

Teim



TEIM Election Watch Analysis

ELECTORAL REPORT:

YEMEN/Presidential and Local Elections
20 September 2006

Leyla Hamad Zahonero

Last revision: 11 February 2009

Election Watch
Taller de Estudios Internacionales Mediterráneos
Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

www.election-watch.org

ISSN: in procedure

www.election-watch.org

Background of the elections:

The 20 September elections were notable for three main circumstances:

First of all, although these were not the first direct presidential elections held in the country,¹ they were the first elections in which the President of the Republic, Ali Abdallah Saleh, had to face a true opponent. Unlike the events of 1999, when Saleh competed for the presidency against a member of his own party, in 2006, the five candidates in the running included at least one, Faisal bin Shamlan, who, due to his relative popular support and his recognised opposition to the regime, represented a real and credible alternative to Saleh's power.

On 17 July 2006, another of the events that marked the evolution of the electoral process took place. President Ali Abdullah Saleh, on the twenty-seventh anniversary of his rise to power, publicly announced that he would not seek re-election.² The reactions to this news were very uneven. While some analysts congratulated him on his voluntary retirement (considering this to be a landmark in modern Arab history and a model to be followed in the region), other more sceptical analysts saw Saleh's announcement as an election strategy and expressed from the start their suspicion that his retirement would actually occur. Months later and after a succession of demonstrations in which supposed sympathisers of the president asked him to continue in politics, Saleh declared his candidacy. This fact, on one hand, led many of the politicians who had announced their intention to seek the presidency not to register as candidates in the end and, on the other, generated a sense of frustration among the electorate in the face of their belief that with Saleh running, there would be no political change. The subsequent lack of motivation had an impact on the participation rates.

Finally, at the beginning of June, the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), the most important opposition group in Yemen, threatened to boycott the elections to protest the voter registration process and what it understood to be partisan activities by the Supreme Commission for Elections and Referendum (SCER) in favour of the government party in the crisis. In order to avoid a boycott that would have delegitimised the election, a series of negotiations took place between the governing party, the General People's Congress (GPC) and the JMP which ended with their signing the 18 June Agreement.³ The agreement was highly representative of the political climate for two reasons: first, it revealed the latent state of mistrust in the JMP with respect to the SCER and second, it was a clear expression of the intention of both the government and the opposition to participate in a clean and peaceful election.

¹ In 1999, direct presidential elections were held in Yemen for the first time. In those elections, President Saleh won 96.20% of the vote while his rival, Najib Qahtan al-Shabi, won 3.80%.

² Ali Abdullah Saleh words were the following, "I will not run for office in the next elections, out of conviction, not because of any outside pressure [...] I want you to look for someone who can lead the march, either from the GPC or from the opposition. Our country is rich with young blood that can lead the country. Let's transfer power peacefully among ourselves". Citation taken from al-Ahram Weekly No. 752, 21-27, July 2005, (consulted September 2006).

³ The most important points in the agreement are: increased participation by the parties in the election commission, a compromise regarding the neutrality of the security forces, the military and the media as well as a commitment to eradicate the abusive use of state resources by the party in power.

Regarding the local elections, it should be noted that, according to the legal calendars, they should have been held in 2004. However, they were delayed until 2006 without any official explanation.

The 20 September elections were technically the most complicated of any held in Yemen,⁴ since the elections for the Presidency and two levels of the Local Councils (governorate and administrative districts) took place on the same day.

It is also important to note that, although the violence recorded during the electoral campaign led to 8 dead and 45 wounded,⁵ the 20 September elections were relatively peaceful ones. This is especially true bearing in mind Yemen's historical trajectory and the numbers of deaths in earlier elections.⁶ The political discourse during the campaign maintained a high degree of aggressiveness, reaching its culmination when President Saleh accused his rival Faisal bin Shamlan of having connections with international terrorism after his bodyguard was arrested for his supposed ties with Al-Qaeda. For his part, bin Shamlan, a person of renowned honesty in Yemen, focused his campaign on corruption and presented himself as 'the anti-corruption candidate'.

Due to security, technical and/or legal problems, it was not possible to hold the elections in all 152 polling places. 19 December was designated to hold some supplementary elections to complete the election process for the Local Councils. That day was also used to elect two deputies – one in Taiz and another in Hodeida – who replaced two representatives who had died shortly before.

Quantitative indices of democracy:

Yemen was classified in the following democratic performance rankings just before the elections:

Measurement	Name and year of report or database	Institution	Index	Points, ranking and classification
Political rights and freedom	Freedom House Report 2006	Freedom House (FH)	PR: political rights CL: civil liberties	PR: 5, CL: 5 (Scale of 1, free to 7, not free) Classification: Partly free
Degree of democracy in earlier elections	Polyarchy 2.0 2002	Peace Research Institute of Oslo and Tatu Vanhanen	ID: Synthetic democracy index, Part: participation, Comp: competition	ID: 3.88 max. 49 Part: 18.8, max. 70 Comp: 20.65, max. 70 (Democracy minimum: ID: 5, Part: 10, Comp: 30) Classification: Does not surpass democracy minimum

⁴ These were not the first simultaneous elections. In 2001, two different elections were held on the same day, but since one of them was a referendum, it did not entail the same degree of technical difficulty.

⁵ Data taken from NewsYemen, "SCER: 45 election centres cancelled and 8 deaths", 22 September 2006, available at http://www.news Yemen.net/en/view_news.asp?sub_no=3_2006_09_22_6356 (consulted February 2007).

⁶ The bloodiest elections in Yemen include the 2001 elections when 47 deaths were recorded in connection with the elections.

Consolidation of authoritarian and democratic institutions	Polity IV 2004	Center for International Development and Conflict Management, Univ. of Maryland	Democracy: consolidation of democratic institutions Autocracy: authoritarian consolidation Polity: synthesis of both	Democracy: 1 Autocracy: 3 Polity: +/-: -2 (Scale of +10, very democratic to -10, very authoritarian) Classification: Weakly anti-democratic
Perception of corruption	Transparency International Corruption Perception Index 2005	Transparency International (TI)	TICPI: corruption perceptions index	TCPI: 2.7 points out of 10, (Scale of 1, very corrupt to 10, not at all corrupt) Rank: 103 out of 163 countries
Management of political and economic change	Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) 2006	Bertelsmann Foundation	MI: Management index, quality of transformation management	MI: 3.87 points out of 10, Rank: 86 out of 119 countries Classification: Management with moderate success
Democracy, including press status and corruption	World Democracy Audit 2006	World Audit	World Democracy Rank: political freedom (FH) + press and corruption (TI)	World Democracy Rank: 132 out of 150 countries, division 4 out of 4

Quantitative analysis of electoral democracy:

The elections analysed in this profile produced the following electoral democracy quantitative results:

Degree of democracy in these elections ⁷	Measurement of democracy in these elections according to the Polyarchy 2.0 index, calculated by TEIM Election Watch	ID: 6.45, max. 49 Part: 27.10 ⁸ , max. 70 Comp: approx. 22.83 ⁹ , max. 70 (Democracy minimum: ID: 5, Part: 10, Comp: 30)	Classification of elections: Non-democratic
---	---	---	--

Definition of the electoral system:

Yemen is a semi-presidential republic in which the political system is structured and dominated by an economic-military-tribal complex.¹⁰

⁷ This calculation was only made for the presidential elections.

⁸ Participation was calculated based on a population of 22,230,531 according to the July 2006 census and the participation of 6,025,818 voters.

⁹ Competition was calculated adding the percentages of the votes for the losing candidates in the first and only round of the presidential election.

¹⁰ 'Military-economic-tribal complex' is a concept coined by Paul Dresch used to designate a complex but effective client network made up of high military leaders, prominent businessmen and tribes, all of which together maintain support for the current President of the Republic. Paul Dresch, "The tribal factor in the Yemeni crisis", en al-Suwaidi, *The Yemeni War of 1994: Causes and Consequences*, London, Saqi Books, 1995, p 34.

The President of the Republic is constitutionally the Head of State and principal holder of executive power. Since 1999, elections for the position have been held with universal suffrage in direct, free and equal elections. The presidential term is for 7 years and has been limited to two terms since 2001, when the latest set of amendments was approved.

The current President of the Republic, Ali Abdallah Saleh, has been in power for nearly 28 years: 12 years as the head of the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR, also known as North Yemen) and 16 as the President of the Republic of Yemen (unified Yemen). As a candidate in the last two presidential elections held in Yemen (1999, 2006), he won both by large majorities. The latest of his victories in September 2006 guaranteed his place in power until 2013, when he will have completed 35 years as the leader of his country. This will be Saleh's last term since he has already been elected President of the Republic twice and the Constitution limits the same candidate to two presidential terms.

Definition of the electoral system and the parties:

Yemen has a simple plurality or 'first-past-the-post' voting system for local and parliamentary elections and a two-round system for presidential elections.¹¹ The required threshold, therefore, is an absolute majority for the Presidency and a simple majority for election to the Local Councils and Parliament. The Constitution guarantees free, multi-party presidential and parliamentary elections and the 2001 General Elections and Referendum Law extended this provision to Local Councils.

There are more than twenty political parties in Yemen although only five of them have parliamentary representation at this time.¹² Over the last few years, Yemeni politics has been dominated by two political forces: the ruling GPC party created in 1984 in the old YAR with a tribal-liberal orientation and the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), a coalition formed in 2002 that contains the main opposition parties.¹³ There is a third coalition of parties, the National Opposition Front, but none of the political groups that are part of it has parliamentary representation and therefore it does not play a very important political role in the Yemeni political process.

The election results are filed and published by the SCER. Their webpage contains a highly detailed report of everything from election results to the accords for the last elections. Voting is not mandatory in Yemen and anyone who wishes to vote must register to do so.

¹¹ The names of the electoral systems are those used by IDEA, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. For details, see the Electoral System Design on their webpage: <http://www.idea.int/esd/world.cfm>

¹² The parties with parliamentary representation are: the GPC with 229 seats, the Islamic Reform Grouping (Islah) with 45 seats, the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) with 7 seats, the Nasserite Unionist Party with 3 seats and the National Arab Socialist Ba'th Party with 2 seats. Different independent deputies make up the rest of the 301 seats.

¹³ The parties that make up the Joint Meeting Parties are: Islah, YSP, NUP, the Ba'th, the al-Haqq Party (The Truth) and the Public Forces Union.

Impact of the electoral procedure and size of the constituency on the elections:

According to Article 5 of the Elections Law, the election of the President of the Republic takes place in one national district. The law stipulates that the winning candidate is the one who wins an absolute majority of the valid votes.

At this time, Yemen is divided into 20 governorates, plus the district of the capital, Sanaa,¹⁴ 333 administrative districts and 5,620 polling constituencies. The Local Councils are elected at two levels: governorate and administrative. In the 20 September election, it is calculated that there were around 7,000 local seats at stake. Each governorate Council had between 15 and 30 councillors and each administrative Council between 18 and 30 depending on their demographic weight. The councillors for both assemblies had to be chosen in the more than 5,600 polling constituencies. While most of the districts were single-member, around 820 were proportional districts with between 2 and 12 councillors being elected in them.

The SCER is responsible for setting the boundaries of the electoral constituencies that, according to the law, must be 'equal in population' although 'a +/- 5% margin of error is permitted'.¹⁵ In addition to the principle of demographic equality,¹⁶ the Election Law specifies that when delimiting the constituencies, other types of geographic and social considerations must be borne in mind.¹⁷

The establishment of Raymah as a new governorate was a particularly important development in the establishment of administrative divisions for the 2006 elections.

Election results:

Participation: Registered voters: 9,247,370 (September 2006)
Men: 5,346,805
Women: 3,900,565

¹⁴ Although the capital, Sanaa, is not a governorate, it is considered as such for electoral purposes.

¹⁵ Article 64 of the Constitution.

¹⁶ Table listing the number of polling conscriptions according to the demographic weight of the administrative division.

Population of the administrative division	Number of districts
35,000 or less	18
35,000 – 75,000	20
75,000 – 150,000	26
150,000 or more	30

Source, "Yemen: Assessing the Feasibility of Computer-Assisted Delimitation" from the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, available at www.aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/bd/bdy/bdy_ye/ (consulted October 2006).






¹⁷ Although the Constitution and the Elections Law require the SCER to redesign the boundaries of the constituencies after each electoral census, it has often been the case that the group has not been able to redraw them within the deadlines established by the law since tensions and discrepancies between the political parties when naming the members of the SCER have delayed the process. In this case, then, despite the fact that there is a legal framework that correctly regulates the electoral process, it is the political parties that end up distorting the system with their discrepancies and lack of consensus.

Total population: 22,230,531 (July 2006 census)

Presidential results: Total number of votes: 6,025,818
 Number of valid votes: 5,377,238
 Number of invalid votes: 648,580 (Percentage: 3.2%)
 Participation: 65.16% (Registered voters)
 Number of candidates requesting place on the ballot: 64.
 Female candidates requesting place on the ballot: 2
 Number of candidates approved: 5
 Approved female candidates: 0

Local results: Governorate level: Participation: 63.8%
 Percentage of invalid votes: 5.6%
 Number of candidates: 1,634
 Men: 1,612
 Women: 22

Administrative district level: Participation: 64.4%
 Percentage of invalid votes: 4.6%
 Number of candidates: 19,027
 Men: 18,902
 Women: 125

Votes won	4,149,673	1,173,025	24,524	21,642	8,324
Percentage	77.17 %	21.82%	0.46%	0.40%	0.15%
Party logo					
Candidate	Ali Abdullah Saleh GPC	Faisal Bin Shamlan JMP	Fathi al-Azab Independent	Yasin Abdo Said CNPO	Ahmed al-Majedi Independent

Results from the 2006 elections

Results from the 1999-2006 presidential elections

Results from the 2006 presidential elections by governorate

Results from the 2006 local council elections at the governorate level

Results from the 2006 local council elections at the administrative district level

Registered voters by province. 2003-2006 comparative study

Evaluative analysis of the elections:

Participation:

There were 9,247,370 registered voters for this election, i.e, almost 1,150,000 million more than for the elections held in 2003 for which there were 8,097,495 registered voters. According to the data from SCER, the participation rate in the election was 65.13% for the presidential election and 63.8% for the local elections on the governorate level and 64.4% on the administrative district level. As the tables show, the participation percentages varied significantly from

region to region.¹⁸ Of particular interest are the low levels of participation in the southern provinces like Abyan, Lahij, Adan and Shabwah, where opposition to the government is especially active and where the opposition candidate, Faisal bin Shamlan, obtained the best results.

On the other hand, it was surprising that President Ali Abdullah Saleh obtained 91.2% of the vote in Sa'dah, given that it is the governorate in which sporadic but bloody, serious clashes have been taking place between the army and local followers of the cleric Zaydi Al-Huzi since 2004. In general, an important aspect of the election results in Yemen is that they are measured according to the number of registered voters. The issue of the role of women was also an important one in this election, beginning with their registration: the percentage of registered women voters was 42.2%. Despite the intense campaign undertaken by SCER to encourage women to register, their number did not surpass that of the parliamentary elections in 2003. In tribal regions like Sa'dah, Ma'rib and Al Jawf, the percentage of registered women voters was particularly low (26.6%, 33.8% and 34.8%, respectively).

Competition:

64 candidates for president sought a place on the ballot. Of these, 14 were rejected because they did not meet the requirements.¹⁹ Only five of the rejected candidates made a formal complaint to the Supreme Court, although none of their pleas were successful. With respect to the 46 candidates that did meet the requirements, only 5 were endorsed by the Parliament and the Shura Council.²⁰ These five candidates were: Ali Abdullah Saleh, the current President and official candidate of the GPC, who received 237 votes, Faisal bin Shamlan, the JMP candidate, who won 51 votes, the CNPO's Yassin Abdo Sabed Noaman, with 33 votes, Ahmed A. Majeed al-Majidi, an independent candidate from the Socialist Party, who won 31 votes and Fathi Mohamed al-Azab, an independent candidate from Islah, who received 22 votes.

For the first time in Yemeni history, two women formally completed their bid for the presidency.²¹ However, neither of the two women obtained sufficient support to run in the elections. Rashida al-Qaili received 3 votes, i.e., 0.78% of the support of both houses while Thikra Ahmed Ali won only 0.48% with 2 votes.

One important aspect of this election is that, unlike in 1999 when President Saleh competed for the presidency against a member of his own party, in 2006 he faced real competition.

With respect to the election to the Local Councils, the SCER announced that 20,513 candidates ran for office. Of these, 1,612 competed for the 431 positions in the Local Councils on a governorate level and 18,901 for the 6,896

¹⁸ Note the difference between the 50.1% participation rate in the presidential election in the governorate of Abyan versus 77.1% in Hajjah and 44.7% at the administrative district level in the local elections in Al Jawf versus 72.4% for Sanaa.

¹⁹ The constitutional requirements to be a candidate for the presidency are: to be a descendent of Yemeni parents, be free to practice political and civil rights, be of good character, meet Islamic religious obligations, have no disgraceful criminal background and not be married or become married to a foreign citizen during the election cycle.

²⁰ According to the Constitution, the only candidates who can present themselves to the electorate are those who have obtained at least a 5% endorsement of the Shura Council and Parliament in a joint session. Of the 412 votes (111 from the Shura Council and 301 from the Parliament), the minimum number of votes needed to reach 5% is 21.

²¹ In the 1999 elections, one woman announced her candidacy but did not complete the legal paperwork in the end.

administrative district level posts.²² There is no record of the number of candidates who were rejected by the local committees; nor is the exact number of candidates who voluntarily withdrew their candidacy known, although the leading reports from international watch missions (IFES, EU and NDI) calculate that the figure was between 3,500 and 4,000 candidates, i.e., 17% to 19% of the bids that were initially presented. All of the reports from the watch groups consulted, as well as various national newspapers, agreed in their reports that there were cases in which political parties, independent candidates and important community members pressured local candidates to withdraw their candidacies. This phenomenon especially affected women, a particularly serious issue given the fact that only 1% of the candidates for the Local Councils were women.

Transparency:

International watch missions in Yemen reported some irregularities that took place during the election day. These cases included interference with absentee votes, unsupervised assistance to illiterate voters, the presence of illegal banners in the areas around the polling centres, irregularities in signing records and the vote recount. However, the reports agree that these irregularities were limited to particular places and at no time were they serious or very serious.

However, during the process of publishing the results from the local elections, serious irregularities did occur. Despite the fact that the law stipulates that the results must be made public immediately, the final results for all of the governorates were not known until 9 October. And although governorate results were delivered for the local elections on 25 September, i.e., 5 days after the deadline, they only covered 17 of the 21 governorates.

For the presidential elections, the results were made public within the legal deadline (72 hours after the polls close). However, the report from the EU watch group revealed an anomaly in their publication since the final results published on 26 September differed from the governorate and partial results officially announced to the mission on 22 September. Among the main differences in the EU report, the most important were some small variations in the number of votes obtained by the candidates and an important decrease in the percentage of invalid votes (from 10.7% announced on the 22nd to 3.2% today). Even thus, the report itself emphasised that these variations did not affect or modify the final result.²³

Party representation and debate during the election:

Yemen has often had independent candidates. Both in the presidential elections and in the parliamentary and local elections, the number of independent candidates is usually quite high. This phenomenon had a double impact on this election. On one hand, it made it possible for any individuals who wanted to make a bid to be a candidate to do so, by-passing the filters of the political parties (which are often only tentatively democratic) and on the other hand, it favoured the fragmentation of the vote. One single party can present two official candidates (as occurred in 1999 with the candidacies of Saleh and

²² Data taken from the official SCER webpage.

²³ "Yemen Final Report. Presidential and Local Council Elections, 20 September 2006"

European Union Election Observation Mission, Yemen 2006, p.33. Available at:

http://www.ec.europa.eu/external_relations/human_rights/eu_election_ass_observ/yemen/final_report_2006_en.pdf

Qahtan), can present one official candidate while another member of the party runs as an independent (the case with the YSP in the 2006 election in which Shamlan ran as the official JMP candidate while the party president Yasin Abdo Said Noman ran as an independent candidate) or not present any candidate and endorse an opposition candidate.

In the case of the 20 September elections, something notable took place: despite the fact that Islah (as an integral part of the JMP) presented the candidacy of Faisal bin Shamlan, the party president and also President of the Parliament and *sheik* of the Hashid tribal confederation, Abdallah bin Hussain al-Ahmar, publicly supported the candidacy of the President of the Republic, Ali Abdallah Saleh, thus damaging the candidacy of the candidate who his political party officially endorsed. Furthermore, the second most important person in the Islah party, Sheik Abd al-Majid al-Zindani, decided to endorse Saleh's candidacy. In Yemen these crossover endorsements are not unusual, and in fact, on the contrary, this is a country in which backstage tribal alliances are usually more solid than party loyalties.²⁴

With respect to the campaign, the Elections Law is very strict regarding regulation. In this respect, issues like financing, political meetings, debates and the times and spaces for election promotion and presentation in the media are closely regulated by Yemeni legislation. According to the law, each candidate must receive the same amount of public funds to underwrite election campaign expenses. In the specific case of the 20 September presidential election, this amount was 25 million Yemeni rials (roughly €100,000). All the presidential candidates received this sum except for one, Fathi Mohammed al-Azab, to whom the SCER refused to pay half the amount, with the excuse that he endorsed another candidate in the middle of the campaign.

The law confers upon the SCER two extremely important powers regarding the election. First, it allows it to regulate the calendars so that the candidates can hold at least one political meeting in each governorate capital on equal terms and second, it is granted control of the government media and assigned the task of supervising and approving everything that is published in the media regarding the elections. Here, with the exception of incidental occurrences, the measures were generally respected. Despite the fact that there were some small violations in the agreements and some irregularities in the time dedicated to the candidates in the media, it is important to note that, as the director of the *Yemen Mirror*, Mohammed al-Asaadi, noted, "the fact that the opposition leaders criticised the government and the President himself on public television and radio means great advancement and progress".²⁵

Openness:

The approval of several candidates by Parliament and the Shura Council and the fact that at least one of them, Faisal bin Shamlan, had relative popular support, a recognised career as an opponent and politician and a candidacy backed by the most important opposition force in Yemen, guaranteed that there

²⁴ "As always in Yemen, it is important to remember that, while political parties are not purely ornamental, behind-the-scenes alliances of tribe and kinship mean much more than party loyalty" in Gregory Johnsen "The Election Yemen was Supposed to Have", 3 October 2006. Available at Merip Online at <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero100306.html> (consulted March 2007).

²⁵ Statement taken from "Media Freedom Hampered During Yemen Presidential Elections, but Democratic Progress Recorded" *The Egyptian Organization for Human Rights* (EOHR), Cairo, 6 November 2006, available at <http://www.eohr.org> (consulted March 2007).

would be real competition between at least two of the contenders for the presidency. However, the fact that Ali Abdullah Saleh ran for office inevitably undercut any possible equality between the government party and the opposition. This was not a surprise, since Saleh had a wide and efficient network of clients that he had managed to put together after 28 years in power. From the time that Saleh's candidacy was confirmed, there was no doubt that he would win the election.

In the elections to the Local Councils, and unlike what occurred in 2001 when the three main parties (GPC, Islah and YSP) made a pact to distribute the seats, there was real competition in the 2006 election.

Once again, and as in earlier elections, women were significantly marginalised in the elections. The fact that neither of the two women presidential candidates acquired sufficient support from Parliament and the Shura Council to run in the election and that many of the women candidates for the Local Councils were pressured to withdraw their candidacies is still one of the most negative aspects of the election.

Furthermore, and despite all the regulations in Yemeni law intended to create equal opportunities between the candidates, and despite the efforts of the SCER, there was no real fairness during the election campaign. The abuse of state resources by the party in power was, indeed, one of the most common complaints in all of the reports by the international watch groups. The most important abuses included placing election banners and posters on government buildings and vehicles, the use of state facilities to hold events and the disproportionate presence of security forces and measures in the acts held by the GPC. All of these abusive, partisan actions managed to undercut the balance of fairness in favour of the party in power. The SCER, for its part, did not know how or could not prevent these abuses (also very much a part of the local elections), despite the fact that this was one of the points agreed upon in the 18 June Agreement.²⁶

Significance:

Given the broad powers of the President of the Republic in Yemen, the announcement of presidential elections is always of great importance in the country's political process since, directly or indirectly, the President has significant power to impact the system. But, more than that, the 2006 elections were especially important for two reasons. First, they were the first presidential elections after the approval of the latest group of constitutional amendments in 2001 that extended of the president's term from 5 to 7 years and increased the power of the President and the Shura Council (a non-elected institution whose members are hand-picked by the President of the Republic). Secondly, and as noted above, this was the first election in which there was a real alternative to the power of the President.

The local elections are less important in Yemen in comparison with the parliamentary and presidential elections. However, due to the degree of decentralisation and the powers currently in the hands of the Local Councils, they

²⁶ For a deeper look at the topic of the abuse of state resources, we recommend the NDI report, since it includes very illustrative graphs showing the presence of army forces and government employees in different candidates' meetings. "Report on the 2006 Presidential and Local Council Elections in the Republic of Yemen" *National Democratic Institute for International Affairs*. Nov 2006. Pp. 12-3. Available at http://www.accessdemocracy.org/library/2152_ye_report_elections_042407.pdf

are significant. Nevertheless, the fact that some of the main positions in the Councils are still personally chosen by the President of the Republic takes credibility and relevance away from the process.

International political reactions and implications:

Most of the election watch reports noted that of all of the countries on the Arab Peninsula, Yemen is most committed to promoting and developing democracy and considered it "an important potential model for democratic development in the region".²⁷ This status of being the 'model to follow' was the main reason that the Yemeni presidential elections aroused international interest.

Until fairly recently, Yemen had fallen into isolation after winning the enmity of the international community when, in 1990, it voted in the UN Security Council against economic sanctions against Iraq for its invasion of Kuwait. One decade later, in 2001, Yemen definitively left its isolation behind when it signed a border agreement with Saudi Arabia, thus ending the tense relations with its neighbouring country, and when it tightened and improved bilateral relations with the USA, it moved from being a rogue state to becoming an ally. Until that time, Yemen and the democratic process that it had been undergoing since unification in 1990 had been broadly ignored by both international powers and by neighbouring countries.

At this time, the dynamic has reversed and the regional trajectory of the democratic process in Yemen has drawn international interest. Many countries and institutions have sent watch groups to cover events there and some institutions like the NDI even have headquarters and their own programme in the country.²⁸

In the case of Spain, our country has never shown interest in the democratic process in Yemen. Moreover, during the 20 September elections, none of the leading Spanish newspapers published any news relating to the Yemeni elections.

Conclusions:

The presidential and local elections on 20 September 2006 were a landmark in the democratic history of the country, as all of the international watch reports emphasised. It is important to bear in mind that these elections were not only the most technically complex elections ever held in Yemen, but that furthermore, for the first time in the history of its democracy, presidential elections were held in which there was real competition and in which President Saleh, in power for 28 years, had to face a rival from the opposition. The SCER, along with different international and national institutions and groups, had been working for a long time to improve the deficiencies and problems that the Yemeni system had revealed in earlier elections, and this joint effort was tangible

²⁷ "Yemen Final Report. Presidential and Local Council Elections, 20 September 2006" *European Union Election Observation Mission, Yemen 2006*. P. 4. Available at http://www.ec.europa.eu/external_relations/human_rights/eu_election_ass_observ/yemen/final_report_2006_en.pdf

²⁸ The NDI has had a specialised programme in Yemen since 1993 and its own headquarters in the country since 1997.

from the very beginning. Moreover, and despite the undeniable climate of mistrust that reigned over the main political forces during the pre-election period, the fact that they agreed to negotiate and sign the 18 June Agreement is solid proof of the good will and mutual commitment to carry out free, open and peaceful elections.

Despite the achievements of these elections, the Yemeni system continues to suffer serious deficiencies. On one hand, the fact that the government party continues to abuse state resources and that the SCER has not managed to find mechanisms to prevent this is one of the most obvious failures in this election. Furthermore, the registration process must be improved and deadlines must be set for delimiting the constituencies and for contesting them in order to correct any errors with time to spare. Moreover, and in order to guarantee the transparency of the process of publishing the election results, not only must presentation deadlines be respected, but the data offered must be thorough – even if they are provisional – in order to avoid any suspicions.

Probably the greatest failure of the 20 September elections was the marginalisation of women candidates. They were excluded from the presidential elections by Parliament and by the Shura Council when they did not receive sufficient backing to run for election. They were also subjected to pressure and harassed in local elections. The incorporation of women into the election process as candidates and as voters continues to be one of the pending impediments to democracy in Yemen.

Finally, regarding the electoral system, it is clear that given the broad powers of the President of the Republic, the term cannot be extended to 7 years and that presidential elections must be held more often. However, an amendment of this nature is currently being proposed along with one to reduce parliamentary terms to 4 years and one guaranteeing a quota of women representatives by law.

References to other analyses of these elections on the Internet:

“Observation Manual for Political Parties and Local and International NGOs” test from the SCER available at

<http://www.scer.org.ye/english/observationmanual.htm>

“Post-Election Report on the 2006 Presidential and Local Council Elections in Yemen”. *IFES*. Nov 2006. Available at

<http://www.ifes.org/publication/be266fe0d59797a237434815ab984a64/FINAL%20ENG%20IFES%20Report%20on%202006%20elections.pdf>

“Report on the 2006 Presidential and Local Council Elections in the Republic of Yemen” *National Democratic Institute for International Affairs*. Nov 2006. Available at

http://www.accessdemocracy.org/library/2152_ye_report_elections_042407.pdf

“Yemen Final Report. Presidential and Local Council Elections, 20 September 2006” *European Union Election Observation Mission, Yemen 2006*. Available at

http://www.ec.europa.eu/external_relations/human_rights/eu_election_ass_obsrv/yemen/final_report_2006_en.pdf