

# SOCIAL MEDIA AND CONFLICT IN YEMEN



## A LEXICON OF HATE SPEECH TERMS



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The Peace Track Initiative (PTI) was established in October 2017 to institutionalize work that was ongoing since 2015. PTI is hosted at the Human Rights Research and Education Center at Ottawa University. It is a member of the Women, Peace, and Security Network-Canada. PTI was founded and is currently chaired by Rasha Jarhum. PTI aims at localizing and feminizing the peace process through promoting inclusion and knowledge leadership of excluded groups focusing on women. PTI employs a human rights-based approach to the peacebuilding process.

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# Introduction

This report is one of PeaceTech Lab's latest lexicons focused on social media and hateful speech in a particular country context. Since 2014, PeaceTech Lab has worked with local partners in countries throughout Africa and the Middle East to develop lexicons of hateful language and to better understand the dynamics of online hate speech and its potential correlations with offline violence. The Lab has pioneered a process to identify and contextualize inflammatory language that can lead to violence and has a growing portfolio of hate speech lexicons. The terms and phrases are identified and assessed by how 'offensive' and 'inflammatory' they are. In other words, the identified terms are considered offensive to specific ethnic, religious, racial, gender, national, or political groups and they have the potential to increase or spark violence in specific contexts. This research is part of the Lab's broader goal of addressing the gap between identifying and countering hate speech online and its impact on communities in conflict zones.

Yemen has been identified as a priority country for this work given the dire humanitarian situation and ongoing conflict since 2014. Conflict in Yemen plays out along various fault lines—regional, sectarian, class, political, tribal, and ethnic—which are reflected in the hateful language employed on and offline to incite violence. The sectarian aspect of conflict in Yemen is relatively new, as prior to 2011, “religious coexistence and intermingling was taken for granted by most Yemenis and seen as a normal feature of everyday life.”<sup>1</sup> But with the outbreak of conflict after the removal of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, “sectarian discourse has become more heated, reorganizing Yemeni society along sectarian lines and rearranging people's relationships to one another on a non-nationalist basis.”<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the social and political dynamics in Yemen have fostered a permissive environment for hate speech. According to information gathered from a community meeting held in Sana'a in 2015, “many leaders have normalized and legitimized antagonistic, exclusionary rhetoric to consolidate their power and dehumanize their enemies.”<sup>3</sup>

In terms of access to online networks, despite a weak telecommunications sector relative to other Middle Eastern countries, an estimated 90 percent of the Yemeni population has access to the internet through mobile phones and, as of 2015, 93 percent of internet users are on Facebook and 92 percent utilize WhatsApp.<sup>4</sup> The heavy saturation of these online communications networks highlights a growing need to understand and address the hate speech being spread within Yemen's complex context.

PeaceTech Lab's work on hateful speech aims to identify and contextualize the particular terms and phrases that have the potential to lead to violence. This project identifies relevant terms through on-the-ground information gathering and examines their origins, context, and usages in a particular country environment. *To successfully monitor and counter hateful speech, we must first identify specific terms and the social and political context that makes them offensive, inflammatory, and potentially dangerous.* The research also seeks to identify alternative terms that might be used to mitigate or replace this language and thereby contribute to building peace. Finally, this report is intended as a resource for individuals and organizations involved in monitoring and combatting hateful speech as well as those involved in conflict prevention and mitigation so that their work can be more effective. The Lab works with a large network of local organizations that have used these lexicons to inform and improve their efforts to address hate speech and prevent potential violence. Dozens of projects and initiatives have been launched by these local partners to counter hate speech in their communities. These lexicons also contribute to the overall body of knowledge on online hate speech to inform and improve other efforts around the globe, including the development of internal policies by social media companies and the use of monitoring software by activist organizations to track the use of hate speech. The Annexes at the end of the report include a description of the project's research methodology, challenges, and risks.



## The Lexicon

### Country Context: Conflict in Yemen

#### Introduction

Destabilization has been one of the most pressing challenges in Yemen. For the last century, many of Yemen's leaders have been overthrown, jailed, or killed as a result of various internal conflicts. These frequent conflicts at the local and regional level have resulted in continuous shifting of power, increasing fragmentation within the society, not to mention generating more ambition for power, revenge, and control over the country's resources. These conflicts have weakened the government and the Yemeni security apparatus meant to provide safety and security for the people.<sup>5</sup> This has resulted in citizens losing trust in the government and relying instead on whichever group is in control of their local area, ultimately enabling tribal, armed, and other political powers to gain influence over the areas in which they provide security.<sup>6</sup> The government has also allowed these groups to have more influence over its decision-making, hindering a healthy political system in Yemen where people are free to select who they believe best represents them rather than who has the most control.<sup>7</sup>

Yemen has a myriad of stakeholders—political parties/powers, tribes, and armed actors—who have frequently shifted alliances, contributing to a sense of uncertainty among the local population about who they should turn to when they face a challenge. This has been worsened by the fact that many of these powers have convinced local communities to support them by promising to provide basic services such as jobs, electricity, water, fuel, and security. Some stakeholders have exploited existing conflicts over land and water to their advantage by supporting one local community over another in exchange for a pledge of loyalty; this has



exacerbated many local conflicts and complicated their resolution. Even when the government has had the capacity to control the country, it instead prioritized the interests of select leaders and groups. Some of these leaders have taken advantage of demands for justice from marginalized and vulnerable groups, such as youth and women, as a way of legitimizing their control and gaining resources rather than ensuring equality and inclusion for such groups.

Corruption is not limited to the central government; it is also endemic within the military. When Ali Abdullah Saleh became president, he began appointing only relatives or his strongest allies as military leaders; eventually these leaders gained more power than governmental officials.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, soldiers have often received salaries through their leaders instead of through governmental channels, enabling leaders to increase or cut salaries as they chose. This allowed military leaders to misuse their powers, massively increase their budgets, and involved the military in conflicts aligned with their own personal interests.<sup>9</sup> As a result of this corruption, the pervasive neglect of the population's interests, and the failure to provide basic services, many Yemenis lost faith in the government and began relying more on informal leaders and traditional laws. As a result, the power of tribal and religious leaders has typically grown stronger than that of government officials and formal security providers.<sup>10</sup> Government officials have exacerbated this issue and, instead of focusing on consolidating law and order within Yemen, have aimed to co-opt tribal and religious leaders to their side for political leverage. Thus, informal actors, such as tribal leaders, have had a significant presence and influence on the political equation in Yemen—particularly those in the region around Sana'a and in the north near Saada (though their power has weakened since the Houthis took control).<sup>11</sup> Some tribes in the middle of the country have also gained power due to the presence of oil and gas reserves, while those in the southern and coastal areas and east in Hadramawt have generally been more interested in internal social issues.

### **Independence, Unification, and Conflict**

In the 1960s, Yemen ended the Imamate in the north and British occupation in the south and created two republican states. The north overthrew Imamate rule and established the Yemen Arab Republic (1962-1990). The government in the north was not strong enough to administer all northern areas, allowing the stronger tribal leaders to influence the ruling mechanism. There was an attempt to weaken these tribal powers during the era of Ibrahim Alhamdi (the third president of the Yemen Arab Republic [YAR]) but Alhamdi was assassinated only three years after becoming president. After two other leaders held the position very briefly, Ali Abdullah Saleh was elected President by the Parliament in 1978. In 1982 he established a political party called the General People's Congress (GPC) which became the ruling party through the present day. In the south, a socialist state supported by the Soviet Union was established following independence from the British. Called the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), this newly-established state was led by the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP). The power of the state over the tribes and informal leaders was much stronger than in the north, but it was weakened by continuous conflict within the YSP, which was the ruling party in the PDRY until post-civil war unification between north and south in 1990.

The unification in 1990 was a critical moment in Yemeni history, not only because the PDRY and the YAR become one, but also because it marked the introduction of a multiparty government and a presidential council, which many people felt would bring participatory democracy to Yemen. However, the plan to merge the two countries was insufficient as it included a mere 30-day transition period without an adequate plan to merge two countries with drastically different political and economic systems (as the YAR was capitalist while the PDRY was socialist) as well as key structural and social differences. Soon after unification, people in the south

started to find themselves neglected at both the national and community levels. Since people in the south had lived in a Soviet-backed socialist system and were dependent on the government to provide everything (including jobs and basic goods), after unification they felt neglected by the national government, leading many to feel like second-class citizens and increasing the perception of inequality between people in the regions.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, the socialist party found itself in a difficult position in the new elections as representation was based on population size and there were many more people in the north.

The GPC dominated the government of the unified state after allying with the Islah party, an Islamist-oriented party established after unification by members of the GPC and the Muslim Brotherhood. Both parties were led by representatives from the north who ruled together starting in Saleh's presidency. The Islah party was led by Abdullah Al Ahmar, one of the closest allies of Saleh, and later by his son, Sadeq. When the YSP tried to secede and make the south independent again, civil war broke out in 1994 that resulted in a win that solidified GPC and Islah domination of the political scene. The alliance between Islah and the GPC was eventually weakened due to disagreements over the division of power.

The one-party domination by the GPC destroyed the hope of creating an inclusive multiparty democracy. Instead of looking for a democratic way to gain support, political parties convinced local leaders to support them by politicizing conflicts over scarce resources such as land and water, and by exploiting long-held grudges and cases of revenge, in order to gain the loyalty of a particular community or tribe.<sup>13</sup> This transformed and complicated many internal conflicts and created unhealthy political competition at both the local and national level. It also led to the emergence of new political powers (such as the Ansar Allah movement [Houthis]) whose increasing influence was fueled by citizens' accusations of injustices. Many claim that the Houthis started as a preaching movement that youth joined in order to learn more about Zaidism and to join in community initiatives to clean streets or help rebuild schools and memorials.<sup>14</sup> However, they clashed with Salafis in the area, and then later with the government, initiating six conflicts between 2004 and 2010 against the Yemeni government, as well as the Saudi government in some instances. With the continuous weakening of the government due to the Arab Spring and the division of the military, the Houthis were able to gain full control over a large part of Yemen—chiefly in the north—by early 2015.

Another movement was launched in the south by a group of military leaders who were systematically excluded after their loss in the 1994 civil war. In 2007, this movement launched marches to advocate for their rights during which they were arbitrarily attacked by military and local forces. This convinced some groups in the south to call for separation from northern Yemen. This ongoing secessionist movement possesses a strong military that is supported by the UAE and is therefore able to control much of south Yemen and challenge the national government.

## **Arab Spring Uprising**

The Arab Spring started in Yemen in February 2011 with various marches in Taiz, Aden, and Sana'a. One group of college students tried to set up a protest camp in Altahrir Square in Sana'a but were confronted by the local forces, so they returned to Sana'a University and camped in front of the main gate. This was followed by camps in almost all of Yemen's main cities. Later, different political and military groups joined, either to show solidarity or to protect the protesters. The protesters began calling for the removal of President Saleh. The movement was unique in Yemen due to the marked participation of youth and women and due to the use of social media as a platform to mobilize the community. While social media was not highly

prevalent in many parts of the country due to the lack of electricity, poor internet connection, and low literacy in technology, it was one of the major elements driving the uprising (especially in major cities).<sup>15</sup> However, just as social media was an outlet for raising awareness against corruption and informing people of their rights, it was also a platform for spreading hate speech. Accusations, slander, and bullying were the main weapons used to fight not only activists, but all political powers in Yemen. Massive numbers of users took to social media in order to target certain individuals and groups as well as to mobilize the community in support of or against ideas, in many cases increasing tension and contributing to conflict.

In November 2011, President Saleh signed the Gulf Initiative Agreement which gave him immunity in exchange for stepping down and handing over the presidency to his deputy, Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi. In 2013, a new social contract was signed to initiate national dialogue. The effort of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) was initially promising as it involved many different Yemeni stakeholders in the discussion about shaping the new country. The NDC included a quota of 30 percent women and 20 percent youth representatives—a first for women and youth to be involved in high level decision-making. The NDC resulted in several strong outcomes and provided the base from which to start writing the new constitution. However, some critiqued it as lacking full representation because many leaders from the Southern Movement, a political movement supportive of southern secession, were excluded. Additionally, all the participants were members of the elite and there were no representatives from local or marginalized communities. Furthermore, in many cases there were no tangible solutions presented that were satisfactory to all stakeholders—this may have been due, in part, to the fact that even during the NDC, many stakeholders involved in negotiations were engaged in fighting in other areas of the country.<sup>16</sup>

### **Escalation of Conflict**

After the NDC, tensions continued to increase, leading to an escalation of conflict on September 21, 2014, when the Houthi and Saleh forces took control of Sana'a, including key government buildings, and launched a military exercise on the Saudi-Yemeni border. Prior to this escalation, the Houthis had entered an alliance of convenience with their former foe, ex-President Saleh. Although both Saleh and the Houthis were part of the NDC process, they revolted against it with the use of force. By March 2015 the combined Houthi-Saleh forces occupied Aden, resulting in armed resistance by southerners supported by the Saudi-Led Coalition (SLC), which had been launched that same month to protect President Hadi and to halt what was viewed as an Iranian expansion by proxy.<sup>17</sup> The Houthi forces were driven out a few months later, with the UAE playing a significant military role. Since then, the UAE established the Security Belt Forces—an elite force in many parts of the south that is under their direct command—which introduced a new political dynamic that has further weakened the legitimate government. These dynamics led to the massive internal and regional war that Yemen is still experiencing today. The conflict has divided Yemen in two with an embattled legitimate government in Aden and a rival de facto Houthi government in the north, while also increasing hate between communities based on regional affiliation (north/south) and creed (Sunni/Shia). This ongoing war is considered to be the worst in the modern era of Yemen, leaving more than 80 percent of the Yemeni population in dire need of humanitarian assistance and creating a fertile ground for violent non-state actors to continue expanding their influence.



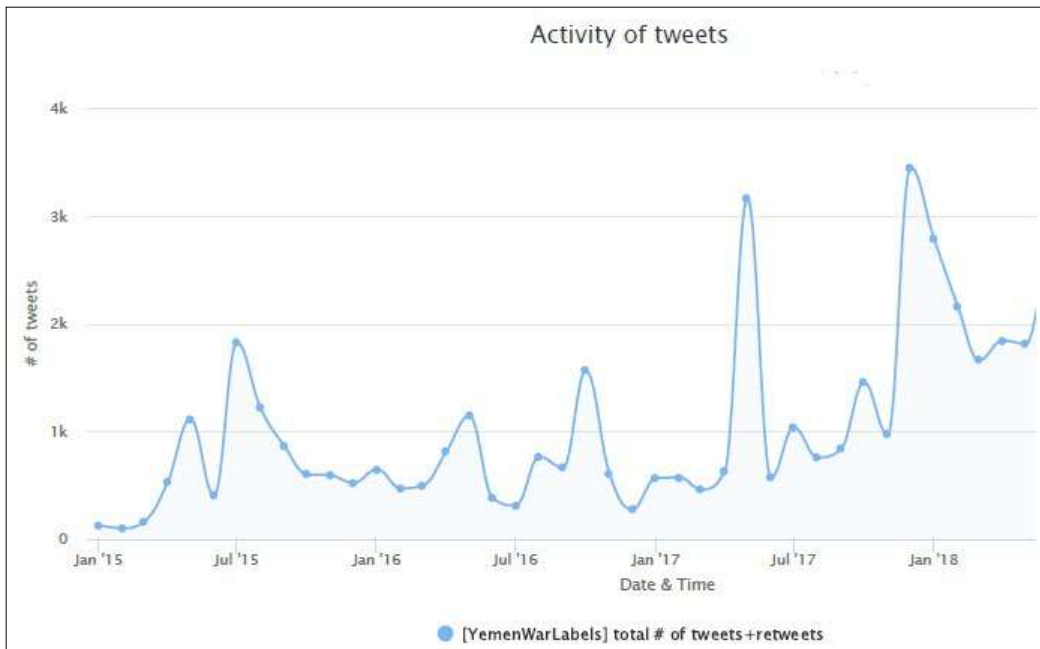


Figure A: This graph from Mecodify<sup>28</sup> illustrates the total number of tweets and retweets containing at least one of five of the hate speech terms discussed below (along with their associated variations) from January 2015 to May 2018. The terms utilized for data collection for this figure are دحباشي / dhabashi, برغلي / berghali, سلالي / salali, انفصالي / infisaliun, and زنبيل / zanbeel. The largest and most sustained spike in hate speech can be observed starting in December 2017, which coincides with Saleh breaking his alliance with the Houthis, which then led to open fighting in Sana'a and, subsequently, the killing of Saleh by Houthi forces.

## Primary Words and Phrases That Are Offensive and Inflammatory

The words and phrases that follow were identified by survey respondents as “offensive and inflammatory” and having the potential to incite violence in Yemen. Each term’s severity, meaning, and context were further critiqued by workshop participants in Yemen, as well as by the project’s expert advisers. The terms are listed alphabetically based on their English translation rather than in order of severity due to the subjective nature of this sort of rating based on subnational location, personal experience, and other factors. PeaceTech Lab staff employed human and automated monitoring to identify examples of such terms in online posts.

**PLEASE NOTE:** The sample posts and quoted comments from online posts may contain offensive, inflammatory, or obscene terms.

### 1. عفاشي / Afashi

**Other spellings and related references:** عفايش / afafish; مزين / muzayin (English meaning: someone of a lower class / in a profession that is looked down upon); خادم / khadim (English translation: servant); زنبيل / zanabeel (English meaning: someone of a lower class / not a descendant of the prophet, but following/serving descendants of the prophet)

**Note:** These latter three related references are class-based offensive terms that are not directly synonymous with ‘afashi’ but which one of the Sana’a focus groups identified as being related to this term. Each of the three is discussed in their own entries below.

## Sample Posts:

### English translation:

“Northerners.  
Northerners.  
Northerners. All of the  
North is fighting the  
South. Please this is the  
truth. #Afashi #Houthi  
#Dehbashi”

### English translation:

“I want to say to you in  
this blessed hour may  
God curse you and your  
family, #Afashi, son of  
a b\*\*\*h

Block these sons of  
b\*\*\*\*s who forged  
#Muhammad Abd-al-  
Salam’s page”

### English translation:

“Go take your mother  
from Khameni’s lap,  
you Afashi  
And learn the manhood  
and how not to be a  
slave to Iran  
And then speak  
#Our borders are your  
cemeteries  
#Afashi  
#Slave of Iran”



**Definition:** ‘Afashi’ is a term that is used to refer pejoratively to supporters of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh and his party, the GPC. The word itself is derived from a family name (Afash) of Saleh which the public only learned about after he left office. He reportedly kept the name a secret, leading some to believe that he was ashamed of it.

**Why it’s offensive and inflammatory:** As one focus group participant stated, “It [the term] is offensive because it labels supporters as people of lower class. It means that they came to power by force alone and not based on their intelligence, efficiency, and leadership.” Many political and military leaders and groups, particularly the Houthis, use this term against anyone who remains loyal to Saleh to indicate that they are unworthy of leadership. The association of this term with being from a lower class comes not from a correlation with a lower economic status, but rather from the negative associations that many Yemenis have towards Saleh and his supporters. Saleh’s 33 years of rule consisted of large-scale corruption and cronyism and ‘afashi’ is now used to imply that Saleh supporters are complicit in or supportive of these sorts of systems. When the term is used by coalition supporters and by Houthis, it is degrading because it accuses the target of being a traitor and a threat. When the term is used by supporters of the 2011 uprising—particularly youth and southerners—it is offensive because it implies that the person labeled as such is blindly loyal to a corrupt tyrant and so is a criminal by association. One focus group participant connected the use of ‘afashi’ with violence, saying that those targeted

by the use of the term have also been targeted with violence by the Houthis, particularly immediately after the assassination of Saleh.

**Non-offensive alternative terms:** رجل مؤتمر / *rajul mutimri* (English translation: *man belonging to the General People's Congress*); مؤيد مؤتمر الشعب العام (English translation: *supporter of the General People's Congress*); مومتري / *mutimri* (English translation: *member of the General People's Congress*)

## 2. برغلي / Berghali

**Other spellings and related references:** براغلة / *baraghila* (plural of *berghali*); أصحاب تعز / *ashab Taiz* (English translation: *belongs to the city of Taiz*); لغلغي / *laghaghi* (English translation: *a degrading term used to describe Yemenis from Ibb and Taiz*)

### Sample Posts:



**English translation:**  
“If you are Dhabashi from Taiz, and you are taking the names of Saudis, and the disaster is that you are taking girl’s names, may God make me f\*\*k you! You Berghali whores. You gave your families and your lands to Houthis for their pleasure, and you are coming here to take girls names. No one could be like you, honored to be northern, because you are subservient. Your mom’s p\*\*\*y.”

**English translation:**  
“He deserves to be killed. Does he believe he is better than Afash? Drag him, he is Berghali Dhabashi, from the middle of Taiz to Ghlaghi. Am I mistaken or does he think that his grandfather is the messenger of God and he is protected by Him?”

**Definition:** This word is a slang term used to refer to people from the governorate of Taiz. Several participants in the focus groups stated that the word is derived from a saying indicating that the price of land or wheat had increased in price; however, a local expert disagreed, stating that the word is believed by some to have originated from a reference to an ineffective Bulgarian gun used by Turkish soldiers in Taiz during the Ottoman Empire. The commonality and use of this term was much debated among respondents with some focus group participants stating that they were unfamiliar with the word and others indicating that it was used mostly by people who were from Taiz themselves. Meanwhile, at least two survey respondents stated that it was most often used by people from Sana’a to mock Taiz residents. Overall, it appears more common in the north of Yemen. The word’s meaning is tied to perceptions of Taiz residents’ pronunciation in comparison to other regions of Yemen. Several participants stated that the term became more common after the war began in 2015 and it became linked to a stereotype of Taiz residents as being troublemakers due to their high levels of activism against military actions and tendency to hold demonstrations. However, this stereotype of Taiz residents being “troublemakers” has been around since the 2011 uprising.

**Why it's offensive and inflammatory:** This term is offensive because it discriminates against a group of people based on their governorate of residence or origin. The term became more common and inflammatory in 2015, when it was used by military leaders and groups, mainly Houthis, to mock or discredit a population seen as being opposed to them. One focus group participant in Sana'a said that, "It was spread by the former regime and its security forces to promote hatred among the people who protested against the regime." However, others also said that it was used by military elements on all sides due to the perception that, "The Ta'ez [sic] youth were the most famous peace activists during [the] revolution—they were the most active in advocating about civil rights."

**Non-offensive alternative terms:** اهل تعز / *ahl taeizu* (English translation: *the people of Taiz*); اخي / *akhi* (English translation: *brother*); يماني (English translation: *Yemeni*); تعزي / *Taizi*; مواطن / *muwatin* (English translation: *citizen*)

### 3. داعشي / Daeshi

**Other spellings and related references:** متطرف / *mutataraf* (English translation: *radical*); suicidal; ارهابي / *irhabi* (English translation: *terrorist*); chicken legs; سلفي / *Salafi*; وهابي / *Wahabi*; اخونجي or اخواني / *ikhwanji* or *ikhwani* (English Translation: *supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood*); قاتل / *qatel* (English translation: *killer*)

#### Sample Posts:

**English translation:**

"You Daeshi, you are uncivilized. Enough, no one is believing you anymore. You dogs of fire worshippers."

**English translation:**

"You are pretending to have an honor, you Daeshi, you Brotherhood, you Awakening [supporters of those who fought alongside US Forces in western Iraq]. I am [gif from music video portraying group of people being shot with automatic weapon]"



**Definition:** This word means “a member of ISIL,” the Arabic acronym of which is Daesh. In the Yemen context, the word may be used to refer to members of ISIL or as a broader label encompassing anyone viewed as radical in their beliefs or actions. In this latter sense, it may be used to accuse someone of ties with a radical extremist group based on differing political or religious beliefs, rather than on suspected ties or evidence of radicalization. Some discussants in the focus groups in Aden stated that some men are labeled as ‘Daeshi’ based on their appearance, namely if they have long hair or a long beard. It is often used against someone who has particularly strict religious beliefs. The word began to be used more frequently in Yemen in 2015 with the outbreak of conflict; several discussants said that prior to this, the term ‘قاعدة’ or ‘qaeda’ (as in al Qaeda) was used in the same manner to describe anyone viewed as extreme.

**Why it’s offensive and inflammatory:** When the word ‘Daeshi’ is used to label a political or military opponent or to accuse someone based on their actions or beliefs, it becomes dangerous for the person labeled as such. As one participant stated, “The term labels people as terrorists and radicals. People use this term to describe others based on their appearance or who they are perceived to be, [or how they] act, and think. People use this term to discredit others. The result is that it associates people with supporting or even joining ISIS, even when they are innocent of these accusations.” The term has commonly been used by members of the Houthis movement against anyone who disagreed with them in order to justify military actions and to persuade western governments that it was a partner in the fight against ISIL. Many of the focus group discussants in Aden stated that they felt that northerners in general used the term to refer to all southerners. However, others stated that the Houthis have employed this term against any opponent, regardless of their northern or southern affiliation or heritage. Focus group participants presented several examples of relatives and acquaintances accused of being ‘Daeshi’ becoming victims of arrest, false imprisonment, and forced disappearance. This was one of the top two most frequently cited hate speech terms by survey respondents.

**Non-offensive alternative terms:** اخي / *akhi* (English translation: *brother*); شخص ملتزم بشده من حزب الإصلاح / *shakhs multazem bishiddah min hizb al islah* (English translation: *someone who is very committed to the Islah party*); متدين / *mutadayen* (English translation: *religiously strict*); شيخ / *Sheikh*; يماني / *Yemeni*; مواطن / *muwatin* (English translation: *citizen*); أخي المنتمي لحزب الإصلاح / *akhi almunjami lihizb al islah* (English translation: *brother from the Islah party*)

## 4. دحباشي / Dhabashi

**Other spellings and related references:** دحابشة / *dahabshah*; شمالي / *shamalii* (English translation: *northern*); قبيلي / *qabili* (English translation: *tribal*)

### Sample Posts:



**English translation:**  
“No one is a dog here except you, you sinful dhabashi. Respect your tongue.”



**English translation:**

“Against your will, whether you like it or not, you Dhabashi. UAE is more honorable than you and your lying union. The UAE is building the south, but you piece of s\*\*t people, you will be remarkable in the history with your s\*\*\*\*y union. You Ataturk trash people. Go to hell with you union.”



**Definition:** This term is based on the name of a character (Dhabash) in a television show from the early 1990s who was from the north of Yemen and who was portrayed as being irresponsible, not law-abiding, and as showing a disregard for Yemeni traditions. The term originated in 1991 with the popularity of the television show, but it began to be used in a derogatory manner towards northern Yemenis around the time of the civil war in 1994. After the spread of this word through popular culture, it became an offensive term used to refer to Yemenis from the northern area of the country. In addition to the characteristics listed above, it is also associated with barbarism and dressing or acting in a slovenly manner.

**Why it’s offensive and inflammatory:** This word was widely agreed by respondents to be very offensive and discriminatory towards northern Yemenis as it assigns several negative attributes to people of a specific region. Several focus group participants stated that they had observed the use of the term lead to physical fighting on several occasions. For example, one participant stated, “On a trip from Sana’a to Aden, my cousin got into a fight with the minibus driver because he called him ‘Dhabashi.’ They ended up getting into a fight, and it became physical. One of them even pulled out a knife.” On a larger scale, most of the focus group discussants agreed that the term was commonly used on social media to target northern residents, particularly on Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp. Overall, the use of the word ‘dhabashi’ deepens divisions between Yemen’s northern and southern regions and promotes hatred and discrimination between people of these two regions. Given the historical tensions between the two regions and the continued existence of a secessionist movement in the south, the use of terms such as this is likely to foster or exacerbate hostility and animosity between northern and southern Yemenis. This was one of the top two hate speech terms most frequently cited by survey respondents.

**Non-offensive alternative terms:** اخي / *akhi* (English translation: *brother*); يماني (English translation: *Yemeni*); مواطن / *muwatin* (English translation: *citizen*); اخي من المناطق الشمالية / *akhi min almanatiq alshamalia* (English translation: *brother from the northern regions*)

## 5. هاشمي / Hashemi

**Other spellings and related references:** سيد / *sayed* or سادة / *sada* (English meaning: *upper class in Yemeni society*); حوثي / *Houthi*; قنديل / *qanadil* (English meaning: *descendant of the prophet*)

### Sample Posts:



**English translation:**  
“You said the truth. You are a great person. Hashemis are Houthis and Houthis are Hashemis. They are all dogs.”

**English translation:**  
“I swear to God, I would shave my beard if you are Yemeni. You son of a b\*\*\*h. You are a Hashemi Houthi.”

**Definition:** The term ‘Hashemi’ refers to an Arab tribe to which the Prophet Muhammad belonged; it is now used to refer to members of this tribe who consider themselves direct descendants of Muhammad. As one participant stated, “‘Hashemi’ is used to discriminate between those [who are] descendants of the prophet and those who are not.” When used negatively, the term implies that ‘Hashemis’ are privileged, elitist, arrogant, and exploitative. Although the word itself is very old, in Yemen it began to be used commonly in political conversations around 2014, the same year that the Houthis took over Sana’a.

**Why it’s offensive and inflammatory:** This term is not considered offensive or discriminatory in every context, as it may be used by those who are members of this group to assert their own status (e.g., some ‘Hashemi’ families will use this status to argue against marriage to a ‘non-Hashemi’). However, it has come to be used by those who are not ‘Hashemi’ to express disdain for those who belong to this group (which chiefly consists of Houthis). A local project facilitator and expert explained that, “At the moment, the term is seen as putting yourself above other people and is presently associated with the Houthis. To be ‘Hashemi’ is seen as placing yourself above others. The social divisions Yemenis overcame 60 years ago have now re-emerged.” Use of the term ‘Hashemi’ deepens antagonisms between social groups and deepens divisions which are part of the current conflict. Several participants and local partners expressed concern at the potential retaliatory violence that could be directed towards those labeled as ‘Hashemi’ due to the actions of the Houthis during the ongoing conflict; anyone called ‘Hashemi’ may be conflated with the Houthis and thus subject to attack. One survey respondent provided an example of hate speech she had experienced on Facebook: “We will throw you out of our country you filthy ‘Hashemi.’ We will wipe you out.” Other participants indicated that this term is used as hate speech across many social media platforms.

**Non-offensive alternative terms:** اخي / *akhi* (English translation: *brother*); مواطن / *muwatin* (English translation: *citizen*); يماني (English translation: *Yemeni*); اهل البيت / *ahl al bait* (English translation: *people of Prophet Muhammad’s house*)

## 6. حوثي / Houthi

**Other spellings and related references:** رافضي / *rafidi* (English meaning: *someone who rejects correct Islam*); سلالي / *salali* (English translation: *dynastic*); مجوسي / *magusi* (English translation: *fire worshippers / infidels*); سيد / *sayed* (English meaning: *upper class in Yemeni society*); قنديل / *qanadil* (English meaning: *descendant of the prophet*); هاشمي / *hashemi* (English translation: *descendant of the prophet*); شيعي / *Shie'i* (English translation: *Shiite*); عميل / *eamil* (English translation: *operative*); إيراني / *Irani* (English translation: *Iranian*); قبيلي / *qabili* (English translation: *tribal*)

### Sample Posts:

**English translation:**

“Houthis are not wanted here. They are dirty people. In addition to that, they are fire worshippers and the Yemeni people are Sunni Muslims. They will never accept the fire worshippers.”

**English translation:**

“There is no Satan here but you. You dirty son of a b\*\*\*h. You are even dirtier than the dirt, you Houthi. You are dog s\*\*t.”



**Definition:** ‘Houthi’ is the term commonly used by people inside and outside of Yemen to refer to the Zaidi Shia political movement whose official name is Ansar Allah; it is also the name of a tribe from northern Yemen, concentrated in Saada Governorate. Houthi is the family name of the brothers who founded the movement, which is currently led by Abdul-Malik al Houthi. Since the conflict in Yemen began, the word has come to have several connotations associated with it, including a link to Iran and the use of violence to achieve goals.

**Why it’s offensive and inflammatory:** As with the term ‘Hashemi,’ ‘Houthi’ is not always considered offensive and inflammatory given that it is the actual name of a tribe. As one of the focus group participants in Sana’a stated, “The word alone is not considered an offensive word. But, after 2012, the word started to be used as a discriminatory word. Why? Because people started to use it to refer to an armed group that is accused as being traitors and responsible for the coup.” The term is inflammatory when it is used to discriminate against or denigrate people from the north (where the Houthi are concentrated) or someone who may sympathize with some Houthi viewpoints but who is not necessarily involved in the conflict or in the Houthi political system. It is used to target those who are believed to be at fault for the conflict or beholden to an Iranian agenda. Many of the focus group participants in both Aden and Sana’a described the Houthis as traitors to Yemen who are responsible for the current violence.

**Non-offensive alternative terms:** اخي / *akhi* (English translation: *brother*); يماني (English translation: *Yemeni*); أنصار الله / *Ansar Allah*

## 7. انفصالي / Infisaliun (Separatist)

**Other spellings and related references:** الجنوبي / *janubii* (English translation: *southern*), الوحدة او / *alwahdat aw almawt lilinfisaliyin* (English translation: *unity or death for separatists*); الحراك الجنوبي / *alharak aljanubi* (English translation: *the Southern Movement*); حراكي / *haraki* (English translation: *member of al-Hirak movement*)

### Sample Posts:



وعلى عينك يا انفصالي قبيح

**English translation:**  
“Whether you like it or not, you ugly infisaliun”



الصورة الأولى اثناء حرب عدن والأمهات يقدمون الطعام لأبنائهم الأبطال في تحرير عدن. الصورة الثانية بعد الحرب الأمهات الذين شاركوا مع ابنائهم في تحرير عدن يبحثون عن ابنائهم في سجون الإمارات السرية الذي تم اعتقالهم من قبل مرتزقة انفصاليين يدعون إليهم بأنهم هم من حرر عدن.  
#ياأهراه

**English translation:** “The first picture is during the war of Aden and the mothers were distributing food to their heroes in the liberation of Aden. The second picture is after the war. The same mothers who participated with their children in liberating Aden are now the same mothers who are looking for their children in UAE secret prisons after they’ve been arrested by infisaliun mercenaries who pretend until today that they liberated Aden. #Heartbroken”



Yes, the unity of Yemen Unity or death of the separatists  
Oui, l'unité du Yémen unité ou la mort des séparatistes  
— نعم الوحدة اليمنية الرخدة أو الموت للانفصاليين  
and 15 others.

**English translation (phrase repeated in three languages—English, French, and Arabic):**  
“Yes, the unity of Yemen Unity or death of the separatists [infisaliun]”

**Definition:** The term ‘infisaliun’ translates to ‘separatist’ and is used to refer to members of the southern Yemen secessionist movement or more generally to southern Yemenis. Although not all southerners support or would support division of the country, it is often used to discriminate against southerners generally—particularly people who voice objections to the treatment of the south or concerns over regional inequality. The word became common after it was used by President Saleh during the 1994 civil war and it was reportedly used often in the media to malign the secessionists after the southern forces were defeated.

**Why it’s offensive and inflammatory:** This word is inflammatory given that the civil war between north and south Yemen was relatively recent and the conflict’s issues and hostility

remain unresolved. As one of the focus group participants in Sana'a remarked, "It is considered as offensive because the term accuses the secessionists of being traitors who oppose the unity of the country, territorial integrity, and national security of Yemen. It also labels the citizens of the south as secessionists who serve the interest of foreign countries." Thus, calling someone 'infisaliun' portrays them as a traitor, which, given the nature of the war, could be interpreted as a call for violence against them. The term is sometimes used by those who strongly oppose any consideration of secession to threaten those who support it or sympathize with it. For example, one discussant cited the use of "A phrase which means southerners have no choice: either accept unification or die!" A variation of this phrase that commonly appears is 'الوحدة او الموت' 'للانفصاليين', which translates to 'unity or death for separatists' and is sometimes shortened to just 'unity or death.' Another phrase including the word 'infisaliun,' is 'سحق الانفصاليين', which translates to 'crushing separatists' and is reported to be used to intimidate anyone expressing support for separation.

**Non-offensive alternative terms:** ناشط سياسي / *nashet syasi* (English translation: *political activist*); تقرير المصير / *taqir almasir* (English translation: *self determination*); اهل الجنوب / *ahl aljanub* (English translation: *the people of the south*); مواطن / *muwatin* (English translation: *citizen*)

## 8. جنوبي / Janubii (Southern)

**Other spellings and related references:** انفصالي / *infisaliun* (English translation: *separatist*); كافر / *kafir* (English translation: *non-believer*); ملحد / *mulhed* (English translation: *atheist*); ديوث / *dayouth* (English translation: *pimp / cuckold*); اشتراكي / *ishtiraki* (English translation: *socialist*); شيوعي / *shuyuei* (English translation: *communist*); لغلغي / *lughlugh* (English translation: *derogatory word for southerner*)

### Sample Posts:



#### English translation:

"I swear to God, you are janubii Harkushi liar. Sitting and talking by the names of your masters, you piece of s\*\*t."

#### English translation:

"Don't call them Dhabashis! You janubii and lughlugh and communist."

**Definition:** Although the literal meaning of this word is simply 'southern,' as in a geographic location, it is no longer considered a neutral term in the Yemen context. Some of the negative characterizations intended by using the word 'janubii' include atheism, poor adherence to Islam, and bad morals. This word, and other terms distinguishing between north and south Yemen, are linked to historical differences that continue to resonate today. For example, many northerners view the south—particularly the city of Aden—as being much more diverse since some of the population is comprised of descendants from former British colonies and therefore does not share the same tribal fabric found in the north.



**Why it's offensive and inflammatory:** Based on the association of the south with higher levels of diversity and a weaker tribal foundation, the term is often used to imply that southerners are less traditional and less authentically Yemeni, and are therefore inferior in the northern context. According to focus group participants, it is also sometimes used by northern Yemenis to insult someone else from the north by asserting that they are exhibiting negative characteristics stereotypically associated with southerners. A focus group participant in Sana'a (in the north of the country) stated that the term "...is offensive and insulting because it labels the people from Aden or the southern part of Yemen as people who do not have any respect for religion and for the traditions of Islamic and Arab countries." Another participant, also present in the Sana'a workshop, displayed their own biases and assumed stereotypes towards southerners in their statement that, "It is offensive to be called a southerner because they are addicted to the use of alcohol, drugs, and commit crimes such having sexual relations before and outside of marriage." These habits are considered particularly offensive within traditional Yemeni culture; therefore, imbuing the word 'janubii' with these stereotypes is quite inflammatory.

Several of the southern participants indicated that the term invoked the suppression and injustice that the south experienced after the 1994 war. Many participants also provided present-day examples of discrimination associated with the use of this word. Several stated that they are called 'janubii' if they travel to areas in northern Yemen and are accused of being separatists. One person relayed a story of a young man from Aden who was attacked and stabbed in Sana'a by a group of men because he was identified as being from the south.

**Note:** This term is also sometimes used by southerners as a point of pride in reference to their status as an independent state prior to unification with the north in 1990. One participant stated that, "I am proud to be janubii. The state that had a rule of law and gave women and children freedoms. It was a time [when] there was no drugs as spread now, there were not thugs, no illiteracy. I am janubii and I speak of janub [south] from my heart." In this context, the term is not used as hate speech, but it may contribute to the broader issue of societal division and hatred between regional groups given that it reinforces the north-south divide that has fostered conflict in the country.

**Non-offensive alternative terms:** يماني (English translation: *Yemeni*); اخي / *akhi* (English translation: *brother*); مواطن / *muwatin* (English translation: *citizen*); اخواننا الجنوبيين / *ikhwanana aljanubeyen* (English translation: *our brothers in the south*)

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## 9. خادم / *Khadim* (Servant)

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**Other spellings and related references:** اخدام / *akhdam* (plural of *khadim*); عبيد / *abed* (English translation: *slaves* or *descendants of slaves*)

### Sample Posts:



**English translation:**  
"No one cares about him, he is only *Khadim*."

**English translation:**

“You are the first khadim and slave to your bread giver, the sons of Zayd. And you are an enemy of your country, you and Saleh people.”



**Definition:** While the literal translation of ‘khadim’ is ‘servant’ (the plural is ‘akhdam’), it is also the name for the lowest group in the Yemeni social structure, of which there are four distinct levels. According to a local Yemeni consultant, “There are an estimated six to eight million ‘akhdam’ across Yemen. They are considered to be the very bottom of the Yemeni social structure, similar to the Dalit community in India. This group is unrepresented politically and totally excluded from all aspects of society. Traditionally, the only jobs available to them have included cleaning services, garbage collection, and begging. They are not part of Yemen’s tribal network and are totally excluded across Yemen. There is no intermarriage or even regular contact between the ‘akhdam’ and other segments of society as other Yemenis do not consider them as clean/pure.” Focus group participants also stated that the term is based not only on social class, but also on race. It is commonly used to refer to any person in Yemen with dark skin, with at least one participant stating that the term is used exclusively to refer to this demographic.<sup>19</sup> Other stereotypes associated with this term include a lack of personal hygiene and generally possessing bad habits.<sup>20</sup>

**Why it’s offensive and inflammatory:** This word is offensive and inflammatory because it expresses contempt towards a marginalized group of people in Yemen’s society and is used in racial discrimination. According to many participants, it is used to perpetuate the discrimination towards and exclusion of the ‘akhdam’ social group. One participant said that, “People who are referred to as this class of people, they are deprived of access to employment and marriage to other social classes. They are also restricted from social and political participation, thus creating a sense of self-destitution, inferiority, isolation, and weakening their sense of national belonging.” The term is used against anyone perceived as belonging to a lower class, often specifically targeting dark-skinned Yemenis. The use of the term highlights and contributes to the problem of racial, social, and economic discrimination and marginalization within Yemeni society.<sup>21</sup>

**Non-offensive alternative terms:** اخي / *akhi* (English translation: *brother*); عامل نظافه / *eamil nazafih* (English translation: *cleaner*); عامل / *eamil* (English translation: *worker*); المهمشين / *almuhamashin* (English translation: *marginalized*); مواطن / *muwatin* (English translation: *citizen*); يمني (English translation: *Yemeni*)

## 10. مجوسي / Majusi

**Other spellings and related references:** مجوس / *majus* (plural of *majusi*); حوثي / *Houthi*; هاشمي / *Hashemi* (English translation: *descendant of the prophet*)

### Sample Posts:



The image displays two sample social media posts. The top post is a tweet with the text 'الضالع لن ترحم اي مجوسي' (Al-Dhala will not show mercy to any majusi) and a graphic of bloody bodies. The bottom post is a Facebook post with the text 'يا مجوسي يا رافضي يا عفاشي والله لن تطيب لكم البيضاء والله لتكن مقبرتكم ولكم فيها نصيب من الشوي والذبح قوالله... fb.me/6puC6c6HM' (O majusi, o rejecter of Islam, o Afashi, I swear to God you will never see Al-Bayda. You will be killed, you will be slaughtered, we will have a barbeque from your flesh. I swear to God your cemeteries will be in Al-Bayda.).

**English translation:**  
“Al-Dhala will take no mercy on any majusi.”  
[Accompanied by graphic image of bloody bodies]

**English translation:** ““You majusi, you rejecter of Islam, you Afashi  
I swear to God you will never see Al-Bayda  
You will be killed, you will be slaughtered, we will have a barbeque from your flesh. I swear to God your cemeteries will be in Al-Bayda.”

**Definition:** ‘Majusi’ is translated as “fire worshipper” and means someone who is an apostate or infidel. The word is also closely associated with Iran and a pro-Iranian stance in Yemen and other contexts. The correlation with Iran likely arose from the use of the word to discredit Iranians in Iraqi propaganda during the 1980s, as one of the participants explained. In Yemen, the word is now used to refer negatively to the Houthis, who are widely believed by their detractors to be executing an Iranian agenda in Yemen. The term’s usage is associated with sectarian divisions and biases.

**Why it’s offensive and inflammatory:** This word is most often used against Houthis or, more broadly, against northern Yemenis or Shia Muslims, as some people conflate these groups with Houthis. One participant also said that it is sometimes used by strong adherents to Islam against those they perceive as being non-religious or non-believers. According to one focus group participant, the term “fuels religious and sectarian conflict in society, leading to hatred and aggression, and the exclusion of some groups from Islam.” It is extremely inflammatory in Yemeni culture because it is used to imply that those belonging to a different sect—specifically the Zaidi Shia branch of Islam—are not true Muslims. Participants stated that this term appears widely across social media (particularly on the webpages of religious extremists) as well as in speeches and statements by politicians.

**Non-offensive alternative terms:** اخي / *akhi* (English translation: *brother*); أنصار الله / *Ansar Allah*; معارض / *muarid* (English translation: *opponent*); يمني (English translation: *Yemeni*); الزيدية / *Zaidi*; شيعة / *Shia*; مواطن / *muwatin* (English translation: *citizen*)

## 11. مرتزق / Murtaziq (Mercenary)

**Other spellings and related references:** مرتزقة / *murtaziqa* (plural of *murtaziq*); عميل / *eamil* (English translation: *operative*)

### Sample Posts:

**English translation:**

“UAE will continue with its dreams to occupy Yemen until the last #murtaziq and #traitors to their country.  
#Yemen is a cemetery for occupiers, you shoes of donkeys”

**English translation:**

“What legitimacy are you talking about, you #traitor. You #murtaziq. The legitimacy of hotels is over since the first attack on #Yemen sovereignty, you dog.”



**Definition:** ‘Murtaziq’ or ‘mercenary’ refers to anyone who makes an illegal livelihood by taking money to fight for external parties. Respondents said that this term is used to describe anyone who is viewed as lacking morals and willing to sell out one’s country for money. It has typically been used throughout the Arabic-speaking world to describe those that fight for money, but it became widespread in Yemen around 2015 when Saudi-led coalition forces initiated fighting against the Houthis.

**Why it’s offensive and inflammatory:** This term has become very common in the context of the current conflict, with opposing sides using it frequently to disparage each other. As one participant stated, “Every party describe[s] the other as ‘mercenary.’” It often appears in political debates both in Yemen and across the region, according to focus group participants, and individuals in Sana’a said that it is common on radio and television channels and social media pages controlled by Houthis. The Houthis employ the term against the opposition and government forces to accuse them of being ‘mercenaries’ of Saudi Arabia and the UAE. In particular, members of the Southern Movement and the Southern Transitional Council (STC), a political secessionist organization, are accused of being ‘mercenaries’ of the UAE as they have received support from the country. Meanwhile, opponents of the Houthis use the term to accuse the Houthis of being ‘mercenaries’ of Iran. Most participants described it as being very offensive as it accuses a person of being a traitor to Yemen, of selling out, and of having no morals. As one participant in Aden stated, “This term leads to armed conflict, violence, aggressive responses, and negative reactions.”

**Non-offensive alternative terms:** اخي / *akhi* (English translation: *brother*); معارض / *muarid* (English translation: *opponent*); يميني (English translation: *Yemeni*); مواطن / *muwatin* (English translation: *citizen*)

## 12. مزين / Muzayin

**Other spellings and related references:** مزينة / *muzayina* (plural of *muzayin*); اخدام / *akhdam* (English translation: *slaves*); هاشمي / *Hashemi* (English translation: *descendant of the prophet*); سيد / *sayed* or سادة / *sada* (English translation: *upper class in Yemeni society*); قبيلي / *qabili* (English translation: *tribal*)

**Note:** These last three related references are terms from the opposite end of the Yemeni social hierarchy but are also used derogatorily.

### Sample Posts:



**English translation:**

“May God curse you and curse your parents. You bastard! You Muzayin sons of Muzayin. If you are from your dad’s sperm, you wouldn’t curse or say bad words. But you are a bastard piece of s\*\*t.”

**English translation:**

“May God curse you, you Muzayin bad people. How many liars, traitors, cheaters are from you?”

**Definition:** Similar to the word ‘khadam,’ ‘muzayin’ is also the name for a class within Yemen’s social hierarchy. This term refers to the third class in this hierarchy; a local consultant and facilitator characterizes ‘muzayin’ as follows:

...they are considered to be the lowest caste within the tribal system. ‘Muzayin’ do the chanting and singing during ceremonies, with poems glorifying upper classes. They generally perform jobs such as butchers, barbers, iron smiths, etc. However, unlike the ‘akhdam,’ they have equal protection of the bigger tribe and are not targeted for revenge by any warring tribes. In fact, when two tribes are at war, ‘muzayin’ are sent as emissaries to open dialogue and/or implement ceasefires. This is because ‘muzayin’ are known for their calm demeanor, and also because their lives are considered less valuable; i.e., if a ‘muzayin’ died in the peacemaking process, the penalty would not be as harsh for the perpetrator than if he killed a non-‘muzayin’ member of the tribe.

While this group does see several benefits not afforded to ‘akhdam’ (such as being able to pursue higher education and professional careers), they are not allowed to marry outside of the ‘muzayin’ class and many are employed in jobs considered to be of lower status (such as barbers and butchers). Several participants stated that this term is far more common in the north of Yemen than in the south.



**Why it's offensive and inflammatory:** Similar to 'akhdam' / 'khadim,' the usage of 'muzayin' perpetuates social exclusion, discrimination, and exploitation within Yemeni society. According to one focus group participant in Sana'a, "The term is racist and leads to violence in the Yemeni community. It promotes hatred and inspires others to take revenge." This speaks to how inflammatory this term can be in some instances and may lead to violence as a form of revenge. The word is reportedly most often used in social and personal situations, particularly related to marriage objections.

**Non-offensive alternative terms:** حلاق / *halaq* (English translation: *barber*); صديق / *sadiq* (English translation: *friend*); اخي / *akhi* (English translation: *brother*); مواطن / *muwatin* (English translation: *citizen*)

### 13. سيد / Sayed

**Other spellings and related references:** سادة / *sada* (plural of *sayed*); هاشمي / *hashemi* (English translation: *descendant of the prophet*); قنديل / *qanadil* (English translation: *descendant of the prophet*); حوثي / *Houthi*; شمالي / *shamalii* (English translation: *northern*)

#### Sample Posts:



#### English translation:

"If a dog took something that is yours, you say to him my sayed #Houthi"

#### English translation:

"Open the doors for them to destroy al-Dhala and Yafa' and to burn them and that will make them the face of their sayed Houthi and loyal slave to him! Al-Dhala and Yafa' will always be a fork in their throats, and a fork in their master Houthi throats until Judgment Day. And we will remain the protects of Arabism and Muhammad's ideologies. #Zanabel\_Legitimacy"

**Definition:** In the rest of the Arabic-speaking world, this word generally means 'Mr.' or 'Sir,' but in Yemen, this term is another reference to a class within the social hierarchy. In this case, 'sayed' refers to the first class within the system—the group that traditionally receives preferential rights and benefits.<sup>22</sup> It is very closely associated with the term 'hashemi' in that the 'sayed' class is perceived to consist of the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. The term is further associated with the belief that 'sayeds' have a "sacred right to rule the country."

**Why it's offensive and inflammatory:** As 'sayed' is part of the same social ranking system as 'akhdam' and 'muzayin,' it also contributes to the perpetuation of discrimination and division within Yemen's traditional social structure. As one discussant stated, "It is discriminative and promotes caste division and arrogance in society..." Furthermore, according to the project's local expert and consultant, "Over the past four years, 'sayeds' have gained a reputation for corruption. For example, four years ago many 'sayeds,' who did not own anything, have since

acquired large estates and made a great deal of money.” This has contributed to a negative perception of the group of people who are identified as ‘sayed,’ and the term is now often used by those outside of the group to imply corruption and arrogance.

**Note:** As with several other terms in this list, ‘sayed’ is also used by those who self-identify as part of this group to assert their status. In this context, the word is not hate speech, but still contributes to discrimination as those using the term often do so to assert their superiority over others. For example, one focus group participant provided an example in which two individuals were engaged in a dispute “and there was a request for them to apologize to each other, and one of them said, ‘I don’t apologize, I am Sayed.’”

**Non-offensive alternative terms:** اخي / *akhi* (English translation: *brother*); يماني (English translation: *Yemeni*); مواطن / *muwatin* (English translation: *citizen*); اهل البيت / *ahl al bait* (English translation: *people of Prophet Muhammad’s house*)

## 14. شمالي / Shamalii (Northern)

**Other spellings and related references:** الاحتلال الشمالي / *alaihital alshamaliu* (English translation: *Northern occupation*); محتل / *muhtal* (English translation: *occupier*); دحباشي / *dhabashi*

### Sample Posts:



يا اوغاد الشمال لن بهنا لنا العيش الا يطرد آخر شمالي همجي متخلف من ارض الجنوب وسيتحقق هذا طال الزمن او قصر باذن لله #عدن



عليك ان تقف لتحية سيدك يا دحباشي والله لن يهدأ لنا بال حتى نطرد اخر شمالي متخلف زيك

**English translation:** “You bastard of the north. We won’t enjoy one living day until we kick out the last barbaric and uncivilized shamalii from the southern lands. And this will come to fruition no matter how much time it takes, with God’s permission #Aden”

**English translation:** “You have to stand and pay respect to your master, you Dhabashi. I swear to God we won’t find rest until we kick out the last uncivilized shamalii like you.”

**Definition:** This term means ‘northern,’ indicating those from the northern region of Yemen and is similar to the term ‘janubii,’ or ‘southern.’ It refers in particular to those living in Sana’a, Saada, and areas in the far north, while people from areas in the “middle” such as Ibb and Taiz are referred to with a different phrase. As with the term ‘janubii,’ ‘shamalii’ has also come to mean more than just a geographic area or direction and has certain characteristics and stereotypes associated with it in the Yemeni context. Its meaning, especially when employed by southerners, alludes to lawlessness and a tendency to act only in one’s self-interest. It also may be used interchangeably with the term ‘dhabashi’ to refer negatively to northerners.

**Why it’s offensive and inflammatory:** Most everyone in the focus group sessions agreed that this term is mostly used by southern Yemenis towards northern Yemenis in general. As one participant said, “It is used by southerners against the northerners to express their resentment toward them” due to southerners’ feelings of marginalization. It is also used to evoke the perception that those in the north have stolen resources from the south in the years since unification. This term is viewed as quite inflammatory by northerners because they “...have a perception that employing the ‘northern’ term means dividing Yemen into two countries again. So, they get aggressive when they are called northerners by any southerner because this means Yemen is really two countries.” This is a reference to the 1994 civil war in which the south attempted to secede, the hostility and animosity persisting from this conflict, and issues that were clearly not resolved between the two regions during the unification process. According to participants, the situation most likely to spark use of this hateful term was travel by northern Yemenis to the south and the resulting problems faced at security checkpoints. Particularly when trying to enter Aden, northern residents experience discrimination and are frequently forced to turn around and return to the north.

**English translation:**

“What Houthi militias have lost in the northern fronts #Al-Dhala, deep in the northern governorate of Ib, the front of Qataba of Qanabel and Zanbeel, in only one month is more than what they have lost in all their fronts since they walked out of the south. Abdulmalek throw them into the hell of Al-Dhala and they got burned. God is Great. Long live #Southern Armed Forces. May God continue with his victories.”

**Non-offensive alternative terms:** يماني (English translation: *Yemeni*); اخي / *akhi* (English translation: *brother*); اخواننا الشماليين / *iikhwanina alshamaliyn* (English translation: *our northern brothers*); مواطن / *muwatin* (English translation: *citizen*)

**15. زنبيل / Zanbeel**

**Other spellings and related references:** زناييل / *zanabeel* (plural of *zanbeel*); حوثي / *Houthi*

**Sample Posts:**





**English translation:**  
 “(So you become Houthi Qanadil or Zanbeel). Death comes for you, you Iranian shoes”

**English translation:**  
 “Since I didn’t say anything wrong to you, but you are a silly idiot, and you will remain in your cave raising the death flags to Israel and killing the Yemenis even though there are thousands of kilometers between you and Israel. The Persians made you their play toy and they are making fun of you with that. But I understand your ignorance and stupidity, you Zanbeel.”

**Definition:** The word ‘zanbeel’ refers to a member of a social class that is perceived to be of lower status, particularly in contrast to a group of higher status known as ‘qanadeel.’ Several participants explained that the term is most often used in the north, particularly by Houthis or by those who identify as ‘Hashemi’ in order to distinguish themselves from those of a lower class within their own society. As one participant stated, “They are the fighters from other tribes who are supporting the Houthis in the fight against the Government and the coalition.” Thus, a ‘zanbeel’ person may be allied with the Houthis, but is not considered by them to have the same stature. One local expert and facilitator, however, clarified that it does not solely apply to Houthi supporters and may be used against anyone who is not considered a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad.

**Why it’s offensive and inflammatory:** Much of the discussion of this term focused on the belief that the lives of ‘zanbeel’ have lesser value than others in their society. Regarding Houthi supporters, one participant said that, “If a fighter or supporter were asked if he is a ‘zanbeel,’ and he says ‘yes,’ it means he will not be treated as well and in the same manner as a ‘qanadeel’ will be treated. This means two people can fight and die for the exact same thing but, somehow, one person gets special treatment based on this lineage distinction.” The perception promoted by this term, that the subject is inferior or worthless, may lead to violence against the individual labeled as ‘zanbeel’ because of the devaluation of their life or wellbeing. Another survey respondent stated that, “If one is described with this term, he may be subjected to looting, theft, or any other act of violence, verbal or physical. This may put his honor and life at stake.”

**Non-offensive alternative terms:** اخي / *akhi* (English translation: *brother*); اخواننا الشماليين / *iikhwanina alshamaliyn* (English translation: *our northern brothers*); مواطن / *muwatin* (English translation: *citizen*)

## Secondary List of Terms that Are Offensive and Inflammatory

<p>الوحدة أو الموت / <b>Alwahdat Aw Almawt</b></p>	<p>This phrase translates to ‘unity/unification or death’ and according to project participants, it is “... used in a political context by the northerners to threaten southerners to accept unification as a fait accompli or die.” It is often used in conjunction with the term ‘infisaliun’ or ‘separatists.’ This phrase is particularly inflammatory because “It incites violence and bloodshed. It explicitly calls for the killing of anyone demanding the restoration of the southern state without considering the negative aspects of unification.” It became common after the 1994 civil war. <i>(Note: separatists have a similar and opposing phrase that they employ: ‘الانفصال أو الموت’ / alinfisal aw almawt’ or ‘separation or death.’)</i></p>
<p>دنبوعي / <b>Dunbue’e</b> دنبوع / <b>Dunbo’a</b></p>	<p>This term, of which there are several variations in spelling, refers to both an empty drum (implying an empty head and stupidity) as well as to President Hadi’s family name. According to a focus group participant, the term is used “to detract from President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi as an objection to his policy in the south, to belittle him and his followers and supporters.”</p>
<p>عيال مسعدة / <b>Eyal Musadah</b></p>	<p>This phrase translates to “boys/sons of Musadah” and it originated from a radio series. According to a focus group participant in Aden, “The main character was called Musadah, and her sons were known for their selfish, opportunistic, and deceiving personalities... So people started to use the term ‘Sons of Musadah’ to identify or refer to a group of people who have the same character as the actors in the series.” It is now used as an offensive phrase for people who belong to the Islah Party because of the negative connotation of these characteristics with members of this group.</p>
<p>فوانيس / <b>Fawanis</b></p>	<p>This word translates literally to ‘lanterns,’ but it came to be used as a derogatory term against supporters of the STC after a series of blackouts in Aden when Aidaros Al-Zubaidi was governor of the city. Al-Zubaidi’s supporters began using a hashtag including the word ‘fawanis’ and when he went on to become president of the STC, the term began to be used to insult his supporters. It is used to demonstrate opposition to Al-Zubaidi and the STC and denigrate the group’s supporters.</p>
<p>حراكش / <b>Harakish</b></p>	<p>This word comes from al-Hirak, the Arabic name for the Southern Movement, and is used to mock those who are activists within the movement. As with the term ‘infisaliun,’ it is also used to disparage those who advocate for or sympathize with the movement for southern secession. It is mostly used by northern Yemenis against southern Yemenis.</p>
<p>اصلاحي / <b>Islahi</b></p>	<p>This word refers to members of the Islah Party (closely associated with the Muslim Brotherhood). There are extremely strong negative perceptions of members of Islah, according to many survey respondents and focus group participants. For example, one person reported that, “The meaning of being a member of Islah is that you deserve [to be] murder[ed]. This matter has reached the extent that the person is killed, and people say, ‘Do not care [sic], he is an Islah member.’” This term is closely associated with ‘Daeshi,’ due to perceptions that Islah members are involved in terrorism.</p>
<p>مرتد / <b>Murtad</b></p>	<p>This term translates to ‘apostate’ and means someone who is a non-believer or who acts inappropriately in the context of Islamic practices. Participants stated that this term came to be used commonly during the 1994 war against the southern secessionists, associating their cause with being un-Islamic. It is related to the term ‘shuyuei’ (below) in that it refers to the south’s years of socialism, which is closely associated with atheism. One focus group participant in Aden stated that the word “...was the cause of bloodshed! This term allowed northerners to encroach on the rights of southerners under the pretext of reparation for sins.” Several participants said that the term even appeared in school textbooks in reference to the 1994 war.</p>
<p>شيوعي / <b>Shuyuei</b></p>	<p>This term translates to ‘communist’ and is used by northern Yemenis against southern Yemenis to imply that the person labeled as such is an atheist or non-believer. It is linked to the former status of the south as a socialist state when it was independent. It became commonplace during and after the 1994 civil conflict.</p>



# Annex A: Methodology and Considerations

## Scope and Design

The survey questions and format and the validation workshop guidelines were adapted from previous lexicon projects, with input and adaptation by local partners. The online surveys were distributed by three different partners—two organizations with local staff and contractors based throughout the country and one independent Yemeni contractor with a broad local network—and more than 260 responses were received. One of these organizations, Peace Track Initiative (PTI), supplemented the information gathered from the online surveys with two in-person workshops held in Aden, which they used to solicit additional survey responses. PTI and one other partner, Development Transformations (DT), each conducted two validation workshops in April 2019. DT staff held their workshops in Aden and Sana'a, consisting of 25 participants total, while PTI held their two workshops in Aden. From the information gathered through the surveys and workshops, an initial lexicon was drafted, which was then passed to a panel of Yemen experts in May 2019 for review and feedback.

## Surveys

The online survey was translated into Arabic from the English version of the survey previously used for the lexicon development process in Cameroon. The translation was done by a PeaceTech Lab consultant, with adjustments made by local partners who collected the information. These adjustments were necessary given differences in Arabic dialects and regional and country-specific contexts that could affect understanding of the concepts and questions presented.

The online surveys in Yemen were distributed using a variety of methods, some of which were in response to problems with internet connectivity, as detailed in Annex B: Issues and Risks. The three local partners used Google Forms to distribute the survey through their own networks and via Facebook and other social media platforms. Additionally, DT distributed the survey through chats on WhatsApp, phone calls placed to a randomized selection of participants in the north of the country, and face-to-face interviews in the south of the country. As mentioned, these alternative approaches were necessary due to the challenges posed by weak and inconsistent internet connectivity throughout much of the country.

## Validation Focus Groups

Based on data from the surveys, a draft of the most frequently cited offensive and inflammatory terms was produced. This draft was then presented for validation in focus groups organized and facilitated by PeaceTech Lab, DT, and PTI in Aden and Sana'a. Participants consisted of both men and women from a range of professions, including activists, journalists, professors, and university students. The focus groups provided important clarification on the origins and usage of the terms, and importantly, the contexts in which they are most likely to appear while also fielding new terms. The inputs from these sessions were then incorporated into a new draft of the lexicon's most frequently cited terms with additional context and examples.

## Online Data Analysis

In addition to disseminating the surveys and conducting validation workshops, local partner PTI provided additional support in the form of social media data analysis through the Mecodify tool.<sup>23</sup> PTI staff input several terms from the pre-workshop lexicon into the Mecodify interface to

analyze the Twitter networks spreading hateful language. The tool provided valuable data on how these terms are used and spread on Twitter as well as analysis of trends in the use of these terms over time.

## Annex B: Issues and Risks

### Security Challenges

Given Yemen's ongoing conflict and the lack of security in the country, several challenges arose, including a lack of access to certain locations. The facilitator for the Sana'a workshop was unable to attend the workshop in person due to coalition restrictions on flights. Fortunately, however, he was able to call in remotely for the workshop and coordinated closely with his local research team. Holding a workshop in Sana'a at all was challenging given that the city is strictly controlled by the Houthis and such activities are often restricted. The strong local presence and knowledge of our partners was critical to the success of this workshop. The security issues in Yemen in general also lengthened the overall lexicon development process given the need for more careful implementation of project activities and the transportation and safety challenges posed to staff in the country.

### Limitations Regarding Project Methodology and Hate Speech Concepts

Methodologies for identifying and analyzing hate speech in specific country contexts are relatively new and in need of further refinement and collaboration. PeaceTech Lab's approach seeks to identify the words and phrases being used and their context in order to understand the dynamics that make them inflammatory. There is no universally accepted or understood definition of hate speech. Thus, the team takes two main defining characteristics into account when considering what to include in these lexicons: 1) is the term or phrase **'offensive'** on the basis of ethnicity, religion, race, gender, national identity, or political affiliation; and 2) **'inflammatory,'** or having the potential to lead to violence. By strictly applying these characteristics when gathering input, the team aims to avoid any tendency among respondents to offer legalistic or scholarly definitions and instead to encourage insights into the contextual complexity and the fluid nature of language.

### Internet Reliability

As mentioned above, the weakness and inconsistency of internet connectivity outside of Aden forced some of our local partners to engage in alternative methods of data collection during the online survey process. Rather than relying chiefly on surveys distributed through Google Forms and Facebook or other social media platforms, data collectors in the northern areas of Yemen placed phone calls to randomized participants to complete the surveys while data collectors in the southern areas of the country utilized face-to-face interviews. The majority of the online survey collection by DT was carried out via WhatsApp chats during the evening hours, when internet connections were typically stronger. The lack of reliable internet connectivity caused delays in the collection of survey data for Yemen, but the overall negative impact was mitigated by experienced local partners who quickly implemented alternative approaches.

## Language and Translation Challenges

Another challenge that impacted the timeline of the project—as well as the ease with which the PeaceTech Lab team was able to analyze the collected data—was a lack of Arabic language abilities on staff. The local partners provided valuable translation support, but having a fluent Arabic speaker on staff or as a dedicated consultant would enable faster and more direct translation, data sorting, and analysis for future lexicons for Arabic-speaking countries.

## Respondent Reservations

PTI received feedback from some respondents indicating that they felt that some of the survey questions sounded like attempts to gather intelligence, which made them suspicious of the project's motives. The facilitators reported that some of those expressing reservations were activists and educated individuals; they also reported that this concern may reflect the sensitive nature of questions related to hate speech and the resulting sensitivities people felt in responding to questions on this topic. This issue emphasizes the need to continuously examine and refine the wording used in these surveys, particularly when they are reformatted for new languages and/or cultural contexts. PeaceTech Lab is committed to taking these concerns into account and consulting closely with knowledgeable local partners to ensure that survey questions are sensitive to the subject matter and are easily understood by their intended audiences.

PTI also reported receiving some resistance from respondents who were themselves perpetrators of hateful language. These participants were defensive when asked questions regarding offensive and inflammatory speech. This has been an issue in the development of previous lexicons, and it reflects the need for facilitators to remain neutral and maintain a high level of sensitivity during all communications, whether during the survey collection phase or in the validation workshops. PeaceTech Lab coordinates with all local facilitators to provide guidelines and suggestions on how to handle these sorts of situations should they arise. All participants are also assured that their identities will remain confidential—even from PeaceTech Lab itself—in order to ensure that all respondents feel comfortable speaking openly and are not worried that they might be targeted if they themselves are perpetrators of hate speech. Rather, open discussion among participants is encouraged to allow for constructive, civil debate from participants who may disagree or take issue with some statements. Safety, trust, and openness are prioritized in all workshops and participant interactions and facilitators are trained to address argumentative behavior or attempts to intimidate participants.

## Participant Bias

For one of the validation workshops in Aden, facilitators found there to be a high level of bias among participants. The facilitating organization, DT, held the workshop with a female majority, expecting that this might temper the expected political bias, but this did not have the intended effect. The participants in Aden expressed strongly prejudiced feelings favoring the south over the north. In response, the lead facilitator was careful to remain neutral and provided vital context in his notes on the workshop transcript. It is likely that similar biases affected some survey respondents and the other workshops given the societal divisions and tensions prevalent in Yemen; the expert review phase of the project serves to ensure that these biases are identified and moderated by input from a range of knowledgeable experts.

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## ABOUT PEACE TECH LAB

PeaceTech Lab works for individuals and communities affected by conflict, using technology, media, and data to accelerate local peacebuilding efforts.

The Lab's programs emphasize a data-driven, cross-sector approach, engaging everyone from student engineers and citizen journalists to Fortune 500 companies in scaling the impact of peacetechnology.

PeaceTech Lab was established as a Center of Innovation by the U.S. Institute of Peace in 2008, and became an independent nonprofit with expert staff and board of directors in 2014.



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