

Digital Narratives and Houthi Detentions of Humanitarian Workers: X, Propaganda, and the Erosion of Civic Space in Yemen



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The Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies is an independent think-tank that seeks to foster change through knowledge production with a focus on Yemen and the surrounding region. The Center's publications and programs, offered in both Arabic and English, cover political, social, economic and security related developments, aiming to impact policy locally, regionally, and internationally.

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Executive Summary

Over the past two years, Yemen's digital landscape has transformed into a battleground for legitimacy, control, and the shaping of public opinion. As the Houthi group (*Ansar Allah*) has intensified its campaign of arrests targeting local and international humanitarian workers, including United Nations (UN) and international non-governmental organization (INGO) staff, the social media platform X has emerged as a central arena for framing, justifying, contesting, and ultimately normalizing repression.

This analysis argues that the Houthis' campaign of detentions and espionage accusations in 2024-2025 were enabled by years of narrative construction in Yemen's online environment, where civil society actors and humanitarian organizations were increasingly portrayed as politicized, aligned with foreign interests, and security threats. To understand this progression, the study draws on a dataset of Yemen-related Arabic-language X content from June 2018 to August 2025. It examines how conversations about NGOs, UN agencies, and civil society evolved, fragmented, and became polarized over the years.

Specifically, the analysis focuses on how discourse on X was used to justify, reframe, or mute resistance to the Houthis' detention of humanitarian and UN workers in 2024-2025. It reveals how pro-Houthi influencers fused the arrests with regional geopolitical narratives—the Gaza war and anti-Western sentiment in particular. The findings further illustrate how the period preceding the detentions was marked by intensifying incitement and suspicion toward organizations, creating a permissive environment in which large-scale arrests could take place with subdued public solidarity for the detainees.

Combining quantitative network analysis with qualitative content monitoring and interviews with aid workers, civil society actors, and observers, the study examines the connection between digital discourse and real-world repression. In doing so, it provides critical lessons for humanitarian organizations, policymakers, and social media platforms as they navigate operational risks, reputational threats, and disinformation in authoritarian settings.

Select Key Findings

Structured messaging in the pro-Houthi X ecosystem: The pro-Houthi X ecosystem operates within a distinct structure, characterized by a tiered messaging system in which each layer plays a crucial role in shaping public perception. At the top, senior figures craft polished diplomatic language, mid-tier influencers enforce ideological coherence, and anonymous accounts spread conspiratorial or inflammatory content. While similar structures exist within other ideological movements, the Houthi model stands out for its integration of religious and political messaging.

Disinformation campaigns that undermine public solidarity: Widespread disinformation online campaigns alleging espionage and moral corruption among humanitarian and civil society workers in Yemen have significantly undermined public solidarity with humanitarian actors. Such narratives were also strategically reactivated at key moments of political tension, such as during the Houthi-Israeli conflict and US-UK airstrikes. While initial public reactions to these claims, especially the televised “confessions” of spy cells among aid workers, were marked by skepticism and sarcasm, such resistance quickly eroded amidst the severe economic strain and daily struggles faced by Yemenis.

Identity-driven engagement: Discourse on X is highly fragmented and performance-centered, with limited cross-political engagement. Rather than encouraging dialogue, interactions function as tools for partisan signaling and the reinforcement of echo chambers. Engagement is primarily identity-based; responses are dictated by the user’s political affiliation rather than the substance of the post. While prominent figures attract polarized, ad hominem responses, institutional accounts elicit issue-based engagement only when they include visual media or symbolic framing.

Women’s issues as moral levers: Within this polarized environment, women-related campaigns appear to serve as moral and symbolic levers. Hashtags referencing detained women or travel restrictions tend to peak around international observance days, and are used more as rhetorical tools rather than as entry points for gender-focused dialogue.

Select Recommendations

For UN Agencies and Humanitarian Organizations:

- To counter reputational attacks and protect staff, humanitarian organizations must invest in anticipatory digital strategies. These should include strengthening social media monitoring, launching proactive campaigns to reinforce the neutrality and legitimacy of aid work, and, when safe, amplifying the voices of former staff and local beneficiaries.

For Yemeni Humanitarian Workers and Activists:

- In the face of politicized online environments, Yemeni aid workers and activists should prioritize personal digital security and avoid engagement in inflammatory discourse. Coordinated messaging with civil society allies and discreet outreach to sympathetic media can help counter harmful narratives without increasing risk.

For Policymakers and International Partners:

- Digital discourse should be treated as a critical indicator of civic space and operational risk. International stakeholders must integrate sentiment tracking into early warning systems, support at-risk humanitarian actors facing digital smear campaigns, and ensure that funding models include protection against information threats—not just physical ones.

For Social Media Platforms:

- To prevent platform misuse in fragile settings, companies like X should detect and mitigate algorithmic amplification of identical mass posts from a single account, apply context-sensitive moderation to politically weaponized hashtags, and expand collaboration with Arabic-speaking fact-checkers familiar with the conflict.

1. Introduction: A Chronology of Repression

Since seizing Sana'a in 2014, the Houthi authorities' relationship with humanitarian organizations, international NGOs, and the diplomatic community has been fraught with deep mistrust and constant bargaining over access, control, and resources. By 2018, UN agencies, donors, and parliamentary inquiries were already documenting systematic obstruction of aid operations in Houthi-held areas, including delays in project approvals and visas, interference in beneficiary targeting, and restrictions that even stalled cholera vaccination campaigns.^[1]

The Houthis' establishment of the Supreme Council for the Management and Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (SCMCHA) in November 2019^[2] enabled sweeping authority over humanitarian work. Bureaucratic controls enacted included the introduction of a controversial 2 percent levy on all aid budgets, effectively a tax on UN and INGO programs, that prompted a major stand-off with donors and was only rolled back after threats to scale down assistance.^[3] At the same time, persistent interference, the risk of redirection or manipulation of aid away from intended beneficiaries, and pressure on implementing partners fuelled recurring frictions with Western embassies and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), ultimately contributing to the partial suspension of US-funded assistance in Houthi-controlled areas after years of disputes over access and attempts to control aid flows.^[4]

The 2024 crackdown on civil society was foreshadowed by years of tightening repression. On January 28, 2019, the Houthis detained two employees working for Saferworld, an international organization focused on peacebuilding and conflict prevention. The director of Saferworld's office in Yemen was accused by the Houthis of jeopardizing national security through her work with the organization. It took three weeks of diplomatic efforts and campaigning for them to be released.^[5] An article published at the time warned of a trend of the Houthis targeting personnel working with international organizations to extort money or gain political leverage by using them as bargaining chips.^[6]

^[1] "Oral Evidence: The Humanitarian Situation in Yemen, HC 1505," International Development Committee, Parliament of the United Kingdom, October 30, 2018, <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/8538/html/>

^[2] "Decree Establishing the Supreme Council for the Management and Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and International Cooperation [AR]," Saba Net, November 7, 2019, <https://www.saba.ye/ar/news3078000.htm>

^[3] Gregory D. Johnsen and Sana'a Center Staff, "The Kingpin of Sana'a – A Profile of Ahmed Hamed," Sana'a Centre for Strategic Studies, May 18, 2021, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/main-publications/14180>

^[4] Scott Paul, "USAID Has Suspended Aid to 80 Percent of Yemenis: An Appalling Abuse of Humanitarian Principles," Just Security, July 22, 2020, <https://www.justsecurity.org/71576/usaids-has-suspended-aid-to-80-percent-of-yemenis-an-appalling-abuse-of-humanitarian-principles>

^[5] Mina Aldroubi, "Houthi Rebels Free Yemeni Activist Awfa Al Naami After Three Weeks," The National, February 17, 2019, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/mena/houthi-rebels-free-yemeni-activist-awfa-al-naami-after-three-weeks-1.826865>

^[6] Robber Gramer, "In Yemen, Targeting of Aid Workers Risks Unraveling Crisis," Foreign Policy, February 21, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/02/21/in-yemen-targeting-of-aid-workers-risks-unraveling-crisis-middle-east-humanitarian-aid-famine-houthi-rebels/>

Although detentions under the Houthis were not a new phenomenon, the arrest of Saferworld staff members marked a significant shift. Detentions now expanded beyond targeting journalists, activists, and human rights defenders to include individuals working for humanitarian and development organizations, including UN agencies. While detentions continued in 2021 and 2023, it was in 2024 that they escalated significantly, coinciding with the Houthis' response to the war in Gaza and their attacks on ships in the Red Sea.

In January 2024, in response to Operation Prosperity Guardian, the US-led military campaign to counter Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, the Houthis ordered American and British UN staff and other humanitarian organizations based in Sana'a to leave the country within a month, or they would face arrest.^[7] On May 30, following US and British airstrikes on Houthi sites in Sana'a and the Red Sea port of Hudaydah, Houthi security forces launched a sweeping crackdown on humanitarian workers. Over a two-week span, dozens of local employees of the UN and INGOs were arbitrarily arrested in Houthi-controlled areas.^[8]

The Houthis claimed that these arrests served to dismantle a US-Israeli espionage network embedded in humanitarian operations,^[9] accusations that were widely disseminated through X accounts linked to Houthi figures and media outlets. Social media became a key battleground for shaping public perception around the legitimacy of these detentions. Over the summer of 2024, the Houthis doubled down on their accusations toward aid organizations. In August, SCMCHA summoned UN and INGO officials for days of meetings in which they pointedly warned of "the dangers of espionage" allegedly lurking within humanitarian work.^[10]

Tensions spiked again in 2025, after US President Donald Trump re-designated the Houthis as a Foreign Terrorist Organization on January 22, which came into effect in March.^[11] Almost immediately after the designation, the Houthis carried out a new wave of arrests, detaining at least eight UN local staff in Sana'a and Sa'ada.^[12]

A dramatic turning point occurred at the end of August, with Israel escalating its retaliatory attacks against the Houthis. On August 30, an Israeli airstrike targeted a high-level Houthi meeting in Sana'a, killing the Houthi-appointed prime minister and several other senior officials.^[13] In response, Houthi forces raided multiple UN

[7] Mohammed Alghobari and Riyam Mukhashaf, "Houthis Order U.S., British Nationals to Leave Yemen," Reuters, January 24, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/houthis-order-us-british-nationals-leave-yemen-2024-01-24/>

[8] "Yemen: Houthis Disappear Dozens of UN, Civil Society Staff," Human Rights Watch, June 26, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/06/26/yemen-houthis-disappear-dozens-un-civil-society-staff>

[9] "Yemen's Houthis say they have arrested an 'American-Israeli spy cell,'" Reuters, June 10, 2024

[10] Ali Abdullah Salam, "The Full Truth Behind the Houthi Meeting with International and UN Organizations [AR]," Aden Al-Ghad, August 16, 2024, <https://www.adngad.net/articles/585755>

[11] "Designation of Ansarallah (Houthi Movement) as a Foreign Terrorist Organization," U.S. Department of State, March 4, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/designation-of-ansarallah-as-a-foreign-terrorist-organization>

[12] "Yemen: Houthis Should End Their Crackdown on Civic Space and Immediately Release Arbitrarily Detained UN and Civil Society Staff," Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, February 4, 2025, <https://www.globalr2p.org/publications/yemen-houthis-should-end-their-crackdown-on-civic-space-and-immediately-release-arbitrarily-detained-un-and-civil-society-staff>

[13] Jaroslav Lukiv, "Houthis Confirm Their Prime Minister Killed in Israeli Strike," BBC News, August 30, 2025, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c62oykrxedwo>

facilities on August 31 in Sana'a and Hudaydah, seizing control of the compounds. At least 11 UN employees from UN agencies, as well as other organizations, were taken hostage, bringing the total number of UN staff in Houthi detention to over 30 by September 2025.^[14] A Houthi Foreign Ministry statement argued^[15] that the UN's "silence" over the Israeli attack on Sana'a proved its complicity. By October 19, 2025, 20 UN employees, including 15 staff, were being detained at UN compounds in Sana'a.^[16] Yemeni nationals were released shortly after; however, the 15 international staff remained under Houthi custody, confined to the UN compound.

In the weeks following the October 19 detentions, Houthi authorities referred dozens of detained international UN staff to trial in a Houthi-run court in Sana'a.^[17] In a significant escalation, the court announced on November 23, 2025, that it had sentenced 17 individuals to death on charges of spying for Israel and the West and facilitating the Israeli strike on Houthi leadership.^[18] This development marked the first time that formal capital sentences had been issued against detained humanitarian workers in the ongoing crackdown, intensifying fears among aid agencies and prompting renewed calls for international intervention. The names of those sentenced were publicly released by Houthi authorities, further raising concerns about the overdue process, safety, and the increasing politicization of humanitarian affiliation in Yemen. Houthi-run courts opened a second trial for 12 more detainees on December 3, 2025, among them eight Yemeni staff from the US Embassy in Sana'a who had been arrested in earlier crackdowns.^[19]

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemned the Houthis' referral of UN staff to court, stressing that UN personnel (including Yemeni nationals) are legally immune from prosecution for acts performed in their official capacity.^[20] Despite these appeals, the Houthi leadership has shown no sign of backing down. In fact, days after Guterres raised the issue with regional mediators, Houthi forces detained yet another 10 UN staff in Sana'a on December 18, 2025, bringing the total number of UN-affiliated detainees to 69.^[21]

^[14] Xinhua, "UN chief condemns additional detention of UN personnel in Yemen," China Daily HK, September 1, 2025, <https://www.chinadailyhk.com/hk/article/618972>

^[15] Ephrem Kossaiy, "UN rejects Houthi espionage allegations as 'disturbing' and dangerous, urges release of detained staff," Arab News, October 17, 2025, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2619170/middle-east>

^[16] "Houthi Rebels Detain 20 UN Staff in Yemen," The Associated Press, October 19, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/oct/19/houthi-rebels-detain-20-un-staff-in-yemen>

^[17] "Houthis Say Arrested UN Staff Will Be Tried over Israeli Strike," Al Jazeera, October 31, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/10/31/houthis-say-arrested-un-staff-will-be-tried-over-israeli-strike>

^[18] "Houthi Court Sentences 17 to Death, Accused of Spying for Israel, West," Al Jazeera, November 23, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/11/23/houthi-court-sentences-17-to-death-accused-of-spying-for-israel-west>

^[19] "Houthis Sentence 18 UN Employees to Death for Espionage," Xinhua, November 23, 2025, <https://english.news.cn/20251123/c3568edf786c4ce7b3511343dec0948d/c.html>

^[20] "UN Chief Condemns Houthi Referral of Some Detained UN Staff to Court," Reuters, December 9, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/un-chief-condemns-houthi-referral-some-detained-un-staff-court-2025-12-09/>

^[21] Caolan Magee, "Houthis Detain 10 More United Nations Staff in Yemen, Bringing Total to 69," Al Jazeera, December 18, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/12/18/houthis-detain-10-more-united-nations-staff-in-yemen-bringing-total-to-69>

The above timeline unfolded against a backdrop of systemic and intense online incitement directed against civil society and humanitarian actors, with accusations of espionage and collaboration with foreign powers. Interviews with civil society workers indicate that these campaigns affected staff safety, as fears of being targeted increased, particularly during fieldwork or travel.^[22] Trust in local communities was also undermined in certain areas, as misinformation and religious incitement spread more quickly than facts. Digital incitement often paved the way for tighter restrictions or detentions, with disinformation campaigns posing not only a reputational risk but a real threat to the safety and freedom of both individuals and organizations.

Against this backdrop, this report situates the detentions within their political and operational contexts. It employs a mixed-methods approach to examine how online narratives contributed to justifying, normalizing, or silencing resistance to the Houthi detentions of humanitarian workers in 2024 and 2025. After presenting findings on network structures and narrative dynamics, the report concludes with policy implications for humanitarian actors, platforms, and international partners.

^[22] Interview with Wala' Obaid, a staff member of Sheba Youth Foundation, December 29, 2025.

2. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining a network analysis with qualitative stakeholder engagement to understand the digital environment surrounding the 2024-2025 detentions of humanitarian and UN staff in Yemen.

1. X Dataset and Network Mapping (2018–2025)

The core dataset of this study comprises approximately 70,000 tweets from more than 40,000 accounts publicly available on the social media platform X in Arabic, spanning June 2018 to August 2025. The 2018 start date establishes a longitudinal baseline for Yemen's civic discourse, capturing the period when organizational vulnerability first became visible following escalating threats against humanitarian and UN organizations. Conducted by Netalics,^[23] the analysis treated X users as "nodes" and interactions (mentions, replies, etc.) as links between them. This enabled the identification of influential broadcasters, repeat amplifiers, and thematic clusters or coordinated messaging patterns based on hashtag co-occurrence.

2. Qualitative Examination of Key Detention Periods

A targeted review of posts during the main detention episodes (June 2024, January and October 2025) enabled a closer examination of the dynamics of social media narratives. This included how Houthi-aligned accounts framed the arrests, how regional themes, such as Gaza and anti-Western sentiment, were incorporated, and how users responded with support, skepticism, sarcasm, or disengagement.

3. Stakeholder Interviews

Interviews were conducted between December 2025 and January 2026 with five stakeholders: a female humanitarian professional who fled the country because of fears of being persecuted by the Houthis; a male project officer with an international humanitarian organization; Wala' Obaid and Mohammed al-Herwi, both Yemeni civil society actors working with Sheba Youth Foundation, and Fares al-Hemyari a Yemeni journalist and X influencer. These perspectives helped interpret online behavior, clarify cultural and political cues, and link digital narratives to real-world risks faced by humanitarian staff.

4. Limitations, Challenges, and Scope

Keyword Challenge: The quantitative dataset is limited to posts containing both "Yemen" and "organizations" as keywords. Because many users omit these terms in domestic shorthand or sarcastic posts, some relevant discourse may be missing.

Restriction to X: The study draws only on publicly available Arabic-language X content, which represents one segment of Yemen's wider information ecosystem. Many politically vulnerable users prefer private channels, closed groups, WhatsApp, Telegram, or Facebook for deeper or safer discussion. Furthermore, X in Yemen is

^[23] This analysis was conducted using Netalics, an interdisciplinary platform that provides the computational infrastructure for social data analysis. Netalics enables real-time monitoring and behavioral insights via customized analytical dashboards.

often used more as a broadcast and signaling platform than a space for sustained dialogue, which limits the extent to which “conversation” can be fully captured on this platform.

Analytical Constraint: The analytical scope is focused on digital discourse dynamics and the normalization of repression. Consequently, it does not provide a comprehensive account of the offline political or social factors shaping events on the ground.

3. Key Findings

3.1. Structured Messaging in the Pro-Houthi X Ecosystem

“Digital narratives often function as preparatory steps—softening public opinion, legitimizing future actions, and signaling intent to security actors. The shift in tone and coordination before the 2024 detentions felt deliberate and ideological, not spontaneous.”^[24]

Both pro- and anti-Houthi actors actively engage on Yemen’s politicized X platform. The pro-Houthi digital ecosystem, however, is distinct in that it has an unusually structured and hierarchical messaging strategy. Similar stratified communication systems are documented in other ideological and political movements worldwide, such as the Taliban^[25] and Iran’s online^[26] campaigns, where top figures define ideological lines, mid-tier actors reinforce loyalty, and anonymous accounts deploy sharper or more controversial content. The Houthi network follows a similar model, marked by notable narrative discipline, ideological coherence, and functionally compartmentalized roles—particularly when deployed to justify politically sensitive actions such as the detention of humanitarian workers.

This architecture enables the Houthi movement to maintain dual registers: a formal, often diplomatic tone for international legitimacy, and an aggressive, conspiratorial rhetoric for domestic mobilization. The strategy allows leadership to deflect legal and reputational risk while still reaping the mobilizing benefits of virality, outrage, and ideological signaling. The Houthi model is particularly effective because it combines this structure with religious-political ideology. The movement’s fusion of faith and authority fosters both top-down directive clarity and bottom-up loyalty, with many participants requiring no explicit instruction.

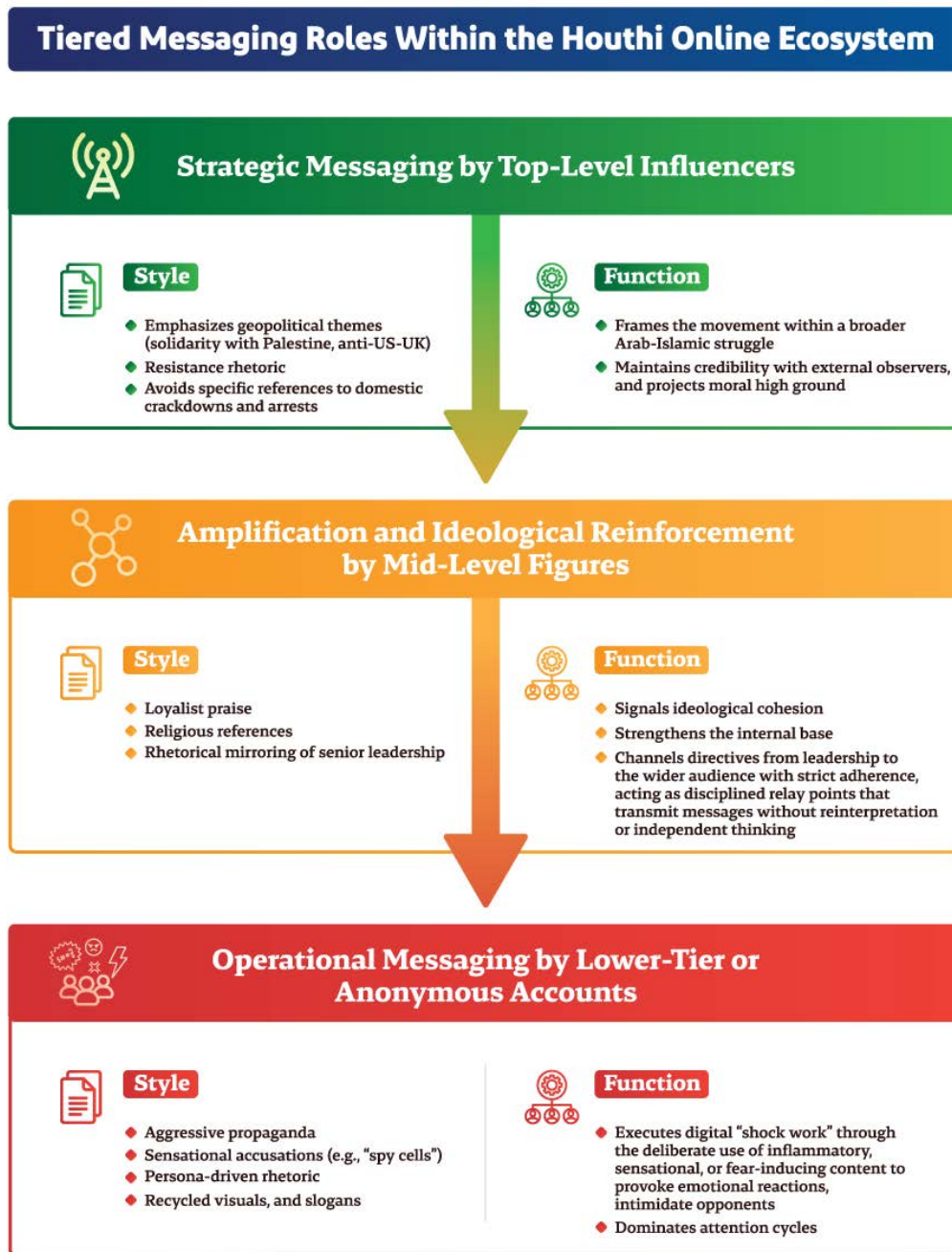
Even where some accounts appear to play paid or coordinated roles within the broader media apparatus, much of the messaging alignment emerges organically from ideological devotion and internalized discipline. As seen in the figure below, the pro-Houthi discourse online operates through a layered structure in which each account type plays a distinct communicative role.

^[24] Interview with a female humanitarian professional who fled the country because of fears of being persecuted by Houthis, December 24, 2025.

^[25] Hazrat M. Bahar, “Social media and disinformation in war propaganda: how Afghan government and the Taliban use Twitter,” *Media Asia*, vol. 47, nos. 1–2, 2020, pp. 34–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01296612.2020.1822634>

^[26] Isabelle Frances-Wright and Moustafa Ayad, “Misleading and manipulated content goes viral on X in Middle East conflict,” *Institute for Strategic Dialogue – Digital Dispatches*, April 14, 2024, <https://www.isdglobal.org/digital-dispatch/misleading-and-manipulated-content-goes-viral-on-x-in-middle-east-conflict/>

Figure 1: Hierarchy in Houthi Digital Networks



Source: Data generated by Netalics software; analysis by Nadia al-Sakkaf. Graphics enhanced by the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies.

A hallmark of this ecosystem is its tight narrative stratification. Inflammatory or unverifiable claims—such as those accusing humanitarian staff of espionage—are introduced through less-visible or pseudonymous accounts. In contrast, top-tier figures focus on polished messaging that appeals to international sympathies. This form of *narrative laundering* preserves credibility while enabling broad-spectrum mobilization.

While anti-Houthi actors are vocal and numerous, their messaging lacks the same coherence or strategic depth. Posts tend to be reactive—responding to arrests, speeches, or allegations—without sustained thematic reinforcement.

3.2. The Spread of Disinformation Campaigns

“Even early on, we knew that these incitement campaigns weren’t just digital noise. Given Yemen’s fragile context and weak legal protections, we treated them as real threats and adopted a cautious, responsible tone in our online presence.”^[27]

Long before the surge of detentions of UN and INGO staff in May 2024, Houthi-aligned actors had already laid the groundwork for hostile rhetoric against international organizations. In a campaign that ran from April to November 2019, and resurfaced between April and July 2025, under the hashtag “Where is the money?”, WFP was targeted with allegations of corruption.^[28] The campaign used keywords such as “organizations,” “civil society,” and “the United Nations” to fuel suspicion about aid operations, increase visibility through institutional hashtags, and periodically reinvigorate the narrative to sustain questions of legitimacy.

Although the campaign primarily challenged the legitimacy and integrity of UN agencies, several Houthi-affiliated accounts further accused these organizations of espionage on behalf of the US and UK.^[29] While corruption remained the central theme, these early espionage narratives laid the groundwork for the more aggressive messaging and escalatory campaigns seen in later years.

In February 2021, another months-long campaign was launched under the hashtag #USA_and_UK_Spies_In_Yemen,^[30] accusing several Yemenis, and even British nationals, of espionage and publicizing alleged court sentences against them.^[31]

In April 2022, another campaign, lasting nearly a year, used the hashtags #No_to_Organizations_Inside_Yemen and #Sumaia_Alkhawlani^[32] to instigate against organizations under the pretext that they are spreading immorality through their feminist agenda. Notably, this campaign was not only supported by Houthi sympathizers but also by conservative segments of society and ordinary citizens.

In a press conference in Amran on August 30, 2023, Mahdi al-Mashat, President of the Houthis’ Supreme Political Council, claimed that his government had obtained internal documents from the US Embassy in Yemen outlining a five-year strategy (2020–2025).^[33] He alleged that the strategy involved establishing civil society organizations as fronts for recruiting Yemeni spies to serve American interests. These claims were widely disseminated through a series of X posts, sparking another wave of anti-NGO discourse across Houthi-aligned online networks.

^[27] Interview with Wala’ Obaid, a staff member at the Sheba Youth Foundation, December 29, 2025.

^[28] “Where Is the Money? A Yemeni Campaign to Find Out the Fate of Aid Funds,” Al-Arabiya Network, April 22, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1tmG-jTo68>

^[29] Mohammed al-Shami, “Major General Jalal Al-Ruwaishan reveals extremely serious information and details about UN organizations that operated under diplomatic cover and humanitarian work to carry out hostile intelligence activities.. [AR],” X, June 10, 2024, <https://x.com/safiALshami/status/1800269826218221796>

^[30] #USA_and_UK_Spies_In_Yemen,” X hashtag, https://x.com/hashtag/USA_and_UK_Spies_In_Yemen?src=hashtag_click

^[31] Ismael Naar, “Houthi court sentences 11 Yemenis to death, including two women and a professor,” Al-Arabiya English, August 28, 2021, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2021/08/28/Houthi-court-sentences-11-Yemenis-to-death-including-two-women-and-a-professor>

^[32] #Sumaia_Alkhawlani refers to a pseudonymous Twitter account that falsely claimed international NGOs in Yemen were training thousands of Yemeni girls—some abroad—to promote “moral corruption.” The account was later exposed as being operated by a man reportedly linked to authorities, and the narrative was used to spread misinformation, discredit civil society, and justify restrictions on women’s rights. A search using this hashtag provides an illustration of the posts that were circulated mostly in 2024 #Sumaia_Alkhawlani (X hashtag), (21) [سمية_الخولاني#21-Search/X](https://x.com/sumaiya_الخولاني#21-Search/X)

^[33] “Al-Mashat: Sana’a penetrated the US embassy [AR],” Al-Alam, August,30, 2023, <https://www.alalam.ir/news/6694573/>

The severity of this digital hostility was best illustrated by its penetration into offline spaces. The rhetoric was so pervasive that it became a primary concern for staff members with no social media presence.^[34] This shift signaled that the campaigns had moved beyond niche platforms and were actively destabilizing the security environment for all humanitarian personnel. As a Yemeni female aid worker recalled, “These narratives were not sudden; they had been building gradually... framing humanitarian workers as foreign agents, moral threats, or political actors disguised as aid providers.”^[35] By the time detentions began, the narrative groundwork had already been laid.”

3.3 UN in the Midst of Polarized Narratives

Across the X platform, shared reference points, such as the United Nations, are used by both pro-Houthi and anti-Houthi users, each employing them to advance opposing narratives. For pro-Houthi accounts, the UN may appear as a foreign antagonist or a compromised actor; for anti-Houthi users, it represents a potential source of pressure and protection. These touchpoints are not consensus zones but rather sites of contested meaning, reinforcing the fact that even common terms fail to generate shared discourse.

Tags associated with the United Nations and its agencies repeatedly co-occur with messages from opposing camps. This gives UN-related content high bridging value: a road many narratives take to cross communities and an object both sides push on—either to validate action (“the UN delivered...”) or to pressure/criticize (“the UN failed/is silent”). The English-language hashtag #Yemen serves as a bridge between Arabic-language posts and international advocacy audiences, further consolidating the UN’s central position within the networked conversation.

Importantly, co-occurrence does not always imply alignment. Some hashtags are used satirically or critically, while others are bundled to manipulate search visibility or hijack trending topics. Campaigners on all sides—especially pro-Houthi influencers—frequently package hashtags bilingually (in Arabic and English) to engage both domestic supporters and international observers, illustrating the dual logic of internal mobilization and external signaling.

This structural pattern reinforces the notion that visibility does not equate to engagement. What appears as a high-volume conversation on humanitarian issues in Yemen is, in fact, a series of siloed broadcasts—strategic, performative, and highly polarized.

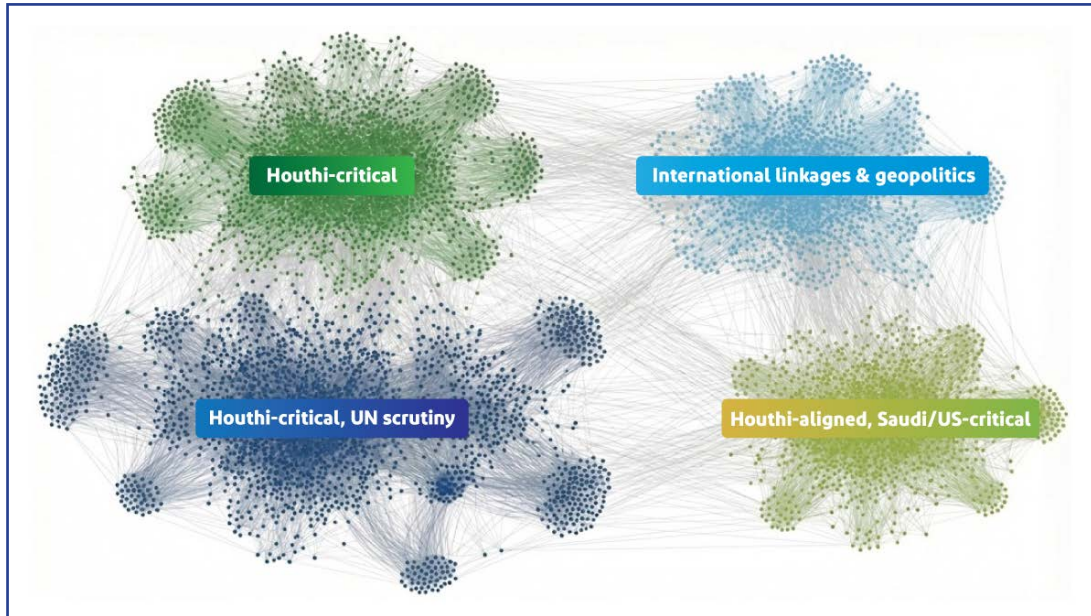
^[34] Interview with a project officer with an international humanitarian, December 28, 2025.

^[35] Interview with a female humanitarian professional who fled the country because of fears of being persecuted by Houthis, December 24, 2025.

3.4. Fragmented Echo Chambers^[36]

The structure of X discourse on organizations and civil society in Yemen reveals a deeply fragmented network characterized by polarized clusters and minimal cross-party interaction. Rather than forming a unified digital space, the conversation is divided into largely self-reinforcing communities, where users engage with like-minded voices and rarely cross ideological boundaries.

Figure 2 . X network of Yemen's civil society and organizational discourse (2018–2025).



Source: Data generated by Netalics. Graphics enhanced by the Sana'a Center.

Figure 2 visualizes the hashtag co-occurrence network, where each node represents a hashtag, scaled by frequency, and colors denote distinct narrative clusters. Dark Green (top left) “Houthi-critical”, represents a broad, diffuse space for anti-Houthi sentiment. It is less centralized than its counterparts, reflecting various regional and political sub-groups. Dark Blue (bottom Left) – “Houthi-critical, UN scrutiny” links opposition to the Houthi movement with appeals for international human rights oversight and UN intervention. Light Blue (top right) – “International linkages & geopolitics” frames the Yemeni conflict through a global lens. Lime Green (bottom right) – “Houthi-aligned, Saudi/US-critical” represents a more cohesive cluster revolving around central figures and official channels that maintain strict message discipline and that centers on criticizing the involvement of the US and Saudi Arabia. The spatial separation of these color-coded clusters and their dense internal structures highlights the presence of self-reinforcing echo chambers, with limited bridging across political lines.

^[36] An echo chamber refers to a communication environment—particularly on social media—where users are primarily exposed to information, opinions, and narratives that reinforce their existing beliefs. Within such spaces, interaction across differing viewpoints is limited, leading to the repetition and amplification of the same messages while alternative perspectives are excluded or discredited.

Both quantitative and qualitative analyses show that X discourse functions less as an invitation to converse and more as a public address system. This aligns with a user network structure in which mentions vastly outnumber replies, reciprocity is minimal, and a small number of organizational or political accounts absorb a disproportionate share of attention. Many accounts situate discussion of organizations, civil society, and even rights squarely within the war and political divide, framing organizations as biased, complicit, or constrained.

Furthermore, within these silos, a clear hierarchy of participation emerges. Influential nodes—such as political leaders or prominent influencers—receive concentrated attention, while mid-tier amplifiers—often anonymous or partisan accounts—echo and broadcast their messages. Most users engage peripherally, through liking, reposting, or occasional replies aligned with their camp. There is little deliberation or back-and-forth: X, in this context, primarily functions as a performative space for broadcasting messages rather than a dialogic one.

3.5. Crisis Response and Discursive Control

“Publicly countering incitement was widely understood to be unsafe [...] online spaces were not neutral arenas for dialogue; they functioned as extension mechanisms of surveillance, intimidation, and narrative control.”^[37]

A distinct pattern emerged in the Houthis' response to external pressures: whenever the Houthis faced significant attacks or pressure from the US, UK, or Israel—whether through airstrikes, naval interventions, or terrorist designations—they intensified domestic crackdowns on UN and NGO personnel. On X, the Houthi crackdown on NGO workers sparked intense debate. Pro-Houthi influencers promoted the official narrative, while Yemeni activists and many citizens expressed skepticism or outrage. Over time, one can observe a propaganda push by Houthi-aligned accounts and a counter-discourse from independent voices.

Houthi-affiliated commentators portrayed the detentions as a patriotic triumph, framing it as Yemen defending itself from foreign espionage using hashtags such as #America_and_Israel's_Spies. They often linked this rhetoric to the broader regional conflict; for instance, many Houthi supporters lumped the alleged spies with the US-Israeli war on Gaza, using hashtags like #AlAqsaFlood, and tagging Palestine/Gaza hashtags or keywords, to cast the crackdown as part of the anti-Israel resistance.

Peaking in June with a short tail into July, discourse began to center around allegations of a US-Israeli spy network. Activity was concentrated within the Houthi-aligned community and diffused via broadcast cascades seeded by movement media and officials. A compact hashtag bundle carried the frame #American-Israeli spies, #America targets Yemen culturally, and #American targeting of society, alongside the English mirror #AmericanIsraeliSpyNetwork. The campaign framed activities of INGOs and civil society through a security lens and situated the discussion within a regional-conflict narrative.

^[37] Interview with a project officer with an international humanitarian, December 28, 2025.

The intensification of online targeting had immediate tangible effects on humanitarian operations. “Concerns increased significantly within our organisation and across INGO coordination spaces when local partners began to be named directly in Houthi online campaigns,” said the member of an international humanitarian organization.^[38] “That shift—from general accusations to naming individuals and organizations—marked a clear escalation in perceived risk.” As a precaution, staff were advised not to engage on social media and to refrain from issuing public responses. The priority was staff safety, as there was concern that public rebuttals could escalate the situation or expose individuals to greater risk.

On X, attention soon pivoted to the detention of UN staff, producing a counter-frame of grievance and pressure directed at the organization. Two campaign labels dominated: #UN let down Yemeni staff - in Arabic - targeting Yemeni/Arabic-speaking users; and #StopUNHouthiComplicity in English for international routing. Pairings with UN agency keyword hashtags, #Yemen, and rights language translated urgency into demands for statements, negotiations, and legal support. This short, dense counter-burst was concentrated outside the Houthi-aligned camp and reframed the UN as a duty-bearer toward its Yemeni staff.

Yemeni journalist and X influencer Fares al-Hemyari noted that “the Houthi narrative drew strength from the leader’s October 2025 speech, where he claimed to possess ‘conclusive evidence’ implicating what he termed the ‘World Food Programme cell’ in the attack that killed the de facto prime minister and senior officials. This bolstered their online rhetoric, framing humanitarian agencies as fronts for espionage.”^[39]

3.6. Eroding Trust and Crisis Fatigue

“We had to work harder to explain our projects and rebuild credibility with communities that had been primed to doubt us. We were involved—both directly and indirectly—in efforts to counter digital disinformation and defend civic work. We implemented projects on digital security, combating misinformation, and protecting civic actors, including training journalists, youth activists, and civil society workers.”^[40]

Despite coordinated messaging by pro-Houthi influencers and institutional media, sentiment analysis of X discourse revealed a persistent wave of public skepticism and ridicule in response to the detention of UN and INGO staff. Hashtags like #Spy_Cell were frequently accompanied by sarcastic commentary, and references to “theatrical play” used to mock televised confessions as poorly scripted drama. Yemeni citizens initially reacted to these arrests with sharp criticism, often framing them as political theater rather than legitimate security operations.

^[38] Interview with a project officer with an international humanitarian, December 28, 2025.

^[39] Interview with Fares al-Hemyari, journalist and X influencer, December 23, 2025.

^[40] Interview Mohammed al-Herwi, project manager at Sheba Youth Foundation, December 29, 2025.

al-Hemyari observed that the social media debate often “blurred human rights discourse with political framing, replacing verified facts with prejudice and packaged accusations.”^[41] This harmed not only those detained—children of humanitarian workers were mocked and called ‘sons of spies,’ exposing families to enduring stigma.”

These reactions were most pronounced during high-profile events, particularly in June 2024, January 2025, and October 2025, when waves of arrests or televised announcements triggered spikes in activity. However, despite strong initial engagement, sentiment data shows a marked decline in public interest over time, as economic hardship and everyday survival began to dominate online narratives.^[42]

Fading engagement is further explained by broader patterns of volume and activity. While the digital discourse on civil society in Yemen maintains a steady baseline, episodic surges are driven by conflict flashpoints and crisis events rather than sustained dialogue. Original posts—though smaller in number—act as ignition points, but the discourse is largely amplification-driven, with reposts far outnumbering replies. Most users interact by rebroadcasting content rather than debating it, reinforcing the dominance of performance over persuasion.

This structure contributes to a pattern of herd-like sentiment bursts, where a few influential accounts or viral frames trigger cascades of emotionally charged, often repetitive responses. While this dynamic can momentarily amplify dissent or skepticism, it rarely translates into sustained public pressure, particularly as crisis fatigue and distrust among all actors—including the media and institutions—set in. According to a female humanitarian worker, “the absence of credible protection pathways meant that even when danger was foreseen, there were no tools, authority, or protection to escape it. Restraint became a survival strategy.”^[43]

Although Houthi narratives face credibility challenges, the architecture of Yemen’s X discourse—polarized, broadcast-based, and leader-driven—limits the formation of lasting counter-narratives or mobilized public resistance. The result is an information space saturated with short-term outrage but structurally incapable of generating cumulative accountability.

“When members of our staff were detained by the Houthis, it became clear that the online incitement campaigns were no longer confined to the digital space,” said a project officer with an international humanitarian organization.^[44] He noted how rhetoric had translated into real-life repression, marking a turning point in how risk was understood and managed within the organization. In response, stricter security measures were introduced, including limits on public communication and restrictions on taking work equipment home. At the same time, efforts to secure the release of detained staff were pursued alongside other international actors through coordination forums, risk meetings, and unified pressure, prioritizing quiet negotiation over public campaigns.

^[41] Interview with Fares al-Hemyari, journalist and X influencer, December 23, 2025.

^[42] Fares al-Hemyari “A preliminary list of the names of UN employees detained by the Houthi Group,” X, October 7, 2025, <https://x.com/faresalhemyari/status/1975519992897544279>

^[43] Interview with a female humanitarian professional who fled the country because of fears of being persecuted by Houthis, December 24, 2025.

^[44] Interview with a project officer with an international humanitarian, December 28, 2025.

3.7. Identity-Driven Engagement

“While many activists questioned the legitimacy of the charges and defended the detainees, a segment of online users expressed schadenfreude—rooted not in evidence, but in social envy toward well-paid UN staff. Their tone reflected deep societal frustration, turning resentment into a public spectacle. In these cases, public responses often become a proxy for political allegiance, with commenters either attacking or defending the individual rather than reflecting on the issue at hand.”^[45]

A key pattern emerging from this study is that engagement on X regarding Yemen’s civic and humanitarian discourse is largely shaped by the user’s political alignment rather than by the content’s substance. Accounts of high-profile Houthi officials—such as those of Mohammed al-Houthi (@Moh_Alhouthi), former president of the Supreme Revolutionary Committee of Yemen, or Nasruddin Amer, vice chairman of the Houthi media authority (@Nasr_Amer1), routinely attract polarized replies that mirror the audience’s stance toward the figure behind the post. The female aid worker described this dynamic as a “performative aspect of discourse... where credibility is conferred or rejected not by factual merit, but by political proximity.”^[46]

This pattern was also evident on the side of the internationally recognized government. An online campaign calling for the release of detained UN and NGO staff was driven primarily by journalists, civil society activists, diaspora networks, and mid-tier partisan accounts that circulated coordinated hashtags and appeals for accountability. Yet senior government figures—such as President Rashad al-Alimi (@PresidentRashad) and Presidential Leadership Council member Tareq Saleh (@tarikyemen)—largely avoided direct participation, instead framing events within broader geopolitical narratives about regional security and Houthi conduct. Their restraint likely reflected strategic considerations: preserving diplomatic maneuverability, avoiding escalation that could affect detainees’ safety, and maintaining a statesmanlike posture rather than entering a polarized online contest. In contrast, Minister of Information, Culture, and Tourism Moammar al-Eryani (@ERYANIM) adopted a more confrontational tone, openly condemning Houthi actions and receiving highly personalized backlash—responses shaped less by the substance of his posts than by his political identity, reinforcing the broader pattern of identity-driven engagement.^[47]

This identity-based pattern contrasts sharply with reactions to posts by institutional accounts such as state-run media, military outlets, or official news agencies. This also includes posts by other international actors such as the US Central Command (@CENTCOM), even though this received negative responses by almost all online users regardless of their affiliation.^[48]

^[45] Interview with Fares al-Hemyari, journalist and X influencer, December 23, 2025.

^[46] Interview with a female humanitarian professional who fled the country because of fears of being persecuted by Houthis, December 24, 2025.

^[47] Moammar al-Eryani “The Iran-backed Houthi terrorist militia continues to escalate its systematic incitement campaign against United Nations staff, its relief agencies, and international organizations operating in areas under its control,” X, October 5, 2025, <https://x.com/ERYANIM/status/1982103332563873999>

^[48] US Central Command, “May 30 U.S. Central Command Update,” X, May 30, 2024, <https://x.com/CENTCOM/status/1796288685530300858>.

Posts from Yemeni state accounts tend to receive greater content-focused engagement, especially when they include visual media such as videos or infographics. When multimedia is present, including posts from individuals, users are more^[49] likely to engage with the actual topic or claim being shared, regardless of political bias. A clear example of this can be seen in posts from the Houthi Defense Ministry account (@MMY1444) and the government-aligned media outlet Alhadath Al-Yamani (@Alhadath_Ymn). Their updates—often featuring operational footage, official statements, or data-driven infographics—encourage users to discuss the reported events, figures, or claims themselves, rather than focusing on the messenger’s identity.

Engagement patterns also reflect herd behavior, with second-tier actors and anonymous amplifiers echoing dominant narratives in near-identical language. In this performative environment—particularly around sensitive issues such as detentions and espionage accusations—credibility is determined less by evidence than by political alignment.

Notably, the findings indicate that this dynamic has also fueled growing skepticism among general users, many of whom have shifted from initial silence or support to more visible resentment or ridicule of official Houthi narratives, particularly when socio-economic grievances (e.g., education, salaries) intersect with repression.

3.8. Women-Focused Frames

Online discussions about civil society and humanitarian actors—including women-related campaigns—are driven primarily by institutional, media, and anonymous accounts that do not disclose gender. Women-focused issues gain visibility mainly through organizational or coordinated amplification rather than through cross-community engagement by individual users. Self-identified male and female accounts play only a limited bridging role, meaning that gender-related campaigns circulate primarily within aligned networks rather than fostering broad, cross-political dialogue.

Notably, women-focused hashtags are rarely framed through the lens of gender equality or universal rights. Instead, they are largely subsumed into conflict and security narratives, serving as a “moral and political critique,” rather than a platform for empowerment or protection from gender-based violence. This is evidenced by the frequent pairing of women-related terms with geographic frontline markers such as #Yemen, #Marib, and #Sana’a, as well as campaign-driven slogans like #the_Houthi_detains_women. While regional and outward-facing hashtags like #Saudi_Arabia and the English hashtag #Yemen occasionally bridge different clusters, they remain predominantly within Houthi-critical networks. In this broadcast-centered environment, women’s issues function less as a shared gender-rights agenda and more as a performative instrument of political signaling.

[49] Nasruddin Amer, “Security services reveal details and confessions of members of a spy network for the British intelligence service (MI6) and the Saudi intelligence service,” X, January 6, 2025, https://x.com/Nasr_Amer1/status/1876262576868434166

In early 2023, Houthis restrictions on Yemeni women's travel were used as an example of shrinking civil society space by civil liberty campaigns online. Anchored to observance calendars such as International Women's Day, it circulated hashtags like #Houthis, #civil-society organizations, #Yemeni_women, and #International_Women's_Day. Substantively, women's mobility was framed as a question of fundamental rights, dignity, and access to public life—emphasizing freedom of movement, economic participation, and social inclusion—rather than as a narrow administrative or regulatory matter.

In February 2024, women-related discourse intersected heavily with siege narratives, which frame Yemen as suffering under an externally imposed blockade, which is cited as the cause behind widespread humanitarian and economic hardship. Posts paired #International_Day_of_the_Muslim_Woman and #Women's_rights with anti-blockade slogans like #EndYemenSiege, #Yemenis_under_siege, and English #Yemen, extending the message outward, while placement concentrated in the Houthi-aligned sphere, with some uptake in accountability-focused clusters, namely networks centered on human rights monitoring and calls for legal or international accountability.

A recurring strand is the “detained women” campaign, clustered around the 16 Days of Activism—a global annual campaign (from November 25 to December 10²) aimed at ending violence against women, beginning on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. In both 2024 and 2025, hashtags such as #Release_the_women_detained_in_Houthi_prisons, #16days, and #International_Day_for_the_Elimination_of_Violence_Against_Women^[50] were paired with place anchors such as #Sana'a, #Taiz, #Aden, and #Marib, and institutional references #United_Nations, #Women's_Rights, #Human_rights. The campaign translated detention cases into emblematic claims routed simultaneously to domestic and international audiences.

Together, these women-focused frames—whether centered on detention, travel, or siege narratives—share common mechanics: messages are widely reposted rather than debated, activity spikes around international observance days, content is shared in both Arabic and English, and posts are tied to specific locations or institutions. They mobilize attention and pressure institutions but rarely foster sustained dialogue across camps. Instead, women are repeatedly invoked as moral symbols within Yemen's polarized digital debate.

[50] Noor al-Jarwi, “Freedom for Rabab Al-Madwahi.” X, November 24, 2024, <https://x.com/Noorajrwi/status/1891619311610921128>

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the large-scale detentions of humanitarian and UN workers by Houthi authorities in 2024 and 2025 were not isolated security responses, but the culmination of long-running narrative construction within Yemen's digital public sphere. Over several years, Arabic-language X discourse progressively reframed humanitarian organizations, civil society actors, and international institutions as politicized, morally suspect, or aligned with foreign agendas. By the time mass arrests occurred, these narratives had already weakened public empathy and normalized suspicion, creating a permissive environment in which repression could escalate with limited social cost.

The findings further indicate that Yemen's online civic space is structurally ill-equipped to sustain resistance to such repression. Network analysis reveals a fragmented, broadcast-oriented ecosystem dominated by hierarchical messaging, minimal reciprocity, and strong identity-based alignment. Pro-Houthi actors benefit from a disciplined, tiered propaganda architecture that enables disinformation to circulate widely while insulating senior figures from reputational risk. Counter-discourse, although present and often skeptical or sarcastic, remains episodic and quickly dissipates in favor of narratives around economic hardship and crisis fatigue.

Institutional actors—most notably the United Nations—occupy a paradoxical position at the center of this discourse. UN-related hashtags function as bridges across polarized communities, but as contested symbols rather than shared reference points. Appeals to the UN simultaneously serve as demands for protection, accusations of complicity, and tools of geopolitical signaling, rendering humanitarian institutions highly visible yet narratively vulnerable. Gendered frames exhibit similar dynamics: women's rights and suffering are repeatedly invoked as moral leverage but rarely translate into sustained, cross-camp dialogue.

The Houthis' campaign to frame aid workers as foreign spies has not succeeded in winning over broad Yemeni public opinion, particularly in online spaces where economic grievances dominate. However, disinformation tactics — including identity-driven polarization, coordinated comment storms, and hashtag manipulation — remain potent tools. A comprehensive policy response should combine real-time monitoring, community-led counter-narratives, and structural accountability mechanisms within platforms to prevent the normalization of false charges and to protect the humanitarian space in Yemen and similar conflict zones.

5. Policy Recommendations

This study highlights the growing importance of digital discourse in shaping public sentiment, operational risk, and the legitimacy of humanitarian action in conflict zones. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed for key stakeholders involved in navigating Yemen's increasingly polarized and politicized information environment.

For Humanitarian and UN Agencies

- Humanitarian actors must treat social media discourse as both a reputational risk and an opportunity for strategic engagement. To that end, organizations should:
- Invest in social media monitoring: Establish or strengthen internal capacity to monitor Arabic-language platforms, detect disinformation trends, and identify emerging risks to staff and operations.
- Develop proactive digital communication strategies: Design content campaigns that foreground the neutrality, transparency, and community-rooted nature of humanitarian work. Avoid defensive postures and focus on affirming legitimacy through storytelling, especially at moments of controversy.
- Leverage local voices: When safe to do so, empower former staff, community beneficiaries, and independent Yemeni voices to share authentic experiences that counter narrative manipulation.
- Prepare for reputational risk: Include digital narrative threats in organizational risk matrices and crisis response protocols, particularly in Houthi-controlled areas.

For Yemeni Humanitarian Workers and Civil Society Actors

- Local actors are both frontline responders and direct targets of digital repression. They should consider the following:
- Prioritize digital safety: Implement digital hygiene practices, minimize personal exposure on social platforms, and stay informed about known propaganda campaigns or trigger issues.
- Avoid polarizing discourse: Focus public messaging on humanitarian needs and principles, steering clear of overt political alignment where feasible to reduce exposure to smear campaigns.
- Coordinate offline solidarity: Build trusted networks of support with journalists, legal defenders, and fellow civil society actors to quietly challenge disinformation or harassment campaigns.
- Document incidents: When safe, maintain records of online threats, coordinated attacks, or disinformation episodes that may inform advocacy or legal support.

For Policymakers and International Partners

- Governments and donors have a responsibility to incorporate digital risks into their foreign policy, humanitarian programming, and civil society support mechanisms.
- Integrate sentiment monitoring into early warning systems: Treat shifts in online discourse as indicators of rising repression or shrinking civic space, complementing traditional intelligence and field reporting.
- Protect humanitarian space in policy: Speak out consistently against the politicization of aid and the targeting of staff, linking digital propaganda to offline repression in diplomatic engagement.
- Fund digital protection measures: Ensure that humanitarian grants and civil society support include resourcing for digital resilience—monitoring, secure communications, crisis response, and media literacy.
- Amplify accurate narratives: Use state or diplomatic accounts to reinforce the impartiality of aid and to challenge disinformation that undermines principled humanitarian access.

For Social Media Platforms (e.g., X)

- Platforms must adapt their moderation tools and trust & safety infrastructure to conflict contexts.
- Detect coordinated inauthentic behavior: Limit algorithmic amplification of copy-pasted or identically phrased content from single users intended to create artificial engagement spikes.
- Apply contextual moderation to hashtags: Where politically weaponized hashtags are tied to real-world arrests or disinformation about aid workers, apply visibility thresholds or warnings.
- Partner with regional experts: Support local fact-checking and misinformation tracking initiatives, especially those operating in Arabic and familiar with Yemen's political landscape.
- Support transparency and redress: Offer clearer processes for reporting coordinated harassment and disinformation affecting civic and humanitarian actors.

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Editor's Note: This text was updated to correct an error that characterized the "Where is the money?" social media campaign as "Houthi-driven".

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