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# Authoritarianism in the Middle East

## Regimes and Resistance

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## The Middle East's Democracy Deficit in Comparative Perspective

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This book was in the final stages of preparation as the recently elected Iraqi parliament completed negotiations over the shape of a new government. At the same time, Syria—in the face of a mass outpouring of protest in Lebanon—had agreed to withdraw its troops from that country, and Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak was yielding to popular pressure for contested presidential elections there. The Bush administration was claiming credit for having ushered in a new era of political reforms in the Middle East;<sup>1</sup> some prominent pundits concurred.

The recent democratic stirrings notwithstanding, it is too soon to herald the dawn of a Middle Eastern “democratic spring.” The protracted negotiations over the composition of Iraq’s new government and the ongoing insurgency there are but two indicators of the challenges of initiating and consolidating democratic reforms in the region. The Middle East is home to some of the world’s most tenacious authoritarian rulers, whose very longevity calls into question the potential for rapid transformation in the region.

Back in the 1950s and 1960s, the prevalence of authoritarian government there did not distinguish the region from other developing countries then known as the third world, nor from the Eastern European communist countries. But the Middle East was not swept up in the third wave of democratization that began (among developing countries) in Latin America in the 1970s, spreading to other third world regions and, in the 1990s, to Eastern Europe. Only in Turkey and Lebanon was an authoritarian era followed by contested elections that, despite constraints, resulted in a circulation of elites. Elsewhere in the region, political liberalizations that had begun in a number of countries have stalled, if not suffered reversal; no authoritarian executive has been removed from office through competitive elections.

To be sure, the Middle East is not the only region of the world where authoritarianism persists. China, the most populous authoritarian country, is also among the most long-lived; in the latter regard it is joined in Asia by Vietnam, Laos, and Burma; in sub-Saharan Africa by Somalia; and in Central America by Cuba. There are also numerous nondemocracies of more recent vintage, but seemingly stable, particularly among the new republics formed after the collapse of the Soviet Union. But in these other regions, nondemocratic systems exist alongside countries that have undergone, or are in the process of, democratic transitions. What distinguishes the Middle East is not simply the *phenomenon* of enduring authoritarianism but rather the *density* of it and the absence of a case of successful democratization.<sup>2</sup>

Today, pundits and policymakers offer daily pronouncements about the causes of this deficit and the prospects for its undoing. Yet until very recently, Western political science has had little to offer by way of explanation for this deficit. The political shifts occurring elsewhere in the world spawned a large literature on democratic transitions, but these studies excluded cases of persistent authoritarianism from their purview. Consideration of Middle Eastern countries is almost completely absent from the most important works on political transitions,<sup>3</sup> including those that explicitly focus on the developing world.<sup>4</sup> Correspondingly, prior studies devoted exclusively to the study of economic and political reforms in the Middle East—or the lack thereof—do not appear to have achieved significant recognition outside the community of specialists on the region.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, scholarly work on the Middle East had been marginalized within the study of developing countries, and even more so in the broader comparative politics field.<sup>6</sup> The authors in this book are part of an effort to correct this imbalance. We share a belief that the study of politics in authoritarian countries, which today still encompass nearly half of the world's population, should be, *sui generis*, more valued by comparative scholars. In addition, we know that the development of knowledge is inhibited when studies of economic and political transitions are focused only on successful cases. By selecting on the dependent variable without assuring different outcomes of it, scholars cannot be certain of the explanatory power of the independent variables they investigate (Collier and Mahoney 1996; cf. King, Keohane, and Verba 1994: 128–149). This last point is especially salient to the study of political reform because numerous countries once hailed as democratizers in the transitions literature, such as Peru, Ecuador, and Thailand, are now assigned more equivocal labels, such as “semi-authoritarian,” “electoral authoritarian,” or “competitive authoritarian.”<sup>7</sup>

These efforts to bring the Middle East back in to the study of political reform and democratic transitions bore fruition, significantly, with the January 2004 publication of a special issue of *Comparative Politics*, a leading journal, devoted to the durability of authoritarianism in the Middle East. This book grew out of that special issue.<sup>8</sup> The authors have revised and updated their original essays, and the editors added to them several additional pieces to allow for broader theoretical coverage as well as more country cases.<sup>9</sup> Chapters here include single country case studies, small-*n* comparisons, and sweeping regional overviews, but all are distinguished by their application of broad comparative theory to Middle Eastern cases. The authors advance theoretical knowledge about what factors encourage democratization and what may explain the resiliency of many authoritarian regimes. Their chapters thus offer rich lessons for those—both within the region and outside of it—who seek to further the cause of democratization in the Middle East and elsewhere.

### The Study of Stubborn Authoritarianism

The chapters in this book have been organized according to whether they place their greatest explanatory emphasis on state- or society-centered variables (Parts 1 and 2, respectively). Stateside factors involve the individuals who hold political power in a country and the agencies and institutions of government. Societal variables consider the population that is ruled over: ordinary citizens and the activities they engage in—and any groups or organizations they may participate in—as they interact with the government. The purpose of this introductory chapter is to highlight the book's theoretical contributions to the existing literature on regime change. Toward that end, rather than summarizing each chapter, I draw out different lessons from each, in a variety of contexts.

As noted in numerous recent essays, the major approaches in the democratization literature can generally be divided into two categories: the “prerequisites” school, whose arguments posit economic, cultural, or institutional necessities for transitions from authoritarianism to begin; and the “transitions” paradigm, which sees democratization as a contingent choice of regime and opposition actors that can occur under a variety of socioeconomic and cultural conditions.<sup>10</sup> This dichotomy is a subset of the larger divide in the social sciences between theories that emphasize the constraints on human behavior posed by macrostructural variables and those that privilege human agency.<sup>11</sup> The chapters in this book advance important propositions that fall within both schools of thought. Their collective message and arguably most important contribution, however, is to

highlight the importance of various institutional arrangements for choices made by political activists and elites who serve to perpetuate authoritarian rule. Therefore, this book responds to the recent call by some scholars for more integrative approaches to the study of political change (Snyder and Mahoney 1999; Jones-Luong 2002).

### *Cultural Prerequisites to Democratization?*

Much of the literature seeking to explain the democracy deficit in the Middle East has fallen into the prerequisites, or structural, category. Within this, cultural analyses have vied with economically based arguments. The authors here in some cases reject, and in some ways amplify and elaborate on, these prior approaches. They also identify new structural variables, in particular emphasizing heretofore neglected political-institutional factors.

For the Arab societies that predominate in the region, one set of cultural arguments posits a patriarchal and tribal mentality as an impediment to the development of pluralist values (inter alia, Sharabi 1988). The former is said to render Arab citizens prone to accept patrimonial leaders, while the latter impedes the sense of national unity that some (e.g., Rustow 1970: 350–351; Karatnycky 2002; Horowitz 1993) have posited as a prerequisite to successful democratization. Indeed, the ethnic divisions that are complicating the U.S. effort to democratize Iraq have led numerous pundits to view sectarianism as the main barrier to democratization in the region as a whole.

Here, Michael Herb seeks to understand whether Arab constitutional monarchies with weak but elected parliaments might follow the path of earlier European monarchies toward parliamentary democracies with only ceremonial thrones. He finds that ethnic divisions do pose a salient barrier to the development of parliamentarianism in several Arab monarchies. In Jordan, he observes, sectarian divisions in society are reflected in malapportioned electoral districts, which weakens the legitimacy of the legislature itself. One reason for the very limited powers that the Bahraini ruling family grants to that country's parliament is that the royalty is Sunni, whereas the country's majority population is Shiite.

Ethnic divisions thus emerge as a contributing factor to resilient authoritarianism in the region, but Herb does not claim them as either a necessary or sufficient condition. He identifies several other factors impeding democratization in Bahrain, in Jordan, as well as in the other monarchies where such divisions are less pronounced. And, as other scholars have noted, tribalism cannot account for the durability of authoritarianism among the more religiously and linguistically homogeneous Arab republics, such as Egypt and Tunisia.<sup>12</sup>

The broader, and prevailing, cultural theory for authoritarianism in the Middle East links it to the Islamic religion that dominates the region. Often labeled as "orientalist," following the influential work of Edward Said, it posits an intrinsic incompatibility between democratic values and Islam. Early versions of the argument attributed this immiscibility to the conflation of political and spiritual leadership in the early days of the Arab/Islamic empire, purportedly precluding an acceptance by Muslims of secular political authority and subordinating civil society to the state. In what Yahya Sadowski labeled as a contradictory, "neo-orientalist" approach, however, Islam has also been said to foster weak states that can never achieve the concentration of power necessary for its subsequent dispersion to occur.<sup>13</sup> The 1979 Iranian revolution and the subsequent spread of Islamist movements seeking (some by violent means) to capture political power and impose Islamic law (*shari'a*), has lent popular credence to orientalist arguments.

Recent efforts to test the alleged association between Islam and authoritarian government quantitatively have produced contradictory results. A large-n statistical analysis by Steven Fish (2002) showed the correlation to be robust; among a variety of causal variables he investigated, Fish found the best explanation to reside in higher levels of gender discrimination in Muslim-majority countries.<sup>14</sup> However, Alfred Stepan and Graeme Robertson (2003), using similar data, argue that when levels of economic development are taken into consideration, it is only the Arab Muslim countries that show a comparative lag in democracy.

Eva Bellin forthrightly repudiates the orientalist approaches in her pages here, noting that "other world cultures, notably Catholicism and Confucianism, have at different times been accused of incompatibility with democracy." Nevertheless, she observes, "these cultural endowments have not prevented countries in Latin America, southern Europe, or East Asia from democratizing."<sup>15</sup> And, as Jason Brownlee notes in his chapter analyzing regime survival of popular uprisings that occurred at different times in Syria, Tunisia, Iraq, and Libya, Islam in these cases "provided a set of ideas for mobilizing *against* dictatorships." The notion of Islam, as a religion, posing an intrinsic obstacle to democracy is thus not supported here.

### *The Role of Rents*

An alternative prerequisites explanation for stubborn authoritarianism in the region, sometimes posited explicitly as a challenge to the cultural arguments, focuses on the particular nature of Middle Eastern economies. Many countries in the region, particularly those in or adjacent to the Arabian Peninsula, derive a substantial income from hydrocarbon

exports; their poorer neighbors are linked to the oil economy through a reliance on labor migration and the resultant remittances, direct aid from the Gulf countries, and/or transit-associated earnings.<sup>16</sup> The “rentier state” theory posits that this access to a nonproductive source of income makes Middle Eastern regimes less reliant on extraction of wealth from their populations in order to finance the state as well as better able to win popular support through the generous provision of social services and government jobs. If opposition to arbitrary taxation was the engine to democratization in the West, then both patronage and the lack of an onerous tax burden on Middle Eastern populations can account for the presumed failure of citizens of these countries to seek greater participation in government.<sup>17</sup>

Rentier arguments originally arose in the 1980s to explain the deviation of the region’s wealthiest oil exporters from the correlation—widely accepted since the seminal work of Seymour Lipset (1960)—between countries with high per capita wealth and democracy,<sup>18</sup> but they were not generally tested outside the Middle East. However, the “no representation without taxation” argument has been challenged by John Waterbury, who finds that extraction policies in the region do not differ substantially from those in other developing areas (Waterbury 1997b, 1994).<sup>19</sup>

Bellin rejects the prerequisites approach in general terms. Rather than *absent* cultural or socioeconomic prerequisites for democratic initiatives to begin, she attributes the robustness of authoritarian regimes to the *presence* of institutional and conjunctural factors, in particular those that strengthen the coercive apparatuses of these governments. In this context, though, she does find rentier income to be salient, in that it contributes to the ability of authoritarian incumbents to maintain extensive and effective security agencies. Fiscal health is essential for rewarding those individuals who comprise the state’s coercive apparatus, she argues, and the Middle East region is distinguished by the comparatively high proportion of government expenditures devoted to security forces.

Arang Keshavarzian verifies that effect in his chapter on Iran. Noting that some recent variants of the rentier state theory predict political instability when oil revenues fluctuate sharply, he questions the utility of that argument with regard to the Islamic Republic, which, over the past twenty-five years, has survived major price swings and periods of declining per capita oil revenues. However, access to rents has facilitated elite resort to patronage and has financed multiple coercive agencies, both contributing to the elite fragmentation and the management of

factionalism by hard-liners to which Keshavarzian attributes the durability of the Iranian regime.

A reduction in access to rents may therefore not be considered a sufficient or even necessary condition for democratization but appears, nevertheless, to be a precursor to some measure of political liberalization. Although prior to the 1980s the region was characterized overwhelmingly by single-party states and party-less monarchies, a number of countries have since the 1980s witnessed a pluralizing trend.<sup>20</sup> Today, contested (albeit to various degrees controlled) legislative elections are held in Iran, Turkey, Bahrain, Kuwait, Yemen, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, and (when permitted by Israel) the Palestinian Authority (PA).<sup>21</sup> This list includes almost all of the region’s oil-poor countries,<sup>22</sup> but—with the exception of Kuwait, whose political opening can be linked to unusual international pressures after the first Gulf War—it excludes all of the wealthiest hydrocarbon exporters.<sup>23</sup> This strongly suggests some causal link between declining rentier income and political *pluralization*, even if *democratization* is neither the intended nor ultimate outcome.<sup>24</sup>

### The Importance of Institutions

The concept of institutions refers to both formal organizations and informal rules and procedures that structure political conduct. Institutional analysis entails “the whole range of state and societal institutions that shape how political actors define their interests and that structure their relations of power to other groups.” Included in this context are “the rules of electoral competition, the structure of party systems, the relations among various branches of government, and the structure and organization of economic actors like trade unions” (Steinmo, Thelen, and Longstreth, 1992: 2). Noneconomic associations such as international and domestically based human rights and environmental groups are also considered under this rubric.

In a recent critique of the transitions paradigm, Thomas Carothers (2002: 8, 16) calls for renewed attention to the role played by institutions in political reforms in authoritarian countries. The chapters herein oblige with arguments focused on a variety of institutional variables. However, whereas Carothers anticipates the identification of institutional arrangements that may be necessary for democratization to occur, thereby posing institutions as prerequisites, the authors here adopt divergent approaches. Some do employ a prerequisites analysis, but others treat institutions as

the backdrop against which the crucial decisions of the actors in the transitions game are made. Taken together, these two approaches show how institutions may act as bridges between other variables and the role of human agency.

### *Political Parties and Elections*

Political party structures and electoral rules capture considerable attention here. Implicitly using a historical-institutionalist approach,<sup>25</sup> Michele Penner Angrist (Chapter 6) seeks to explain why competitive party politics appears to have taken firmer root in Turkey than elsewhere in the region, as well as to account for variations in the forms of authoritarianism that Middle Eastern countries exhibit. Her approach posits the demise or departure of imperial power as a critical juncture at which “the nature of nascent indigenous party systems significantly affected the types of political regimes that eventually emerged.” In countries that had a single, dominant party at the time of independence, one-party states resulted. Single, preponderant parties did not render authoritarianism inevitable, she argues, “but enabled nondemocratically inclined elites to quickly and effectively build authoritarian regimes because they faced no rival actors and because single parties are effective political tools. Where there were multiple parties, two other aspects of party systems come into play: the degree of polarization and—in an important new variable Angrist introduces here—“mobilizational asymmetry.” As explained below, Angrist sees these factors as affecting the strategic calculations of elites vis-à-vis the likely outcome of partisan electoral competition.

Angrist’s party system variables point to the importance of the practices governing electoral competition. This is further underscored in the contribution by Marsha Pripstein Posusney, which looks at contested legislative elections in six Arab countries from the 1970s through 2000. Not surprisingly, these elections all returned parliaments favorable to the incumbent executives. Although ballot box stuffing and outright vote coercion, in various forms, were obvious operative factors here, Posusney also points to a more subtle means by which incumbent elites manipulated the election outcome: district design and the rules for choosing the winners themselves. She demonstrates how the rulers of both Egypt and Jordan changed and how the PA initially designed electoral rules to ensure loyalist legislatures; in Yemen, use of a different electoral system might have averted the civil war that broke out shortly after unification. Posusney’s chapter thus shows that electoral systems, whose importance to outcomes in established democracies is well known (Reynolds and

Reilly 1997; Grofman and Lijphart 1986; Cox 1997) and whose optimal design in new democracies is the subject of current debate (Lijphart and Waisman 1996), can also be important to the unfolding of politics in countries whose rulers are resisting democratization.

Herb’s research, too, shows that electoral engineering poses a formidable obstacle to democratization. Among the European constitutional monarchies he studied, only those whose elections were clean saw a successful transition to parliamentarism; where fraudulent elections were suspected, the resulting legislatures lacked legitimacy and the citizenry refrained from pushing for greater parliamentary powers. Herb finds government tampering with election results to be most serious, among the Arab constitutional monarchies, in Morocco. In Jordan and Bahrain, as mentioned earlier, results are also manipulated through district malapportionment.

In Ellen Lust-Okar’s chapter, the relevant electoral rules are not those determining the outcome among contestants but rather those governing which parties or movements may compete. Using a formal model that presupposes that economic crisis will generate opposition activity and that oppositional elites will exploit popular economic discontent to seek political advantage, she examines aspects of the relationship between economic crisis and political reform movements in two of the pluralizing monarchies, Jordan and Morocco.<sup>26</sup> Given crisis-generated political mobilizations, she argues, the durability of such movements will be a function of the structures of contestation created by the incumbent ruler. Mobilization will be more sustained in unified structures—when opposition parties are uniformly either given access to, or denied, opportunities for formal political participation—as opposed to when the opposition is divided between those who are formally recognized versus excluded movements. Lust-Okar sees the divided environment—where some parties are granted limited opportunities to participate in elections while others are excluded—as producing moderation among the included parties, who fear that an alliance with excluded groups could force the regime to punish the moderates by further constricting their avenues for participation.<sup>27</sup>

In different ways, Herb, Keshavarzian, and Vickie Langohr all spotlight the weakness, or absence, of opposition parties, even in countries that have some degree of electoral contestation, as a central explanatory variable. Herb argues that developed parties were necessary for the success of parliamentarism in Europe, because “only parties could make parliament’s preferences durable and give parliament the ability to dictate the composition of the ministry to the monarch.” But among today’s Arab monarchies, he finds, all except Morocco lack a strong party system.

In the Iranian case, Keshavarzian notes the lack of a party as a factor weakening the reformist camp. Iran is unique in the region in that reformists succeeded (for a period) in capturing the presidency and dominating the legislature, making them part of the governing elite. Hard-liners, however, were able to stymie their efforts through control of other governmental institutions. At this juncture the reformers needed to mobilize their supporters among the citizenry but were handicapped in their ability to do so by the lack of an institutionalized and well-rooted political organization.

Langohr comes to party weakness indirectly, by studying the role of civil society organizations in mobilizing dissent in Tunisia, Egypt, and the PA. Much of the recent literature on transitions, she observes, based on the experience of Latin America, Eastern Europe, and other democratizing regions, has singled out women's, environmental, and other advocacy associations as the most propitious groups to steer democratization forward. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have therefore been able to attract significant funding from foreign donors, in addition to generally facing more permissive organizing environments. In contrast, nonruling parties in the Arab pluralizers have been weak vehicles for opposition because of government repression, severe financial constraints, and a marked tendency for excluded elites to run as independents, where possible, rather than joining parties. Advocacy organizations therefore became the key vehicles of opposition in the countries Langohr studied. But this has negative ramifications for Arab democratization, as NGOs' single-issue focus and dependence on foreign funding render them unable to mobilize and maintain widespread support. Thus, following Carothers (2002: 5–21), she argues that it is time for scholarly and policy analysis of democratization in the region to focus less on the role of NGOs and more on the importance of developing viable political parties.

A lack of democracy within the oppositional associations also contributes to their ineffectiveness, thus posing a challenge to the literature that posits NGOs as training grounds for the tolerance and civility needed to sustain partisan democratic practices in a society. It may be, however, that it was the single-issue focus of these groups (as encouraged by donors) that inhibited this development and that other types of organizations can better play such a role. In Carrie Rosefsky Wickham's (2004) work on Islamists in Egypt, the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood within student organizations and professional syndicates—namely, functional rather than advocacy groups—did contribute to their political learning of greater tolerance for diverse points of view.

### Government Agencies

Military and security agencies are part of the state, but countries vary in the way in which these agencies interact with policymakers. Bellin's chapter emphasizes the structure of relations between incumbent rulers and the military, drawing a contrast between an institutionalized military, where entry and promotion standards are rational, and one based on primordial ties to executive authority. In the former situation, which is also associated with the military having a greater sense of national purpose, the prospects for officers rejecting roles in government or as the guarantors of internal security are higher. In most countries in the Middle East, however, patrimonial militaries are the norm.

Brownlee, too, is concerned with the capacity of the security apparatus to repress dissent, particularly in times of political crisis. Whereas Lust-Okar's study specifies mobilizations generated by economic crises, Brownlee casts a broader net by looking at situations where regimes' survival was threatened by popular uprisings, independent of the underlying cause. In Syria (1982), Tunisia (1987), Iraq (1991), and Libya (1993), he finds "moments of political contestation" analogous to crises that elsewhere in the world resulted in the breakdown of authoritarianism; in these Middle East cases, however, the result was regime stabilization. Brownlee attributes this outcome in part to the ability of the incumbent rulers to suppress dissent through each regime's coercive apparatus. His study thus provides concrete case evidence that supports Bellin's emphasis on the importance of security agencies to authoritarian endurance.

In Iran, Keshavarzian finds a multiplicity of security organizations, each able to act independently of the other. This has meant, in particular, the existence of coercive agencies that are able to escape supervision both by the legislature and by international monitoring agencies. The control of these autonomous security forces by opponents of change has enabled them to crack down on reformers both within and outside of the regime.

Finally, while excessive executive powers characterize all of the countries covered here, except contemporary Turkey, it is worth noting that the legal framework for the distribution of powers among the branches of government may differ. Studying the charters of the Arab constitutional monarchies, Herb finds significant variation in the degree to which they grant powers to parliament. Where the legislature's powers are more limited, the monarchs are less likely to resort to electoral manipulation or to suspension of the parliament. It follows that constitu-

tional overhaul will need to accompany other political reforms for the achievement of parliamentarianism in some, but not all, of the Arab monarchies.

### The Role of Human Agency

Human agency occupies pride of place in the transitions paradigm that characterizes much of the recent literature on democratization. Inspired by the early article of Dankwart Rustow (1970), contingency approaches stress that democracy will emerge when incumbent authoritarians opposed to change (hard-liners), as well as challengers (soft-liners, or reformists) who may themselves have antidemocratic leanings, come to see the uncertainty associated with free and fair electoral competition as the best option among other alternatives. Thus, the contingency school emphasizes the strategic choices made by political elites, a category understood to include not only incumbent rulers but also opposition activists. This book embellishes the transitions paradigm in a variety of ways.

Keshavarzian argues that fragmentation of the elite in Iran stands in the way of the negotiations necessary to the transitions scenario. On the one hand, the existence of multiple and overlapping government agencies provides outlets for regime elites to influence policy and establish patronage networks even if they have been marginalized from the major centers of power; this reduces the likelihood that they will push for systemic reform. On the other hand, fragmentation within the reformist camp inhibits its ability to coalesce around a platform for change and mobilize mass support behind it. The divisions in both camps also impede the compromises and mutual assurances entailed in pacted transitions. He writes,

The diverse and institutionally scattered hard-liners and soft-liners are in no position to make credible commitments, for instance, that [one of the security agencies] will not organize a military coup or that reformists will enact sweeping reforms that put the entire system of the Islamic Republic under question. The risk of tolerating each other and the cost of creating a system of mutual security increases as the polity is more fragmented because it is necessary to bargain with a larger, and by definition more heterogeneous, collection of political competitors.

For Angrist, party systems form the backdrop to the choices made by opposition elites and incumbents in those countries that had two or more viable parties at independence. Sharp differences in the platforms of political parties discourage democratization because they increase the

costs to elites of an electoral loss to a rival party. But even with relatively low levels of political polarization, mobilizational asymmetry can impede the opening or expansion of an electoral arena because elites of the weaker parties will feel they are not facing a level playing field. Hence, Angrist argues that despite the presence of partisan contestation in numerous countries in the region as they emerged from the colonial era, competitive politics survived (albeit with occasional setbacks) only in Turkey because it enjoyed a uniquely favorable party system that facilitated elite willingness to risk losses at the ballot box.

### Opposition Actors

The remaining chapters with an agency argument focus on either the opposition or the incumbent side. Lust-Okar, like Angrist, spotlights decisions made by party leaders, but while presuming the existence of multiple parties with an array of ideological platforms, she models party leaders' choices as more constrained, as the power to expand or constrict partisan competition rests solely with ruling executives not subject to popular recall. In this environment, as previously noted, Lust-Okar holds that opposition elites will be more likely to jointly mobilize for political reform when they are all uniformly either granted or denied access to limited legislative participation; in a divided contestational structure, the included parties will forfeit the potential mobilizational gains of coalitions with excluded groups, fearing the higher cost that they would be punished by the regime with exclusion themselves.

Posusney explores the options available to legalized opposition party activists when faced with legislative elections whose results they expect to be falsified. She argues that participating in such elections cedes to them a measure of legitimacy, but abstaining denies the opposition one of the few legal avenues available for clarifying their policy differences with the regime. Election boycotts, when mounted by a unified opposition, are a powerful political critique and can succeed in winning reforms, as happened in Morocco in the early 1970s. But differences in ideology, size, and mobilizational capacity have generally impeded efforts to sustain electoral boycotts in the countries she studies; the Islamist/secularist divide is particularly salient here. Finding that efforts to minimize ballot box stuffing through voting-day monitoring programs are on the rise in the region, she suggests that as elections become cleaner, opposition parties might benefit from campaigns to modify those electoral rules that favor incumbent authoritarians.

Langohr also spotlights the strategies of opposition activists, but her emphasis is on associational groups. She portrays activists as political

entrepreneurs who face a decision whether to concentrate their energies on parties versus NGOs. Although the civil society literature has tended to assign NGOs and parties different roles in the democratization process, assuming that they draw on different reservoirs of support, Langohr proposes that both be seen as part of a larger "topography of opposition" in which opposition activists choose the organizational form that seems to present the best opportunity for effective political expression. In both Tunisia and Egypt, activists turned to NGOs partly as a response to donor initiatives but also because of numerous weaknesses associated with the existing opposition parties. For different reasons, independent Palestinian forces also channeled their talents into civic associations. In all three cases, these decisions contributed to the phenomenon of multiple and competing NGOs while at the same time impeding the internal reforms in opposition parties necessary to transform them into viable contenders for political power.

### *Ruling Elites*

For Brownlee and Bellin, however, the focus should be less on societal actors and more on incumbent elites. Brownlee argues that the comparative work on transitions has concentrated on societal opposition forces and regime soft-liners to the neglect of those in power who resist reform. It is the latter's willingness and ability to turn to brutality in order to avert a breakdown that explains the survival of the four personalistic dictatorships he examines. The Middle East's neopatrimonial rulers have not been unusual in this regard, he suggests, but the explanatory power of this resort to intense repression has been overlooked by theorists eager to find some uniquely Middle Eastern factor to account for authoritarian endurance there.

Bellin likewise observes that the robustness of authoritarianism requires not only the regime's capacity but also its will to repress opposition, and she posits several factors affecting that propensity. Where the ruling regime came to power through a coup (as in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Algeria, and, at times, Turkey), military institutionalization, as discussed earlier, impacts officers' calculations about the potential risks of a return to the barracks. High levels of institutionalization foster the development of soft-liners who believe that the military's effectiveness and cohesion are compromised by holding the reigns of power. Where patrimonialism reigns (as can characterize monarchies as well as military regimes), however, officers have reason to fear that their positions would be jeopardized by political reforms.

Incumbent leaders and their security elites also make calculations about the potential costs of suppressing dissident movements. Here is

where, Bellin posits, a relatively low level of political mobilization in the region comes into play: when there are not large throngs protesting in the streets, the political costs of repressing dissent are lower. It is significant in this regard that the final stages of the Iranian revolution were bloodless, as when millions were marching against the shah, the army refused to fire on them.

### *International Actors*

Whereas transitions theory centers on the choices made by political elites within authoritarian countries, several of the chapters in this book demonstrate that political decisions made by external actors can also play a role in either undergirding or undermining authoritarian rule. Posusney points to a positive role that international agencies can play through election monitoring, which has helped in a limited way to restrict vote coercion and ballot-box stuffing in some countries discussed here. In Langohr's analysis, however, some well-meaning foreign organizations have contributed inadvertently to keeping incumbent elites in power. Convinced by the civil society literature that NGOs are the critical agents of democratization in authoritarian societies, international agencies have channeled funds and political support to local advocacy groups. This, in turn, had the effect of steering opposition activists in the countries she studies toward establishing NGOs rather than struggling to reform political parties.

For Bellin and Brownlee, maintenance of Middle East authoritarianism has been an intentional Western policy. Bellin posits continued diplomatic support for existing regimes as one of the four advantages that Middle East authoritarian rulers enjoy relative to their present and former counterparts elsewhere. Foreign military aid, or what Alan Richards (2002) has labeled a "strategic rent," also contributes to the fiscal health of some countries' security apparatuses. Bellin attributes this support to two key Western strategic concerns: the stability of oil supplies and containing the Islamist threat. Arguably, Western backing for Israel is a third prominent consideration.

Brownlee echoes this point, particularly in the current context of the U.S.-led war on terrorism. In his four cases of regime restabilization, though, it was not international support for the incumbent rulers but rather their lack of reliance on external patrons that enabled their resort to brutality. Thus, it is not international backing per se but rather an absence of international constraints on the rulers' use of force that is the operative factor in his analysis; this absence of constraints can occur either through active Western support for authoritarian regimes or as a result of the latter's *independence from the West*.



## Conclusion

Taken together, as Angrist's concluding chapter underscores, all the chapters here leave little cause for optimism that authoritarian countries in the Middle East will undergo transitions to democracy in the near future. The incumbent executives enjoy a number of advantages relative to their former counterparts elsewhere in the world, including loyal and well-funded security agencies and, for most (including, during the late 1970s and 1980s, Saddam Hussein's Iraq), the benefits of Western acquiescence to their continued rule. At the same time, the institutions serving regime challengers are weak: opposition parties are highly constrained and typically nondemocratic themselves; advocacy groups are fragmented and structurally ill-suited to mount broad campaigns for political reform; and professional associations, even if they serve as incubators for tolerance and pluralist values, are underdeveloped throughout the region. Consequently, strong popular mobilizations against incumbent rulers are infrequent and until now have been readily suppressed. Legislative elections, where they are permitted, are often manipulated and fraudulent, and elected parliaments have only limited powers vis-à-vis the executive branch.

The study of resilient authoritarianism is normatively imperative for a discipline that had largely, before the U.S. invasion of Iraq, turned its back on this region, as on other stubbornly nondemocratic countries outside of it. The chapters in this book demonstrate that this study can be both empirically rich and theoretically fruitful, and thus able to contribute concretely to hastening the downfall of nondemocratic regimes.

## Notes

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1. The Middle East is generally understood, geographically, to include both northern Africa and southwest Asia. Although some scholarly works, drawing on the old British concept of the "Near East," set the western border at Egypt, it is today more commonly considered to extend from Mauritania in the west to Iran in the east and from Turkey (thereby also incorporating that country's European territory) in the north to Sudan and Yemen in the south.

2. Israel, with a political and economic trajectory unique to the region, never went through an authoritarian era and is the only Middle Eastern country today that can be considered a consolidated democracy, in so far as the institu-

tionalization of competitive elections and the rights and freedoms of its citizens are concerned.

3. The list includes, but is not limited to: O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986); O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead (1986); Linz and Stepan (1996); Haggard and Kaufman (1995); and Anderson (1999). See also the critique by Ross (2001).

4. For instance, Diamond, Linz, and Lipset (1990); and Chehabi and Linz (1998a). For a related critique of the latter work, see Brownlee (2002b).

5. Especially noteworthy in this regard is the excellent two-volume study by Brynen, Korany, and Noble (1995); and Korany, Brynen, and Noble (1998).

6. For documentary evidence, in terms of faculty positions, see Diamond (2002a); on scholarly publications see Lustick (2000: 192) and Hull (1999).

7. See especially Diamond (2002b); Schedler (2002); Carothers (2002: 5–21); Ottaway (2003); and Levitsky and Way (2002).

8. The special issue was the product of a series of workshops titled, and with the aim of, "Bringing the Middle East Back in . . . to the Study of Political and Economic Reform." See the acknowledgments in this book for more details.

9. Because of space considerations, it was not possible to include all of the original *Comparative Politics* essays here. We encourage readers of this book to also study Wickham (2004).

10. For excellent overviews see, inter alia, Anderson (1999); Carothers (2002); and Burnell (1998).

11. For an elaboration and literature review, see Mahoney and Snyder (1999).

12. See also the critique of Sharabi and others in Anderson (1995a: 77–92). For a large-n study disputing that ethnic diversity is negatively correlated with democracy, see Fish and Brooks (2004).

13. Sadowski (1993: 14–21, 40).

14. Gender relations do not figure prominently in the arguments presented in this book, but see Doumato and Posusney (2003).

15. See also Wickham (2004), which notes the possibility of political Islamic groups moderating their long-term platforms in a direction that embraces certain democratic values, though not necessarily a secular framework based on a separation of religion and state.

16. Tourist revenues, which have been important particularly to Egypt and some of the North African countries, are another form of rent.

17. The seminal work on this is Beblawi and Luciano (1987). See also Anderson (1995a, 1997).

18. Recent work which generally corroborates, while qualifying, this association includes Przeworski et al. (2000); and Huber, Rueschemeyer, and Stephens (1993).

19. More recently, a large-n study by Michael Ross (2001) does demonstrate cross-regional support for the rentier effect, but his statistical evidence has been challenged by Michael Herb (forthcoming).

20. When referring to the moves toward expanded contestation in these countries, I use the terms "pluralizing" and "pluralization" as intentional substitutes for either "liberalizing"/"liberalization" or "democratizing"/"democratization." To apply democratization to the multiparty experiments described here implies an

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