁵ The Hadawi Hashemite movement, which is an extension of the Zaidi/Hadawi current follows imam Al-Hadi Yahya ibn Al-Husain, and his political theory that sees the monopoly of power as an exclusive right of the Hashemite descendants of “Al batnain” (i.e., Al-Hasan and Al-Husain and their descendants). By contrast, they uphold the Shiite Zaidi doctrine and believe in the Hadawi theory, which is built on jihad and revolt against rulers as a means to seize power. Hashemite families in Yemen are known by their surnames, such as Al Mutawwakil or Al Mo’ayyed (Musi’d, 2022).

⁶ Hussein Badr Al-Din Al-Houthi, also known as (The martyred leader) is considered the founder and father of the Houthi movement. He was a charismatic and influential leader in the Zaydi movement. His death turned him into a symbolic figure and fuelled the movement even more. His practices were documented in a series of books and are still taught in schools in Saadah (The New Arab 2016).

deputy Hadi and established the NDC (National Dialogue Conference: Muata'amar Al Hawar Al Wadani) (McAuley 2011, 1-9). Amidst the disorder and chaos of the 2012 protests, The Houthis used the chaos and disorder that happened because of the 2012 protests and retained heavy weapons as well as expanded their territory. They became the de facto rulers of Saada, appointing a governor and overseeing all local administrative sectors (International Crisis Group 2014, 2). The group also established a social order in the form of a supervisory system that oversees all local and administrative sectors of Saadah. But how did the rebel group achieve this? A 2010 U.S. embassy report described Yemen as a country with “a system of grand corruption...thriving on the combination of weak state institutions and a fragmented elite structure” (Edross 2017). This systemic weakness provides an explanation of how the Houthis managed to expand their territory. But how did the Houthis become part of the NDC?

After the transfer of power in 2012, Hadi struggled to assert his authority. One reason was Saleh, who continued to act as the head of the GPC, refusing to leave Sana'a and maintaining influence behind the scenes. Additionally, as part of the establishment of the NDC, the Houthis, who had gained a presence in the Change Square, secured a seat in the NDC, thus obtaining a position at the national table. During the NDC, the group advocated for “popular positions, including a federal state based on democratic principles, political pluralism, religious freedom, and balance of powers” (International Crisis Group 2014, I). The Houthis, having built an anti-regime narrative during their presence in 2012, gained political support in Saada and its surroundings by providing security and justice—areas where the state had shown an inability or unwillingness to act (International Crisis Group 2014, 6). They were also outspoken against the Ahmar tribe and the Yemeni Congregation for Reform, also known as Al Islah, both of which were not favoured by the Yemeni people. The Houthis adeptly switched between identities based on the situation's requirements; within their own communities, they adopted a religious role, while with others, they assumed a national character. This fluidity made them serious contenders in the political realm and helped them form strategic alliances along the way (Nagi 2019). But how did the Houthis manage to take over Sana'a and become its governing authority?

Since taking power, Hadi had been occupied with balancing various factions in the capital, leaving a power vacuum that the Houthis and other tribal leaders quickly filled. Between 2011 and 2013, the Houthis had occurring clashes with their southern neighbours in

the Damaj Valley, the Salafis⁷. As the NDC deadline approached, each party sought to manipulate outcomes in their favour, and the Houthis took up arms, leading to full-scale conflict in Damaj (International Crisis Group 2014, 3). These battles escalated towards the capital, with the Houthis gaining more territory, including the strategic city of Amran (Jamih, 2), known to Yemenis as the gateway to Sana'a and is the stronghold of the Al-Ahmar tribe and Al-Islah political group. In August 2014, Houthi forces stormed the capital under the guise of peaceful protests, protesting fuel price hikes and demanding the resignation of the corrupt government (Salisbury 2014). According to a Human Rights Watch report in September, during one such protest, state soldiers responded violently after Houthis retaliated against water cannons and tear gas with rocks. The soldiers opened fire with live rounds, resulting in at least nine deaths and 67 injuries (Human Rights Watch 2014). Subsequently, the Houthis took up arms on multiple fronts, and within four days, they controlled the city after the interior minister ordered state troops to stand down. Many believe Saleh and his loyalists facilitated this takeover (BBC News 2014). Some rumours suggest the Houthis were aware of Hadi's intentions to weaken Al Islah (Nagi 2019).

Throughout this section, I discussed the background information on how the Houthi movement started, grew, and eventually took over the capital and became its de facto authority. In the next section, I will discuss how the concepts of wartime social order, legitimacy, and greed played a role in developing the Houthis resilience. I will explore that by explaining the actors, alliances, and major events that happened between 2017 and 2023.

3.2 Actors, Alliances and the Major Events 2017 - 2023

In this section, I aim to show how the major events in the five years contributed to the Houthis resilience and ability to withstand a nine-year conflict, which resulted in the continuation of the Yemeni conflict. Throughout this section, my analytical framework will serve as the structure to describe the empirical evidence by using my main concepts, wartime social order, legitimacy, and greed, as headings under which the relevant events and evidence will be detailed. This approach will ensure a systematic and organized presentation of the data, highlighting how each concept resonates with the findings.

⁷ Salafism aims to "purify" Islam of Western influence and centuries' worth of "deviant" digressions from the true Islamic religion, and according to practitioners, that includes Shiism, Sufism, and even non-Salafist Sunni (Olidort 2015).

The Main Actors and Alliances of the Yemeni Conflict between 2017 and 2023



Figure 1 Mapping the Yemeni conflict: Actors and Alliances 2017 – 2023

3.3 Wartime Social Order

Rebel Governance and the Wartime Social Order of the Houthis (2017):

The alliance between Saleh and the Houthis began in 2014 when the Houthis reached Sana'a. With Saleh's assistance, including support from his political party, the General People's Congress (GPC), and military members loyal to him, the Houthis successfully took control of Sana'a. They placed President Hadi under house arrest (Alley 2018). Hadi eventually escaped

to Aden, renounced his resignation, and declared the city the temporary capital of Yemen. This move prompted Saleh and Houthi forces to march south, capturing numerous cities and expanding their territory (Popp 2015, 3). Beyond the battlefield, the Houthis and the GPC partnered in governance, with the GPC providing significant administrative experience. In 2016, they formed the National Salvation Government and established the Supreme Political Council (Al Majlis As Siyasiyy Al A'ala), a legislative body that replaced the House of Representatives and became the highest leadership authority of the coup regime in Sana'a. This new council replaced the Supreme Revolutionary Committee (al lajna al thawrya), an informal administrative body the Houthis had created to serve as a parallel governance system and substitute for Parliament after taking control of Sana'a in 2015. Despite this, the Houthis continued to operate the Supreme Revolutionary Committee as a supervisory system, injecting overseers (Mushriffin) into state institutions (Shuja Al-Deen 2022, 4). The GPC viewed this as a shadow government, leading to ongoing tensions between the allies (Alley 2018).

In 2017, the UAE offered Saleh a deal to switch sides. An anonymous official cited by Al Jazeera suggested that Saleh had planned to sideline the Houthis as early as 2017. Reports also indicated that Saudi Arabia and the UAE considered replacing Hadi with Saleh. These developments and the UAE's potential to regain influence led Saleh to declare his break from the Houthis (Edross 2017). However, after a three-day battle, the Houthis killed Saleh (Al Jazeera News 2017). With Saleh gone, the Houthis became the dominant force in their controlled areas and tightened their grip on the country. The Houthis, anticipating potential rebellion, sidelined GPC members and assumed complete control over the Supreme Political Council, and transferred all the responsibilities of the Revolutionary Committee under the SPC since it was now unnecessary. The Houthis intensified their use of the supervisory system, which consists of a network of loyal individuals to the Houthi movement. The main objective is to place overseers in different institutions (local and state) with functions in five main categories: security, finance, social, intellectual, and educational (Shujaa Al-Deen 2022, 5-6). Collectively, these overseers maintain tight control and order over rebel-held areas.

This describes how the Houthis managed a wartime social order that initially began as a partnership with Saleh but became dominated by them after the alliance dissolved. This social order ensures the group's existence and contributes to their establishment of control and resilience in rebel-held areas. Another contributor and possibly a motivator for the continuous rebellion of the Houthis is greed. In 2017, the rebels extracted billions of rials as the result of seizing funds, property, and bank accounts of 1223 Yemenis they labelled as traitors (Sana'a

Center Economic Unit, 2020, 12-13). This extortion campaign was the beginning of the Houthis, which created multiple revenue sources. The following two years describe how they achieved that.

3.4 Greed

The greed-motivated Houthi rebels (2018-2020):

The Houthis became the dominant power in 2017, granting them unlimited access to resources and state revenues which they utilized through the several changes they would implement in this two-year period that created several sources of revenue, some of which went to funding the military activities of the movements and others that funded the pockets and enriched the Houthi leaders. In 2018 the rebel group created a taxation system which consists of two parts, the land custom check points and the war efforts tax known as Al Majhud Al Harbei. To create the first part the Houthis passed a bill through the SPC and created land custom check points in several cities they controlled such as Amran. These custom entry point demanded that trucks loaded with goods coming from government-controlled areas pay a 100% tariff (total amount of their goods) to pass. In some cases, trucks were held and only released when a bribe is paid to the supervisor of the check point. This source of income generated about \$30 million/month a steady stream for the rebel group and is the largest source of income (Heistein 2022, 17; Salisbury 2023, 28). next to the Iranian support via oil shipments (Lederer 2019).

The second part Al Majhud Al Harbei is a rogue taxation method created by the financial supervisory system. Supervisors go to private companies and shops to demand monthly contributions to the war effort. This payment then goes to the SPC who are allegedly send a major part of it to the commanders in the frontlines, while a minor part is used to finance the social events the Houthis conduct such as the commemoration of the ‘martyred leader’ Hussein Badr Al-Din Al Houthi (Al Thawra Net 2024). Then, in 2019, the Houthis expanded the 1999 zakat law and introduced a new levy known as Al Khumus. It imposes a 20 percent levy on many economic activities, including mineral, water, and fishery sectors (Al-Arabiya 2020). The revenue from this predominantly is meant for Hasmeite descendants (Ahl al-Bayt), according to the Houthis interpretation, which means it benefits the Al-Houthi family and Hashemite leaders loyal to the movement. Even though GPC representatives rejected this, the dominance of the Houthis overruled it. The Houthis also established a new zakat body to manage revenue coming from Al Khumus. The new body stripped local authorities from

collecting Zakat and centralized the system under the presidential office; that way, it was directly monitored by Houthi authorities (The Sana'a Center Economic Unit, 2020, 8).

The final source of income was claimed by the Houthis in 2020 when they took control of Al Hodeidah city and its port. Battles between the rebels and the IRG intensified in Ma'arib, which made the government relocate its military resources from Al Hodeidah to Ma'arib, allowing the Houthis to retake the city and its port. (AlJazeera News 2021). The UN suspects that the Houthis do not do so despite being bound by the UN-truce agreement to use the public earnings from the port to pay salaries for public service workers. Instead, they allegedly pocketed the money for their leadership or used it to fund their war efforts (Al Batati 2023). Financial resources are vital for rebels in a war situation to fund their movement and maintain their resilience. Rebels can use it for weapons, recruitment, and other activities (Weinstein 2005, 600). Throughout this section, I described how the Houthis used different methods to generate revenue. In the next section, I will explore the role of legitimacy and how both the Yemeni state and the Houthis alike strived to achieve it.

3.5 Legitimacy

Shifts in Conflict Dynamics and Political Restructuring for Legitimacy (2021 - 2023)

In a war situation, legitimacy becomes a two-edged sword; one is the state, and the other is the rebels against it, with each trying to evoke general support and compliance from the people because noncompliance can lead to resistance acts amongst the civilian society who are needed to achieve a stable and productive governance (Levi 2018, 603). In this section, I will start by describing the steps the Yemeni state took to bring more legitimacy to its leadership structure, followed by the discourse the Houthis implemented with the same goal.

In 2021, the Houthis showed a robust military force, exerted significant pressure in pro-government areas such as Shabwa, Ma'arib, and Al Bayda (AlJazeera News 2021), as well as increased aerial threat through intensified cross-border drone attacks, as depicted in Figure 3, and demonstrated increased lethality in their operations, as illustrated in Figure 4. An example of such a threat is "Operation Victory from God" in 2019, where the Houthis crippled half of the oil output of Saudi Arabia (Hubbard, Karasz, and Reed 2019). This increase in power created a shift in the conflict dynamics and needed to be addressed by the coalition camp. Mainly because while this was happening, Saudi and UAE-backed forces were busy fighting each other despite having signed the Riyadh agreement, which was a power-sharing agreement that aimed to unite the frontlines against the Houthi (The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi

Arabia Washington DC 2019), which perhaps means that sometime in 2021 the GCC-sponsored talks had started, maybe behind closed doors at first and its result would later be shown in 2022.

**Interception of Houthi Cross-Border Rocket, Missile, and Drone Attacks
(May 2015 - April 2022)**

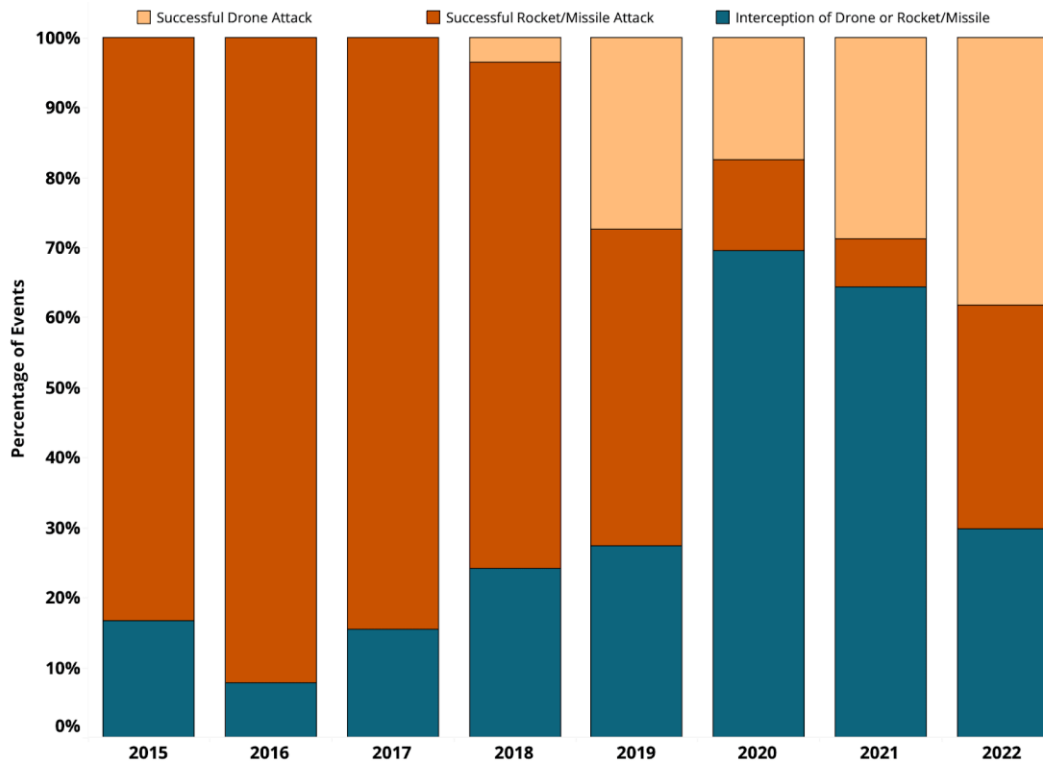


Figure 3

Source: ACLED/2023

**Lethality of Houthi Cross-Border Rocket, Missile, and Drone Events
(May 2015 - April 2022)**

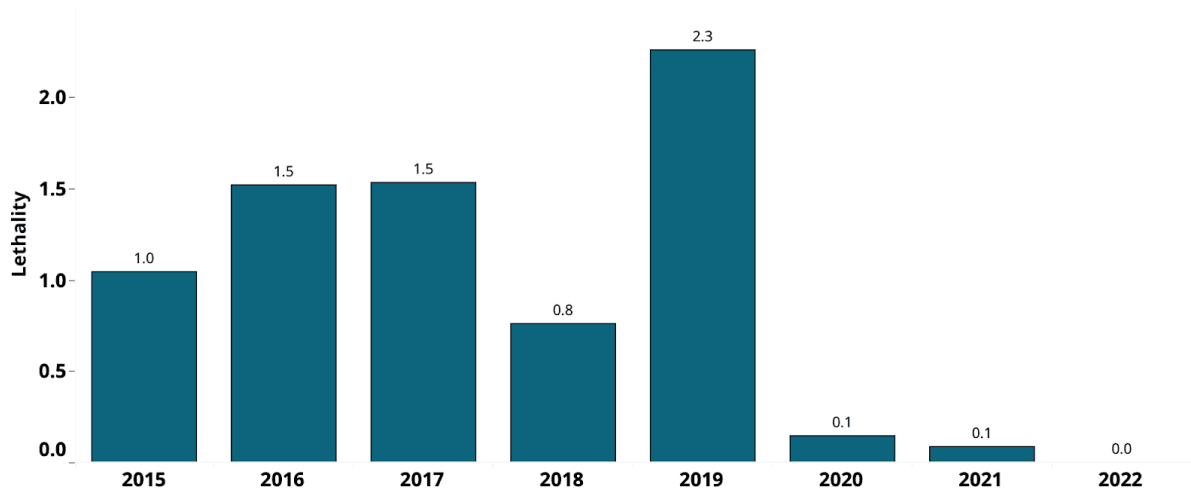


Figure 4

Source: ACLED/2023

The year 2022 marked a change in the conflict in Yemen and a major change in the Yemeni government. The GCC-sponsored talks resulted in President Hadi transferring his presidential powers to a new Presidential Leadership Council selected in the GCC talks. The council consists of some of the main actors in power, such as Aidarus Al-Zubaidi, leader of the STC, and Sultan Al-Arada, governor of Ma'arib and a well-respected tribal leader amongst tribes of the Marib governate, along with other individuals (see image 5). The PLC is mainly composed of two networks: the Saudi-backed groups loosely tied to the Al Islah Sunni Islamist political party and the UAE-aligned network, a mainly Salafist force. This diplomatic discourse aimed to present a unified front, recalibrate the power dynamics within the Saudi-led coalition, and legitimize a new leadership structure that could better address the conflict and unify the efforts against the Houthis. However, the intended outcome did not materialize as expected. A year later, perhaps driven by greed, the factions represented within the PLC, notably those aligned with the Southern Transitional Council (STC) and President Hadi's government, engaged in disputes over critical supply lines that generate revenue, which underscored a lack of unified vision and cooperation among the council members, hindering their effectiveness in addressing broader strategic goals (Ali-Khan 2023).



Image 2

Composition of Yemen's new PLC

Source: ISPI on X (formerly twitter) 24 April 2022

Houthi Geopolitical Discourse for Legitimacy (2023)

In 2023, a Chinese-brokered peace between Iran and Saudi Arabia facilitated talks between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis, mediated by Oman in Sana'a. This initiative was followed by a significant five-day visit to Saudi Arabia by Houthi officials in September, marking their first official visit to the country. The negotiations included discussions on reconstruction plans, a timeline for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Yemen, and the reopening of the Sana'a airport and ports controlled by the Houthis (Montgomery 2024). Despite the progress, the two parties did not finalise a concrete deal. The Israel-Hamas conflict that erupted shortly after and disrupted the momentum (Kingsley and Kershner 2023). In response to the events of October seventh, the Houthis declared war on Israel and imposed a blockade on the Red Sea, attacking ships headed to Israel in the Bab-Almandab Strait (BBC News 2024). They also utilized their media platforms to advocate for Palestine, organizing rallies and protests to bolster their legitimacy while delegitimizing the IRG, Saudi Arabia, and their coalition partners, whom they branded as traitors. They framed these nations as willing to normalize relations with Israel, which they characterized as dealing with the devil. The Houthis have employed discourse to mobilize support among the Yemeni population, leveraging the widespread alignment with and empathy for the Palestinian cause. They also increased military mobilization and introduced military and financial campaigns to support Palestine (Rushdi 2024, 4).

Throughout the previous section, I illustrated how the Houthi movement started, grew, was radicalized, and eventually took over Sana'a. I also went through the significant events that resonate with my analytical framework and can explain how the Houthis gained and maintained their resilience throughout the five years. Other events also took place during these five years (Montgomery 2024), but they go beyond the scope of this research. In the next chapter, I will revisit my empirical data to explain further and show how each concept will answer one of the three sub-questions, leading to an answer to my main research question. I will also reflect on the data through the lens of my theories to explain how they resonated and were able to untangle this puzzle.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis & Theoretical Reflections

In this chapter, I will revisit the categories of described evidence within my case study of Houthi rebel resilience and, once again, use the concepts of the analytical framework to explain or interpret the data I described in the previous chapter. This description will be more abstract in addressing and answering my sub-questions, leading to an answer to the main research question. I will use a Lund analytical matrix to help me make sense and interpret my data. This matrix is helpful to locate the contents of my case study between the specific (limited, particular and precise) and the general (common, extensive and universal). It helps it to sit between the abstract (conceptual, decontextualized and detached) and concrete (Actual and not formalized by the analyst) (Lund 2014, 225). Finally, it will explicitly show the concepts and theory I am using in explaining or interpreting my evidence that will answer my sub-questions.

4.1 Wartime Social Order

Sub-question 1: How did the Supreme Political Council, an informal institution, contribute to social order and predictability, thereby enhancing their resilience between 2017 and 2023?

- What is the supervisory system? And what are its different categories?
- How did the Houthis use the supervisory system to interact with the civilians and civil society organizations in the Houthi-rebel-controlled areas?

Lund matrix

	Concrete	Abstract
Specific	<p>Observation: The Houthis intensified their use of the supervisory system after Saleh's death.</p>	<p>Concepts: - Wartime Social order - Control - Rebelocracy - Resilience</p>
General	<p>Pattern: The Houthis control several aspects through the supervisory system.</p>	<p>Theory: Rebel governance theory</p>

The concept of wartime social order offers a lens to explain how wartime institutions operate and help non-state groups interact with civilians under their control. This framework can help explain why groups decide to implement such systems. The supervisory system

created by the Houthis consists of loyal individuals and operates on two levels. The first level includes primary Mushrifin, referred to as the mujahideen (fighters of God) because they fought with the Houthis in the Saadah wars. A primary Mushrif, usually a Hashemite, is chosen by Abdulmalik Al Houthi and operates under the authority of the Supreme Political Council. The second level includes secondary Mushrifin, who are either Hashemites or Mutthawith (The Houthified)⁸, depending on the importance of the role assigned. Primary and secondary Mushrifin are distributed among local and state institutions in different districts, villages, and areas where they operate under five main categories: security, finance, social, intellectual, and educational (Shuja Al-Deen 2022, 5-6).

The first category is the security supervisors (al-mushrif al-amnei), who hold authority above local security forces, including the police and the coast guard in cities and tribal chiefs in villages. These supervisors maintain a tight grip on the state's security through the Preventative Security, Security and Intelligence Bureau, and the Zainabiyat⁹. In Preventative Security, supervisors set security checkpoints and have the power to make arrests, turning these checkpoints into mobile security centers (Nagi, Ardemangi, and Transfeld 2020). The Security and Intelligence Bureau identifies threats to the movement, such as resistance movements or outside agents, and mediates internal conflicts within the forces (Heistein 2022, 10). The Zainabiyat, an all-female security force, searches women, arrests them during protests, and raids their homes. Women in Yemen usually have cultural impunity from being attacked. That is where this unit comes in. Additionally, they also recruit and indoctrinate Women and girls in order to expand the movement (Al-Batati 2020). The second category are the financial Mushrifin, who are responsible for collecting taxes, sometimes called Al Majhud Al Harbei (War expenses). They collect money from private businesses, small businesses, and farmers at a lower level and from oil derivatives and properties or businesses seized from enemies of the movement at a higher level. They also collect the Islamic zakat, an annual tax of one percent of an individual's assets (Al-Batati 2023). The first two supervisory systems focus on maintaining governance, control, and extortion of financial means, which is essential for the resilience of the rebel movement.

⁸ The Mutthawithin (the Houthified) are individuals from non Hashemite families who joined the Houthi movement after the group took control of the capital Sanaa.

⁹ The Zainabiyat primarily drawn from Hashemite families are an intelligence apparatus directed at women. (United Nations Security Council 2020).

The remaining three supervisory systems are more focused on establishing legitimacy and interacting more with civilians. The first is the social supervisors (al-mushrif al-ijtimaai), which deal with different social actors. The supervisors interact with tribe leaders (Sheikh al-Qabilah), who can influence all the tribe and a tool to recruit tribesmen from the village of the Sheikh. They also deal with civil society organizations, such as aid agencies and international NGOs, and grant them access to operate in the areas they control to deliver aid. The last local actors these supervisors interact with are the heads of neighborhoods (Aqil Al harah)¹⁰. The role of the Aqil is to collect and pass information about residents to the social supervisor, distribute necessities (cooking gas cylinders), and ensure that young residents attend cultural programs the intellectual mushrif organizes (ACAPS 2020, 5-6). On the other hand, the intellectual Mushrifin organize various events, such as the commemoration of the founder of the rebel group Hussein Al Houthi or the annual celebration of the September 21 revolution, when the group took over the capital (Shuja Al-Deen 2022, 7). An example is the Intellectual Mushrif in the governance of Ibb, who organized an event to remember the martyred leader Hussien Bader Al-Din Al-Houthi in an event venue with more than 200 people in attendance (Office of the Ibb Governorate Undersecretary for Expatriate Affairs, Facebook, February 11, 2024).

The educational supervisors (al-mushrif at-tarbawei) monitor educational establishments to ensure new curriculums imposed by the Houthis, which emphasize Jihad and censor influential Yemeni figures opposing Houthi ideologies, are being taught (Al Masdar Online, 2024). They ensure the slogan "God is great, death to America, death to Israel, curse the Jews, and victory to Islam" is recited during morning assemblies, fostering loyalty and encouraging youth to join the battlefield (Ghanem 2021). They also monitor higher education and run mandatory classes in public universities that align with their geopolitical ideologies, such as anti-Israel seminars (Sayers 2023). The intellectual and educational supervisory systems aim to spread Houthi propaganda, building and maintaining the group's legitimacy (ACAPS, 2020, 5). Through the informal Supreme Political Council and its supervisory system, Houthi leadership has managed to apply a policy of divide and rule, like Saleh's 33-year dictatorship.

¹⁰ The role of Akil Al harah, a position typically held by the wisest person in a neighborhood and selected by the homeowners, carries significant weight in the community. Traditionally, the Aqil's main responsibility was to mediate disputes within the neighborhood, a role that was highly respected. However, this role underwent a significant transformation under Houthi rule, indicating the profound impact of political changes on local dynamics (Shuja Al-Deen, 2022, 7).

They have centralized power, sidelining other actors in Yemeni society, creating a space where they remain dominant and can effectively utilize the revenues to their own.

4.2 Greed

Sub-question 3: How does greed resonate in the Houthi rebel movement and contribute to its resilience and growth between 2017 and 2023?

- What methods did the Houthis use to generate revenue and sustain their movement?

Lund matrix

	Concrete	Abstract
Specific	<p>Observation: The Houthis utilized several methods to finance their leadership and movement, which caused internal conflict.</p>	<p>Concepts: - Greed - Resource exploitation - Resilience</p>
General	<p>Pattern: The Houthis continue to reject any deal that would possibly suspend the conflict.</p>	<p>Theory: Rational Choice Theory</p>

In this section, I will explain how the Houthi rebel movement gained financially from the war, which leads me to argue that their movement is greed-motivated and that their end game is likely to keep the war ongoing, which would benefit them. So, what lead me to this assumption? For the first time since the war started, in 2023, a Houthi delegation visited Saudi Arabia with Oman as the mediator and engaged in a five-day round of talks, which showed a potential for an agreement that would pave the way to end the hostilities and possibly the conflict. The agreement revolved around a timeline for foreign troops to exit Yemen and create a buffer zone in the southern Saudi-Yemeni border (El Yaakoubi and Alghobari, 2023). Saudi Arabia, who excluded the PLC from their talks with the Houthi, seems to be now focused on their 2030 vision as well as hosting the 2034 World Cup, which makes it more apparent that they perhaps are focusing on securing their southern borders rather than winning the conflict and defeating the Houthis. (Sana’a Center for Strategic Studies, 2023).

Nevertheless, after the October 07th attacks and on November 19, 2023, the Houthis launched a series of attacks in the Red Sea, which are still ongoing and continue to impact the

maritime trade routes (AlJazeera 2024). These attacks go against what the Houthi lead negotiator Mohammed Abdelsalam stated, 'peace being the Houthis first choice' during the Riyadh talks (Habor 2023). So why are the Houthis not utilizing the chance to suspend the conflict and keep choosing war? The Houthis have absolute power in the areas they control, granting them unlimited access to resources. The group has controlled the Central bank in Sana'a since 2014. When the Yemeni government moved the CBY to Aden in 2016, it gave the Houthis the additional advantage of collecting the bank revenues since paying the public sector is now the responsibility of the CBY in Aden.

The Houthis have also implemented unlimited levies on merchants, businessmen, and private enterprises and expanded the zakat law to include the Khumus. All this brought the group a lot of revenue and sparked internal competition, with the main competitors identified being Ahmed Hamid, who controls most of the revenue-generating agencies, and Mohammed Al-Houthi, the president of the SPC, who controls most state institutes through the supervisory system (Abaad Studies 2023, 4-6). To counter Mohammed Al-Houthi and his supervisors Hamid has either dismissed or withheld money from supervisors loyal to Al-Houthi demanding that if they want to be paid, they must go to the battlefronts and then replaces them with individuals loyal to him. While Al-Houthi uses supervisors to harass and push individuals loyal to Hamid to quit from their positions to put his people in their place, that way he creates a wider network of revenue collecting Mushriffin. (Abaad Studies 2023, 8-9). Aside from this greedy competition and on a wider scale, the Houthis have made fortunes during this war and have become investors in real estate, pharmaceutical, and privately owned companies (Yemen Monitor 2023; Yemen Organization for Combating Human Trafficking¹¹). They have also opened hundreds of stores own more than 1250 companies and established nearly 30 oil companies which imports barrels through ports of Hodeidah and Salif through shell companies (Regain Yemen 2021). They also use these oil companies to create petroleum shortages and then sell it on the black market, this tactic generates an estimate of \$1.14 billion annually (United Nations Security Council 2020).

The financial strategies employed by the Houthi rebel movement reveal a pattern of greed-motivated actions, suggesting that their end goal may be to perpetuate the conflict for their benefit. Despite opportunities to resolve the conflict, the Houthis have continued to

¹¹ A report by the Yemen Organization for Combating Human Trafficking reveals the Houthis' involvement in the trade of smuggled and counterfeit drugs. November 23, 2022. (<https://www.yocht.org/?lang=en>).

engage in hostilities, which made me draw my argument about the movement being greed motivated.

4.3 Legitimacy

Sub-question 2: How did the Houthis use discourse through communication channels and significant international events to legitimize their movement and enhance their resilience between 2017 and 2023?

- How did the Houthis use media and online communication channels to create discourse that delegitimizes the Yemeni government and its allies between 2017 and 2023?
- How did the Houthis leverage major events, such as the Israel-Gaza conflict, to legitimize their movement and reinforce their resilience through public support and financial campaigns?

Lund matrix

	Concrete	Abstract
Specific	Observation: The Houthis use discourse to de-legitimize the government and legitimize their movement.	Concepts: - Legitimacy - Collective action - Discourse - Resilience
General	Pattern: The Houthis utilize their communication channels to de-legitimize the government and its allies and legitimize their movement	Theory: Discourse Theory

Through the lens of legitimacy and the notion of discourse, I will first explore why people accept the legitimacy of the PLC despite it not being elected. After that I will explore how the Houthis used the Israel – Gaza conflict to create discourse, mobilize popular support and further legitimize the authority of their rebel movement. I will finally tie up the section by elaborating the importance of legitimacy to rebel resilience.

The formation of the PLC created a new political paradigm and an organizational structure for the different actors on the ground backed up by Saudi Arabia and the UAE. It brought them under a power-shared agreement. Unlike Hadi, who was elected by the Yemeni people in a UN-overseen, single-candidate ballot in 2012, the PLC was formed in Riyadh after several closed-door meetings without elections (International Crisis Group 2022, 2). The

Houthis mocked this formation and referred to it as the “reshuffling of mercenaries” backed by Saudi Arabia (@abdualsalah, X (formally Twitter), 07 April 2022). Despite that, collectively, the PLC members are far more prevalent among Yemeni civilians than Hadi was because they represent different political factions with one common goal of defeating the Houthis since they view them as a Shiite sect rebel group that aims to bring back the pre-1962 imamate system, which allows only Hashemites to be elite., and are seen as an Iranian-backed group that grabbed power by force (International Crisis Group 2022, 9).

On the other hand, the Houthis may recognize their illegitimacy, which can explain why they use discourse to reaffirm their positions. Following the Israel – Gaza conflict started on October 07th the Houthis took advantage of the situation, knowing that Yemeni people of all factions have unequivocal support for the Palestinian cause. The group involved themselves in the ongoing Gaza war. One reason that led them to align themselves with Palestine is that a few months before October, the Houthis were facing growing popular discontent because of the economic deterioration. In the past, the group used the excuse of the coalition restrictions on Sana’a airport and the port of Hodeidah as an excuse, but that was not possible after the April 2022 truce resulted in the lifting of these restrictions (Shuja Al-Deen 2024).

The Houthis utilized all their resources and media platforms to advocate for the Palestinian cause. They also declared that Yemenis should be proud of their role in the conflict. Moreover, during Friday prayers, the sermons were focused on portraying Abdulmalek al-Houthi as the righteous ruler sent by God to ensure victory for Yemenis¹². Furthermore, civil society groups in Houthi-controlled areas mobilized protests, urged people to join the battle, and praised the Red Sea Operations the rebel group was conducting (Yemen TV, 2024). The rebel groups launched a series of solidarity campaigns, most done in Al-Sabeen Square in Sana’a, such as “You Are Not Alone” (Saba Net 2024). At the end of these rallies and marches, the chant of “We delegate to you” the ‘you’ here is Abdulmalik Al-Houthi the rebel leader. This chant can constitute an oral collective acclamation to Al-Houthi, legitimizing his authority and the rule of the group (Rushdi 2024).

¹² Friday Prayer Sermon, Al-Khulafa’a Mosque, Sana’a, January 19, 2024.



Image 3

Source: Al-Masirah TV

Supporters of the Houthis hold Palestinian and Yemeni flags during a rally in Al-Sabeen Square

Finally, they also used the October 7 event to launch financial campaigns such as “Al-Quds is Closer,” also known as “Our Money Protects Al-Quds,” to raise funds and collect donations allegedly for Palestine. For instance, the General Authority for Zakat raised nearly 1.4 billion Yemeni Rials and allegedly gave it to Hamas leadership in Gaza (General Authority of Zakat, 2023).

Legitimacy allows the state and non-state actors to manoeuvre the public, justify policy mistakes, and engage in unpopular undertakings (Levi 2018, 603). Rebel groups cannot rely on formal sources of legitimation that the state has and need to rely on other tactics. Here, discourse can help non-state armed groups win approval amongst their different audiences and overcome their legitimacy dilemmas (Krieger 2018, 564-565). With legitimacy and discourse, rebels can mobilize popular support and recruitment campaigns, influencing their resilience. In the next section, I will use my theories to reflect on the findings and showcase how they, alongside the concepts, have answered my research question.

4.4 Theoretical Reflections

In this section, I will reflect on how the paper drew insights from the three key theories of rebel governance, discourse, and rational choice theories to describe how wartime social order, greed, and legitimacy contributed to the resilience of the Houthi rebels and played a role in prolonging the ongoing conflict in Yemen between 2017 and 2023. The rebel governance theory illustrated how Houthi governance structures regulated their controlled territories' social, political, and economic life. Through the wartime social order, I explored the

sophisticated supervisory system the Houthis created to administer civilian relations and create order and predictability in the everyday lives of citizens. It also fostered a social contract showing what services the Houthis were offering and the expectation of citizens receiving them. This governance structure and the integration it offered have been crucial in maintaining the Houthis' resilience by securing civilian support, resources, and legitimacy.

Then, through discourse and the notion of legitimacy, I explained how the Houthis utilized narratives and strategically used discursive approaches to emphasize perceived injustices, mobilize support, glorify their cause, and legitimize violence, for instance, their Palestine support rallies and campaigns which they knew would resonate well with the general public of Yemen and perhaps even create a new collective identity that allows those who oppose their previous actions to see them in a new light. All that can factor in strengthening the movement and making it more resilient. Finally, I used the rational choice theory and the notion of greed to show how the Houthi movement was greed-motivated by exploring the different methods they used to extort financial means both in the short term, such as the khumus and the long term, like the establishment of private businesses to generate a steady income. I also explored how greed created internal competition, further proving the motives behind their rebellion. All in all, greed shows the rebels' ability to exploit resources and maximize utility. It can be an essential factor in resilience because it offers the funding and motivation to continue this rebellion.

This section reflected on how the governance, discourse, and rational choice theories, along with their associated concepts of wartime social order, greed, and legitimacy, factor in resilience and answer the research question, as I will demonstrate in this paper's next and final chapter. Additionally, I will highlight the contributions this research has made to the literature on rebel resilience. Finally, I will explore possible future directions for research on this topic.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, I explored the factors that contributed to the Houthi rebel resilience in Yemen from 2017 to 2023 by using the lenses of rebel governance, discourse and rational choice theory, and the concepts of wartime social order, legitimacy, and discourse respectively, with the objectives of first explaining how these theories and concept play a role in reinforcing rebel resilience and answering the research question: *How did wartime social order, legitimacy, and greed factor in the resilience of the Houthi rebels and the continuation of the conflict in Yemen between 2017 and 2023?*

In the rebel governance theory, I mainly used the work of Arjona (2014) and Revkin and Ahram (2020) to define what rebel governance is, the objective it serves, such as regulating the social life of civilians, and the importance of establishing governance structure. I explored this importance through the concept of wartime social order, which shows how wartime institutions, rebel institutions in my case, can offer a parallel state structure and the rule of law and craft a social contract that brings order through predictability, which can be an important governance technique. I illustrated how, through the informal Supreme Political Council and its supervisory system, the Houthi were able to cover different categories, each covering one important aspect of governance, such as the social apparatus governed by social supervisors that connected the Houthis to civilians and civil society organization such as tribal leaders, were able to create divide and rule system that marginalized important social actors such as Sheikh Al Qabila (the tribal chief) as well as weaken his authority and power. Establishing wartime social order and rebel institutions can help rebels maintain control, engage and build relationships with civilians, and legitimize their movement, factors that all play a role in strengthening rebel resilience. However, to establish governance, rebels need to be motivated to start a movement; the rational choice theory explains that.

In rational choice theory, I mainly referred to the work of Demmers (2017) and Paul and Collier (1999 and 2004), which starts with the assumption that individuals are rational agents who act based on their self-interest, so when they see a situation where the benefits outweigh the costs, they will tap into their well of being utility maximisers. Here, benefits go beyond the monetary material and can motivate rebels to start a movement. Movements can be greed or grievance-based, which led me to use the notion of greed through Collier Hoeffler's model to determine what motivated the Houthis. Greed-based rebellions offer an opportunity to extort the available financial resources essential to sustain a rebellion, either by funding the movement or pocketing the money for its leadership. The Houthis implemented various ways

to gain revenue, some of which they used to finance their war, such as the customs taxation fees, and others pocketed by their leadership, like the khumus. These revenue-generating tactics also sparked competition amongst the group. They caused a rift between the fighters on the frontline and their fellow village members working in the Houthi institutions in Sana'a. The different companies and businesses Houthi individuals own show a pattern of greed in the movement, which could motivate them to avoid any commitment to deals that can suspend the conflict. The availability of financial resources allows the movement to maintain momentum, and the individual motivation to maximize profit for self-interest gives the movement a reason to stay resilient and benefit from ongoing conflict. Even though greed is a motivator, rebels still need legitimacy to manoeuvre their relationship with the public, which leads rebel groups to utilize discourse to achieve that.

Finally, using the work of Jabri (1996) and Schroder and Schmidt (2001), I explained how discourse could involve the manipulation of information as rebels can use a form of strategic conduct that can develop deeply ingrained dominant realities to legitimize violence through generating meaning behind struggles, sacrifice, and death for noble acts. I also investigated the elements that feed discursive imaginaries, such as narratives, which can be formed as one type of violent imaginaries to legitimize war from a moral and historical perspective. All that was then expanded upon through the concept of legitimacy, which showed how the Houthis used the Israel-Gaza conflict to create a collective identity by creating a narrative of being the defenders of Palestine and reinforcing that with rallies and protests that can be seen as performances and displays of military parades that included the new graduates of Toufan Al-Aqsa (Al-Aqsa flood) brigades. With this, the Houthis could mobilize popular support and possibly legitimize themselves.

All this explains how the three factors of rebel governance, rational choice theory, and discourse explored from wartime social order, greed, and legitimacy, respectively, contribute to rebel resilience and sufficiently answer the research question: How do rebel governance, rational choice, and discourse contribute to the resilience of the Houthi rebels and the continuation of the conflict in Yemen between 2017 and 2023? This thesis demonstrated the factors that contributed to the Houthi rebellion, highlighting multiple reasons why the group still exists and why the conflict in Yemen is still ongoing. However, the area of rebel resilience is broad, and researchers can explore it from other angles; for instance, future research can explore the role of indoctrination in the recruitment and mobilization of Youth in areas controlled by non-state actors. The Houthis, for example, conduct an indoctrination camp in

the areas under their control called ‘Al Huda summer program’ programs for kids aged seven to fifteen in mosques and schools to indoctrinate them with Houthi religious ideas, see image 5 (Miller 2023). They then use their media channel, Al Masirah, to interview these youths. In one interview, a kid aged ten years old said:

We are your ballistic missiles my Sayyid Abdulmalik Al-Houthi, shoot us at all your targets, in the skies land or seas (Al Masirah Tv, Al Huda Summer Program 2024).

Finally, this thesis also touched upon the Houthis fluidity of identities as a manoeuvring tactic to be more influential and accepted amongst different social groups. It also discussed the creation of a collective identity through the discourse of defending Palestine, which a wider Yemeni audience can accept. These two contribute to the debate and literature on rebel resilience and can be investigated and applied in other non-state movements.



Image 4

Source: AlMasirah Tv

Children shouting the Houthi Slogan "God is great, death to America, death to Israel, curse the Jews, and victory for Islam"

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